Revenge and Its Implications: Literati Discourse of Justice in Late Qing and Modern Chinese Fiction

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Revenge and Its Implications:
Literati Discourse of Justice in Late Qing and Modern Chinese Fiction

by
Yoojin Soh

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2012
Saint Louis, Missouri
Abstract

Revenge and Its Implications: Literati Discourse of Justice in Late Qing and Modern Chinese Fiction
by
Yoojin Soh
Doctor of Philosophy in Chinese and Comparative Literature
Washington University in St. Louis, 2012
Professor Lingchei Letty Chen, Co-Chair
Professor Robert E. Hegel, Co-Chair

My dissertation explores literati criticism of injustice embedded in revenge narratives. Ranging from the late Qing to modern China, this research project elaborates on the existing scholarship regarding historical and cultural meanings of revenge to demonstrate the use of earlier textual sources by intellectual writers to embody their ideas and strategies. The literati community inherited a keen sense of injustice in society from previous writing practice and passed it down to later generations. Revenge narratives were able to reinforce this intellectual tradition because the authors of social criticism could use fiction to express their anger and frustration over injustices suffered by the people. Despite differing political ideals, authors of revenge narratives all deliberated on the problems out of which social injustice originated; thus, they claimed for themselves a timeless mission: criticism of all manner of violence along the routes of historical events.

The frequent usage of implications is the focus of my textual analysis. In particular, I discover that illustrations of violence are rich sources of implied messages. Works of revenge have multiple layers of narrative structure. In order to carry out their moral criticism, the intellectuals wrote indirectly about political questions, usually through stylistic control of tone and diction. Embedded meanings often appear to contradict the authors’ political backgrounds. This arrangement, however, is essential in overcoming reductionist political meanings of their revenge narratives. My textual
examples promote different political perspectives: Confucianism, nationalism, May Fourth cultural criticism and anarchism. The literati criticism of injustice also varies in pointing out physical and psychological violence. Nevertheless, this stylistic elaboration enabled these authors to sympathize equally with the victims of social injustice.

I arrange my four major chapters in the chronological order of the works discussed. Following the trajectories of historical events, I examine applications of the revenge theme with special attention to descriptions of violence. Yu Wanchun (1794-1849) wrote *Dangkou zhi* (Quelling the Bandits, 1851) in order to oppose banditry. His illustrations of *lingchi* (death by slicing), on the other hand, envision the triumph of legal justice against abusive ministers. Wu Jianren’s (1866-1910) *Tongshi* (A History of Pain, 1903-06) draws on the Mongol invasion of the Southern Song in order to protect the Qing empire. His conventional descriptions of *tucheng* (massacre of a whole city), nevertheless, transcend the anti-Manchu discourse and further indict the repeated violence of dynastic change. Lu Xun (1881-1936) manipulates multiple editions of the Meijianchi tale in compiling his “Zhujian” (Forging the Swords, 1926). Because his criticism of filial revenge implicates the victims of abusive power, Lu Xun slips into self-criticism, insinuated in the psychology of *zhanshou* (decapitation). Ba Jin’s (1904-2005) *Miewang* (Destruction, 1929) explores the political impotence of an anarchist. The merciless warlord rule is to blame for the public execution; but its psychological impact prompts the youth to assert their moral responsibility through assassination. I conclude my dissertation with Cao Yu’s (1910-96) *Yuanye* (The Wilderness, 1937). The literature of revenge, however implied the messages were, allowed intellectuals to carry on the perennial exposure and criticism of injustice.
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Introduction

Expressions of Unfairness

My study begins with the Chinese literati’s development of fictional narrative in order to express their historical concerns. In particular, my initial questions relate to how the literati came to express their philosophy through fiction. Writing about the late Ming, Andrew H. Plaks notes an enhanced level of seriousness in that the fiction writers could deliver “the aesthetic and moral values of literati culture.”\(^1\) Described as “wenren xiaoshuo” (literati fiction), this elaborate form was more than a simple entertainment or a means for income. Compared with other previous examples, this new fiction form was able to convey the messages in a more complex manner. Robert E. Hegel discusses the ideological commitment of the late Ming intellectuals. Generally, the literati fiction largely falls into two distinct categories: the historical novel and the scholar-beauty romance. Even though the two forms differ in source materials and thematic concerns, they all dealt with pertinent moral topics. The historical novel emphasizes the Confucian ethical values such as zhong (loyalty) and yi (righteousness). Likewise, the characters in the scholar-beauty romance “[a]ll adhere strictly to Confucian norms of proper social interaction.”\(^2\) Of course, authors of the literati fiction were not of a single mind while expressing moral concerns or pursuing artistic perfection. Nevertheless, the formation of the literati fiction is meaningful.


because the literati could carry out moral criticism by committing themselves to writing novels.

The literati fiction testifies to the weakening political status of the literati novelists. Towards the Ming-Qing transition onward, the literati endured the severe competition of civil-service examinations. As their political conditions showed no signs of improvement, the literati complicated the discussion of Confucianism, even challenging its orthodox status. With this realization, authors renovated the literati fiction: Confucianism was no longer viewed as a unique value for praise and they incorporated various sources and themes. As Martin W. Huang identifies this transformation in the 18th century as "autobiographical consciousness," the literati "privatized" their novels by portraying characters and events on the basis of their own personal experiences. In so doing, the literati expanded their artistic freedom and diversified their interests and ideas. Meanwhile, this evolution of the literati fiction, I believe, nourished the fictional imagination of those writers who wanted to continue moral criticism. Because the

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3 See Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction*, pp. 60-61. The increasing number of troubled literati explains the rise of the literati fiction: "As advisor and minister to the Confucian ruler, one might thereby promote order, hence social welfare, throughout the realm. . . . Lack of access to such positions due to increasing competition in the civil-service examinations produced frustration and no little anxiety over identity among seventeenth-century literati." See also Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 360-70. In the section "Alternative Responses to Failure," Elman presents Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) and Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1813-64) as those literati who transformed their anxiety into either literature or religious revolt. Elman refers to Philip Kuhn’s study in which the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1736-95) feared that the literati group who failed in the civil-service examinations might turn against the Manchus. Hong Xiuquan’s Taiping Rebellion is one such example. See Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 227.


5 Here, I note the changing forms of the literati search for moral criticism. Martin Huang argues that the literati who pursued “the life-style of wenren (man of culture) . . . had little interest in Confucian moral issues.” See Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 29. I understand that the literati novelists began to grapple with Confucianism, unlike those predecessors who wanted to promote their moral criticism on the basis of the dominant philosophy. Especially, during and after the 18th century, the literati were not completely committed to promoting Confucian teachings as they had done in *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 [The romance of the Three Kingdoms] and *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 [Outlaws of the marsh]. I do not consider this phenomenon as a complete disappearance of literati’s moral criticism; rather, I view this as their attempt to develop multiple forms of criticism, which many times challenged and
literati were able to fictionalize their politically impotent status, they were able to carry on the most serious tasks when the previous scholar-officials had to rely on other literary forms. Long before the Ming-Qing transition, the sense of political marginalization had existed which the scholar-officials often included in their writings. With the formation of the literati fiction and its renovations of “self-expression,” the literati novelists could take over the previous moral criticism; at the same time, they could not only individualize their motives but also put forward other “justifiable” convictions.

Insofar as the literati fiction provided sites for exploring moral criticism, the literati inherited this legacy from previous intellectual writings and also passed it down to later generations. As a result, the literati fiction should be approached from the perspective of the literati’s persistent criticism of society, which enabled them to bolster their injured self-esteem. According to Martin Huang, literati fiction became popular when the gentry witnessed an increasing “separation between those literati kept outside the official world and those allowed in.” In addition, Huang examines the changing concept of the literati and refers to Yoshikawa Kōjirō who argues that the literati distinguished themselves from scholar-officials already in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Willard J. Peterson, furthermore, associates the Neo-Confucian scholars of

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6 Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, p. 29. Robert Hegel also notes the literati’s frustration with their political success. In the 18th century, Hegel observes, the literati’s mindset changed from frustration to resignation, which even accelerated their retreat to the novelist career, hence, the expression of individuality. See Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction*, pp. 60-61.

7 See Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, pp. 26-30. For Huang’s reference to Yoshikawa Kōjirō, see John Timothy Wixted, trans., *Five Hundred Years of Chinese Poetry, 1150-1650* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), esp., pp. 84-89, the section “The Origins of *Wenren*.” Yoshikawa argues that the *wenren* (“independent [free] artists” in his English translation) group appeared in South China at the end of the Yuan. His examples are those poets such as Yang Weizhen 杨维楨 (1296-1370), Ni Zan 倪瓒 (1301-74), Gu Ying 顾瑛 (1310-69) and Gao Ming 高明 (c. 1305-after 1368). According to Yoshikawa, “[the literati] had no ties to philosophy and none with political affairs; or rather, the situation was such that they of necessity had no contact with the latter.” For the quotes, see
the Ming with those of the Song who refused to accept governmental positions in order to retreat to their moral life. Scholars differ in defining the literati; however, I note one critical feature which continued over dynasties. The literati, whether they wanted or not, equally distanced themselves from administrative affairs and instead tried to find answers in intellectual commitment. In this respect, I agree with Stephen J. Roddy’s concept of the literati in which their shared mindset of intellectual community is of importance: “[My definition of the literati] refers less to an empirically verifiable social group than to a nexus of cultural, ideological, and sociopolitical values and relationships.” A sense of political frustration may have established the literati; but more fundamentally, the literati also devoted themselves to moral criticism going beyond a simple expression of dissatisfaction.

In the inception and transformation of the literati fiction, I discover an archetype which characterizes the moral foundation of Chinese intellectuals. Traditionally, the “marginalized conditions” were essential for the literati who claimed to act as moral critics. Moreover, the literati had the capacity to interpret the marginalization, and their criticism varied according to individual perspectives. Despite the changing periods and shifting interests, they were able to justify their political failure in the name of illuminating moral problems. Whether or not their ideas could bear fruit does not really matter. The literati had been concerned about deteriorating moral conditions. Vernacular fiction in the late Ming period is just one such example of the intellectual history of

Yoshikawa, *Five Hundred Years of Chinese Poetry*, p. 84.


China. Already during the Zhanguo 戰國 (Warring States) period (403-221 BC), the Confucian master Mencius (372-289 BC) was pessimistic about the prospects for daotong 道統 (the transmission of the Way). In the Han 漢 dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145-c. 86 BC) relied on historiography to provide moral criticism of his day. During the Mongol Yuan, the literati could not secure any political success using classical literature;10 thus, they produced the zaju 雜劇 plays, upgrading the genre from the formerly “repressed and marginalized” to a crucial element of gentry culture.11 Similarly, the literati fiction reflects this continuous literary heritage, which echoes the Tang 唐 (618-907) literatus Han Yu’s 韓愈 (768-824) well-known phrase, buping ze ming 不平則鳴 (man will cry out against injustice).12 In sum, the sense of unfairness or injustice is relevant to but does not uniquely derive from the literati’s failure in achieving an administrative career.

10 The Mongol Yuan suspended the civil-service examinations. But, I am not saying that the Han Chinese literati never had a chance to serve in the Yuan administration. Stephen H. West, for example, points out that the Mongols spared the eminent writers and scholars. West refers to Liu Qi’s 劉祁 (1203-50) Guiqian zhi 归潛志 [Records written on returning to retirement] and Song Zizhen’s 宋子貞 (1185-1266) “Zhongshuling Yelü gong shendaobei” 中書令耶律公神道碑 [Memorial inscriptions in honor of the Secretariat Director Yelü Chucai] in which Yelü Chucai’s 耶律楚材 (1190-1244) proposal worked out to save “artisans, craftsmen, men of the Three Teachings (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism)” from the notorious Mongol massacre. See Stephen H. West, “Mongol Influence on the Development of Northern Drama,” in China under Mongol Rule, ed. John D. Langlois, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 458-59.

11 See Geng Song, The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), p. 27. The Confucian scholars were the major authors of Yuan zaju, but they still expressed “heterosexual eroticism.” Song interprets this phenomenon from two reasons: first, the Mongol Yuan’s loose intellectual control; second, the prosperity of urban economy in the 13th century China. See also Yoshikawa Kōjirō, Yuan zaju yanjiu 元雜劇研究 [A study of Yuan zaju], trans. Zheng Qingmao 鄭清茂 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1977), pp. 118-20. Yoshikawa delineates the reasons for the rise of zaju in the Yuan. The suspension of civil-service exams might be a “direct” reason; but Yoshikawa argues that the literati’s moral change was “decisive” for their reconsideration of the existing literature. The literati suffered from the Mongol rule, which turned their attention to non-traditional literature. See also West, “Mongol Influence on the Development of Northern Drama,” p. 462. West explains the reason, not from the literati’s grief before the oppressive Mongol rule, but from the cultural dynamics in which the Mongol Yuan administration played a critical role. The Mongols patronized the theatre at court, which surely promoted the zaju play in the elite class.

12 For the specific source of this phrase, see Han Yu 韓愈, “Song Meng Dongye xu” 送孟東野序 [A dedication in honor of Meng Jiao, 801], in Han Yu quanji jiaozhu 韓愈全集校注 [Corrected and annotated complete works of Han Yu], eds. Qu Shouyuan 齊守元 and Chang Sichun 常思春, et al., vol. 3 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1996), pp. 1464-73.
Justifiable Revenge

The literati had reasons to be interested in revenge; at the same time, they were prompted to deliberate on ambiguous moral issues. In the archive of traditional Chinese revenge stories, Wang Li 王立 and Liu Weiying 劉衛英 discover that the writers of revenge narratives were undeniably influenced by the historians who articulated their moral standards into records. Meanwhile, Wang and Liu carefully distinguish “positive” public revenge from private, pointing out primitive passion as selfish and unreasonable in the latter. Nevertheless, “positive” revenge is arguably praiseworthy. For example, Chen Pingyuan 陳平原 defines respectable revenge by reference to the assassin stories in Sima Qian’s Shiji 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian, 91 BC). That the assassins were good at martial arts is not crucial; instead, their actions are admirable and justifiable if they satisfied “danshi yiqi” 膽識義氣 (audacity and righteousness) and “xisheng jingshen” 犧牲精神 (spirit of sacrifice). Chen’s study, from another standpoint, suggests a dispute because the same accounts received different moral evaluations. During the Ming, Chen Yidian 陳懿典 (fl. 1592) criticized Nie Zheng’s 聶政 (d. 397 BC) revenge for being private and thus in violation of “zhengyi” 正義

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in this way, the Ming scholar challenged Sima Qian’s view of revenge as a moral action. The late Qing literatus Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) disagreed with praise for Nie Zheng; but Liang affirmed his “enchou” 恩仇 (revenge in return for kindness) because the revenge satisfies the criteria for wushi dao 武士道 (the way of the knight-errant).17

In Tokugawa Japan, the Confucian scholars debated over whether the act of revenge could be justifiable in the Akō 赤穂 incident. The Chūshingura 忠臣蔵 (The treasury of the loyal retainers) tales are based upon a famous historical event. In 1703, the 47 retainers avenged their late lord Asano Naganori 淺野長矩 (1667-1701), and all ended their lives with the shogun’s order of seppuku.18 The vendetta case left a huge impact on the Japanese culture: the Chūshingura tradition, as a source of multiple art forms, exemplifies how people have been sympathetic with the loyal retainers.19 James McMullen, meanwhile, analyzes an intellectual debate regarding whether the avengers were outlaws or righteous men of loyalty. Scholars differently evaluated the revenge; but


17 See Liang Qichao 梁啓超, “Zhongguo zhi wushi dao” 中國之武士道 [The way of the knight-errant in China, 1904], in Liang, Liang Qichao quanjí 梁啓超全集 [Complete works of Liang Qichao], vol. 3 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), p. 1402.


they all deliberated on the tension in which morality does not always complement the existing law. For example, Satō Naokata佐藤直方 (1650-1719) argued that law should prevail over loyalty because the shogun’s sentence was legitimate in light of Asano’s breach of law. In contrast, Asami Keisai浅見絽齋 (1652-1711) paid homage to the suicidal honor in light of their “absolute loyalty.” Dazai Shundai太宰春台 (1680-1747), unlike the former two “absolute” approaches, transcends the questions of being loyal either to the shogun or to the immediate lord; instead, he respected the retainers because of their promotion of morality as a criticism of injustice. Likewise, the debates over the Chūshingura revenge continued and intensified the discussions of law and ritual which the Tang Chinese intellectuals had also struggled to settle.

The Western debates on revenge further complicate the interpretation of justifiable revenge. Scholars of literature and culture usually begin with defining revenge before they detail their studies of the revenge theme. They all note the negative connotation in the concept. Representatively, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) called

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22 See McMullen, “Confucian Perspectives on the Akō Revenge,” pp. 296-99. McMullen introduces the Tang dynasty debate over Xu Yuanqing’s徐元慶 filial revenge, which provides a range of approaches relevant to the Akō revenge. Chen Zi’ang陳子昂 (661-702), in “Fuchou yi zhuang”復讎議狀 [Memorial of the revenge discussion], proposed “symbolic compromise” in which the son should be executed for killing a government official while the family should receive a banner for commemorating his filial piety. See also Michael Dalby, “Revenge and the Law in Traditional China,” *American Journal of Legal History* 25.4 (October 1981), pp. 279-88. Dalby summarizes the criticisms of Chen’s symbolic compromise held by Liu Zongyuan柳宗元 (773-819) and Han Yu (768-824). In “Po fuchou yi”駁復讎議 [Refuting “The Revenge Discussion”], Liu argued that 礼 (ritual) and 刑 (criminal law) should be simultaneously taken into account and a final judgment should be made only after carrying out a thorough investigation (盖聖人之制，究理以定賞罰，本情以正褒貶，統于一而已矣). In “Fuchou zhuang”復讎狀 [Memorial of revenge], Han stressed the varying contexts for revenge (臣愚以爲復讎之名雖同，而其事各異).

revenge “a kind of wild justice,”\textsuperscript{24} a phrase which has been widely cited in revenge studies. Revenge is often thought of as being disruptive to peace and order. Thus, revenge had been a challenge or a menace that should be put down for the sake of Christian principles and legal systems. For advocates of legal systems, revenge has nothing to do with fair judgment. Revengers are deemed as outlaws; for this reason, the opponents of capital punishment even use “legalized revenge” when they criticize it as a primitive and inhuman action.\textsuperscript{25} The Judeo-Christian tradition also discourages revenge on the basis of passages written in the Holy Bible: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.”\textsuperscript{26} Consequently, God is the only entity with the authority to carry out revenge. People have no right to take revenge unless they are sanctioned by His religious principles. According to these religious and legal perspectives, revenge does not represent justice; rather, revenge and justice are in opposition and resist any coordination.

Nevertheless, scholars have also explored the “positive” values inherent in revenge. In fact, great works of the Western literary heritage rely on the revenge theme. From the Greek myths such as Homer’s epics to the Elizabethan dramatic forms, the classics often justified revenge. The statement, “Revenge is for losers,”\textsuperscript{27} is simplistic. In \textit{Wild Justice} (1983), Susan Jacoby observes the “taboo” around use of the word “revenge”; instead, they invented euphemistic language such as “retribution,”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24}Francis Bacon, “Of Revenge” (1625), in \textit{The Essays or Counsel s Civil and Moral}, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{26}\textit{Romans} 12:19: “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but \textit{rather} give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”
\item \textsuperscript{27}John Kerrigan, \textit{Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon} (Oxford: Clarendon-Oxford University Press, 1996), p. vii. Kerrigan opposes shallow interpretations of revenge such as “vicious reciprocations” as well as its downright objections, e.g., the quoted passage here. Considering revenge instead as a motif chosen frequently in “recognizable masterpieces,” Kerrigan notes its serious adaptation to literary and dramatic works.
\end{itemize}
“resettlement,” “special treatment,” “protective reaction strike,” etc.  

28 Jacoby argues that people perceive justice through revenge, but they try to avoid the word because of its illegitimate and irreligious connotations. Actually, Bacon admits a need for revenge when there is no law; moreover, he acknowledges that public revenge is “for the most part fortunate” while private revenge is not.  

29 As Harry Keyishian argues, God’s monopoly on revenge also suggests eventual redemption, a form of vicarious revenge: “[I]n a moral universe we need not stand alone in our sense of injury. Even if abandoned by all others, we are consoled by the thought that the ‘system’ of things sympathizes with us, that it recognizes and resents our injuries as we do.”  

30 As a result, revenge can be termed retribution and redemption insofar as the religious and legal principles sanction it on behalf of individuals. Moreover, public revenge becomes acceptable when it successfully upholds moral justice.

**Indicting Injustice**

Revenge originates from the sense of suffering from unfairness; in this regard, revenge tales signify the criticism of society in which people are not satisfied with the established retributive systems. In *Law and Literature* (2009), Richard A. Posner opposes the concept of justifiable revenge: “[J]ustice as vengeance is crude from a moral standpoint once one steps outside the moral framework of the vengeance system itself.”  

31 Basically, the vengeance system is “unstable”; nevertheless, Posner endorses revenge on

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the condition that there are no “alternatives.” He implies a solid legal system as an alternative which began to come into shape in the modern era. Still, Posner’s “alternatives” are ambiguous enough to exacerbate people’s perceptions of unfairness. The revenge theme remains popular and influential even in contemporary society. Noting the conflicts between legality and revenge, Katherine Maynard and others examine the origins of injustice: “Legal justice . . . can be disrupted or subverted by hatred and fear, and by factors such as racism, ethnic and class prejudice, and also by incompetence or corruption by participants. When such factors discredit legal justice, groups or individuals may be motivated to ‘take matters into their own hands’ and consider vigilante or extralegal justice an attractive alternative.” Instead of blaming individuals for their outlawry, Maynard and others argue that people are attracted to private revenge when the legal system fails to realize justice and fairness.

In China, the literati’s revenge is mandated by a restoration of moral justice. More importantly, moral justice is broad and inclusive; that is, its accomplishment is not contingent upon a specific legal system, but it problematizes all the sources for intensifying the literati’s continual perception of unfairness. For example, Liang Qichao praised Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (d. 484 BC) who destroyed his fatherland in order to accomplish filial revenge because he practiced the dictum “revenge is also the great justice” (復仇亦天下之大義也). Liang blames the chaotic world where people have no other alternatives than to choose one of the most violent forms of revenge,

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32 Posner, Law and Literature, p. 82.
34 Liang Qichao, “Zhongguo zhi wushi dao,” pp. 1397-98.
assassination. In particular, fictional imagination creates multiple forms of revenge effective for redeeming moral justice. The Yuan period zaju play Guan Hanqing’s 關漢卿 (c. 1225-1302) “Dou E yuan” 質閼冤 (The injustice to Dou E), for instance, accomplishes legal justice by appointing Dou Tianzhang 竇天章 (Dou E’s father) as Suzheng Lianfangshi 肅政廉訪使 (Surveillance Commissioner). Accordingly, Dou E’s wrongful death is reexamined, and the responsible people all receive legal punishments: the villain Donkey Zhang is executed by lingchi 凌遲 (death by slicing) with 120 cuts and Doctor Lu is beheaded for selling poison. Also, the prefect who passed a wrong sentence receives one hundred strokes and his name is removed permanently from the official list. As opposed to the expression of unfairness, Guan’s play appears to shed light on the ideal rule of legal justice, and thus, the accomplishment of moral justice.

Guan Hanqing’s meticulously designed revenge, however, lies in the criticism of the Yuan dynasty’s political failure, especially the rule of imperial law. Moreover, the intervention of Heaven implies the “universal nature of injustice” which has existed

35 Liang Qichao considers that assassination should be the last resort against the people’s enemies (擊刺者，對付民賊最後之手段也). Liang believes that the appearance of this violent method is a natural phenomenon in light of the dark and hopeless age which continued for tens of centuries (沉沉黑暗數十世紀). For this reason, Liang sympathizes with the Russian nihilists. Jing Ke 荊軻, Tian Guang 田光, Fan Yuqi 樊於期, Gao Jianli 高漸離 are historical figures in this category. See Liang Qichao, “Zhongguo zhi wushi dao,” p. 1415.


37 See West and Idema, eds. and trans., Monks, Bandits, Lovers, And Immortals, p. 4. “By forestalling any remedy until a future life, one could focus blame on people of social and political power who misapplied the law without calling the cosmic moral basis of the law, as exemplified by Heaven, into question. Injustice was the product of bad people, not a bad system; it was not crime or even torture that provoked Heaven, but its unjust use against the innocent.”

38 West and Idema, eds. and trans., Monks, Bandits, Lovers, And Immortals, p. 6. West and Idema are open to
ever since human society came into being. Instead of engaging with a thorough investigation such as securing evidence, Dou Tianzhang is able to carry out legal justice only after he encounters Dou E’s ghost; moreover, the final judicial decision is made when the three supernatural events confirm her petition of total innocence. From this layered revenge theme, I note a representative frame constructed in the literati’s narrative works. The revenge theme can be present in multiple forms; moreover, the themes are not disconnected but often contradict each other. In *The Heart of Time* (2006), Sabina Knight discovers that the concept “sideshadowing” is useful in identifying the layered meanings inherent in Chinese fictional narrative: “Sideshadowing may present two or more plot lines, provide alternative endings, allow different interpretations to inhere in a work, or suggest alternative scenarios through characters’ reflections, checked impulses, or different perspectives.” Knight’s application of “sideshadowing” is helpful for illuminating multiple messages concerning literati’s writings of revenge. To comprehend the expression of unfairness, readers have to turn their attention from the explicit statements to the indirect and implied messages. Thus, the literati’s revenge narrative needs to be analyzed in detail because their messages are “camouflaged.” As a result, they are overlooked and await decoding.

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39 The three vows are as follows: “When the stroke strikes off my head, not a drop of my warm blood will stain the ground. It will all fly up instead to the white silk streamer (都飛在白練上). This is the hottest time of summer, sir. If injustice had indeed been done, three feet of snow will cover my dead body (天降三尺瑞雪). Then this district will suffer from drought for three whole years (楚州亢旱三年).” See Guan, “Dou E yuan,” pp. 1510-11. For English, see Yang and Yang, trans., “Snow in Midsummer,” p. 29. See also West and Idema, eds. and trans., *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, And Immortals*, p. 27.

Strategies of Implication

Sabina Knight further identifies the counterparts of sideshadowing in Chinese commentary tradition. Referring to the *dufa* (how to read) essays and also Plaks’s essay concerning the terms used in those texts, Knight notes that indirect implications may involve complicated usages of analogy, subtle changes in style, and purposeful shifts of focus. All of these literary techniques demonstrate the literati’s search for indirect expression: “The existence of this rich terminology suggests that commentators were highly attuned to fine nuances in the array of representations of temporal relations in traditional Chinese fiction.”

Moreover, these terms, argues Plaks, had been applied distinctly in the writing practice: “[A]ll of the terms are primarily defined and redefined contextually according to the individual usage of the various critics and the changing subject matter elucidated.” Consequently, the commentary tradition explains the literary techniques widely shared and adopted among the literati. The literati novelists expressed their ideas implicitly and those readers in the literati community were expected to recognize their implied messages. In addition, those techniques did not suppress their fictional imagination; instead, the literati were capable of following established literary conventions as far as they could and still be able to tailor their strategies according to individual interests and intents.

The techniques of implication were chosen in diverse genres of literati writing. Novelists were not the only group of writers who employed the techniques of indirection. From the time of Confucius, the poetic tradition of China required the literati to cultivate

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41 Knight, *Heart of Time*, p. 43.

the talents necessary for penetrating the embedded meanings. For example, Pauline Yu
introduces commentators such as the Mao 毛 editors and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200)
who underscored moral teachings in the context of relevant historical evidence: “The
process is one of contextualization, not allegorization, and one that proved to be the
dominant tradition in later criticism as well, which preferred to read a poet’s works as
literal records of actual experience, from which a biography could be constructed. Thus
the moral lesson is not accidental or arbitrary, but one that arises from a specific context,
and for a specific historical reason.”43 Meanwhile, Haun Saussy argues that the original
meaning of Shijing 詩經 (The classic of poetry) is unidentifiable, so the commentators
were able to appropriate the interpretations, using the classic as evidence for justifying
their own perspectives. Thus, the commentators changed the meaning of “shi yan zhi”
詩言志 (indeed the phrase poetry tells of intent) to “shi yi yan zhi” 詩以言志 (using
poems as a means of expressing intent).44 Regardless whether the poems engaged with
allegorization or contextualization, the studies of commentary tradition demonstrate that
the Chinese literati paid serious attention to implied messages. They put extreme care
into creating ambiguous textual representations.

These literati had various reasons for formulating this roundabout technique.
Artistic elaboration does not suffice to explain the considerable efforts the literati made
even at the risk of intensifying the ambiguity of the textual meaning. In this respect, the
case reports, which the local magistrates prepared for imperial review, elucidate the
politics inherent in the application of implying rather than stating directly. Examining the


Qing dynasty handbook Wang Youhuai’s 王又槐 Ban’an yaolüe 辦案要略 (Essentials of managing crime cases), especially the “Xugong” 敘供 (How to compose testimony) section, Karasawa Yasuhiko 唐澤靖彦 discovers that the proposed techniques are almost identical to those of the fiction critics.45 Moreover, Hegel notes that the magistrates relied strategically on rhetorical questions because “the texts present their cases sympathetically in order to win the emotional support of the intended readers, the reviewing officials.”46 The officials had the responsibility to draw a fair judgment while being faithful to the legal codes; moreover, a judicial decision had to be made without considering emotional concerns. Nevertheless, they still wanted to take into account sympathetic circumstances, and they were aware that sympathetic appeals could be effective to persuade the reviewers. The literati explored methods to avoid unnecessary tensions resulting from their personal perspectives. In sum, the literary techniques of implication allowed the literati community to continue and consolidate their moral criticism, when a straightforward statement would be unable to fulfill their responsibilities.

**Changing Times, Changing Ideas**

Concerning the general structure of this study, in ensuing chapters I explore the trajectories of the evolving revenge theme from the late Qing to modern China. Because


the literati’s revenge is meaningful insofar as they employ the concept as a means of exposing unfairness, I am interested in their negotiation with changing historical events. This thematic approach is nothing new. In the field of literature, Jianmei Liu in *Revolution Plus Love* (2003) carries out her search for the “genealogy” of revolution and love. Placing the leftists’ literature as a site for formulating individual consciousness, Liu discovers a complicated intellectual mindset: “[The leftist writers] endured a schizophrenic syndrome in which their sensitivity as individuals was troubled by the difference between utopia and reality.” Moreover, Haiyan Lee names her study the “genealogy of love” and justifies her topic as useful for delineating the affective capacities of sentimentality: “Emotion talk is never about emotion pure and simple, but is always also about something else, namely, identity, morality, gender, authority, power and community.” Likewise, Michael Berry expands the genealogical approach to the intertextuality of film and literature. Following the progress of modern Chinese history, Berry incorporates both geographically and politically distinct Chinese areas and examines the representations of trauma. Furthermore, in *Speaking to History* (2009), the historian Paul A. Cohen notes the revenge theme in the story of King Goujian of Yue 越王勾践 (r. 496-465 BC) as an archetypal motif through modern China. As Cohen states in his preface, “The basic plan . . . is to examine the ways in which the story functioned—the parts it took—as it percolated through Chinese history from the late

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Qing to the present.” I benefit from this array of scholarly methodology and situate my study of the literati’s writings of revenge within changing periods and changing perspectives.

In particular, I am aware that implied messages appeared conspicuously while the literati represented the details of violence. From corporal punishment to catastrophic warfare, the illustrations of violence testify to the literati criticism of moral injustice. In this sense, David Der-wei Wang’s scholarship is a rich resource for my argumentation. In *The Monster That Is History* (2004), for example, Wang notes that fictional narratives effectively reflected the moral and psychological registers while the writers developed multiple methods for detailing violence. Consequently, literature generates criticism of any forms of victimization: “I also call attention to the fact that the modern Chinese representation of violence can be underwritten as a violence of representation. For Chinese writers and readers alike, to represent pain and suffering is not merely to reflect external instances of violence; rather it demands to be appreciated and enlisted as a radical agency of change.” Furthermore, the representation of violence, Wang continues, indicts injustice according to the standards of moral justice: “Literature thus presents itself as a meeting ground where poetic justice contends with legal justice, or in more volatile terms, where ink demands blood. Writing and reading are taken as juridical events capable of transforming symbolic victims into social rebels and figurative humiliation into moral passion.” In my chapters, I will pay attention to the changing

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52 Wang, *Monster That Is History*, p. 3.
forms of violence (both physical and psychological). In addition, I will emphasize that the literati fulfilled their desire for moral justice while depicting violence in great detail. For this purpose, they had to meticulously perform the literary techniques of implication.

In the following chapters, I will investigate four revenge narratives written by four authors. Roughly speaking, the primary texts of the first two chapters were written before the fall of the Qing empire (1911). And the final two chapters deal with the works of May Fourth (1919) generation writers. Accordingly, the Confucian discourse will illuminate the revenge theme in the first two chapters. Meanwhile, the differing ideologies after the May Fourth movement will be central in my discussion of more modern works in the two subsequent chapters. In Chapter One, Yu Wanchun’s 俞萬春 (1794-1849) *Dangkou zhi* 蕩寇志 (Quelling the bandits, 1851) envisions a Confucian loyalism by portraying an emperor who punishes bandits and abusive ministers through the imperial legal system. Despite his opposition to the making of bandit heroes in *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Outlaws of the marsh), Yu Wanchun deliberated on the fundamental reasons for widespread banditry. Consequently, the historical analogy indicts the corrupt officialdom, which culminates in the illustration of the extreme in corporal punishment, *lingchi*. In Chapter Two, I will discuss Wu Jianren’s 吳趼人 (1866-1910) *Tongshi* 痛史 (A history of pain, 1903-06). The Confucian-nationalist rewrites the Mongol invasion and struggles to mobilize a thirst for revenge by recollecting national and ethnic shame. The illustrations of atrocity such as *tucheng* 屠城 (massacre of a whole city), however, denote the historical pessimism which had an inception already in the late Ming. While including the ethnic debates of the time, I will underline Wu Jianren’s motive for the restoration of moral principles; in doing so, he has
no other alternative but to formulate the historical novel to assert his sense of poetic justice.

In Chapter Three, Lu Xun’s 魯迅 (1881-1936) “Zhujian” 鑄劍 (Forging the swords, 1927) reinforces his May Fourth project by retelling the Meijianchi 眉間尺 tale as a means to criticize traditional culture and indifferent Chinese readers. While illustrating decapitation, however, Lu Xun reveals his own complicity with the problems inherent in what he labels the Chinese mentality. I want to demonstrate that Lu Xun’s strategies of indirection enable him to modulate his reluctant confession, which otherwise would have contradicted his lifetime mission as a cultural critic. Finally, in Chapter Four, I will examine Ba Jin’s 巴金 (1904-2005) Miewang 滅亡 (Destruction, 1929) in which sympathy towards the victims of violence justifies the cause of anarchistic revenge against warlord rule. The implicit narrative, meanwhile, suggests that Ba Jin reflects his incapacity in the face of revolution and romance; in specific, the space of public execution discloses the helplessness of intellectuals before the merciless warlord rule. In this regard, Ba Jin’s assassination has multiple layers of meaning: not only the criticism of leadership but also the literati perception of their own political impotence. Overall, my research explores the perennial literati search for moral justice in the throes of changing times and ideas, which would have been impossible for them to carry out without persistently elaborating the techniques of implication in their writings.
Chapter One

Writing to Avenge: Yu Wanchun’s *Quelling the Bandits* and Redeeming Imperial Dignity

Introduction: Revenge and Legal Justice

The relationship between private revenge and legal punishment was one of the most controversial topics for literati in imperial China. Exploring the legal philosophy in traditional China, Michael Dalby surveys the contentious historical relationship between the two important constructs. According to Dalby, revenge, often appearing in a personal form, demands redemption of defamed moral values such as in avenging parents. For example, the Confucian classic *Li Ji* (Book of rites) included a conversation in which Confucius endorses moral responsibilities for filial revenge.1 In response to this “righteous” vengeance, nevertheless, Chinese imperial monarchs expressed concern about the public disorder vindictive subjects might cause. In particular, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-95) summarized the problem as follows: “Once this practice gets started, any son will be able to nurse a private hatred and use retaliation as a pretext—and no doubt there will be vengeance-killings one after the other without end.”2 Noting this

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1 Michael Dalby, “Revenge and the Law in Traditional China,” *American Journal of Legal History* 25.4 (October 1981), p. 271. Dalby quotes a passage taken from “Tan’gong” 檀弓 section of *Li Ji* 禮記 [Book of rites]: “Zixia 子夏 asked Confucius, saying, ‘How should (a man) conduct himself with reference to the man who has killed his father or mother (父母之仇)?’ The Master said, ‘He should sleep on straw, with his shield for a pillow; he should not take office; he must be determined not to live with the slayer under the same Heaven (弗與共天下). If he meet with him in the marketplace or the court, he should not have to go back for his weapon, but (instantly) fight with him.” Another passage Dalby cites is from “Quli” 曲禮 section also of the *Book of Rites*: “One should not live under the same Heaven with the enemy who has slain one’s father” (父之讐弗與共戴天). See the same page in Dalby’s article. Dalby’s English translation is based upon James Legge, trans., *Li Chi: Book of Rites*, vol. 1 (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1967), p. 140 and p. 92, respectively. For the Chinese original, see Wang Wenzheng 王文錦, annot., *Li Ji yijie* 禮記 譯解 [Explanatory notes on the *Book of Rites*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), p. 82 and p. 29. *Mencius* has a similar passage in “Jinxin” 尽心 section; but the purpose is rather to suppress homicide, not the justification of filial revenge: “Mencius said, ‘Only now do I realize how serious it is to kill a member of the family of another man. If you killed his father, he would kill your father; if you killed his elder brother, he would kill your elder brother. This being the case, though you may not have killed your father and brother with your own hands, it is but one step removed.’” See D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius*, rev. ed. (1970; London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 158-59.

2 Dalby, “Revenge and the Law,” p. 302.
conflict, Dalby sums up his survey with the successive imperial regimes’ efforts to establish public order. Despite the moral justification for revenge, “full commitment and full devotion marked [judicial officials’] treatment of revenge. In their eyes, the majesty of the imperial law deserved no less.”\(^3\) The Confucian officials (including emperors) could not disregard the righteous need for vengeance; however, they honored the desire for personal revenge by carrying out the rule of imperial law.

As a result, to Confucian loyalists, especially for those who were concerned about public justice, the growing reading population for *Shuihu* (Outlaws of the marsh) editions must have been of particular concern. Their loyalist mindset comprehends, in different ways, the illustrations of Liangshan bandits who are devoted to personal revenge; in detail, they proclaim the execution of justice even with the descriptions of sympathy and heroism. Regarding this fiction publication and readerly response, the May Fourth intellectuals understood the editions and sequels of *Outlaws of the Marsh* as reflections of “historical milieus.” For instance, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) agrees with Hu Shi’s 胡適 (1891-1962) observation in that the widespread banditry during the late Ming influenced Jin Shengtan’s 金聖嘆 (1610-61) commentary and his edition of *Outlaws of the Marsh*.\(^4\) In this vein, Lu Xun explains the reason for Chen Chen’s 陳忱 (c. 1613-70) *Shuihu houzhuan* (A sequel to *Outlaws of the Marsh*, 1664) as a displaced Ming loyalist’s sympathy for bandits. Likewise, Yu Wanchun’s 兪萬春 (1794-1796)...

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\(^3\) Dalby, “Revenge and the Law,” p. 307.

1849) *Dangkou zhi* 蕩寇志 (Quelling the bandits, 1851) is said to reflect the mindset of those who have forgotten antagonism against the Manchu invaders.⁵ While agreeing with Lu Xun’s attention to the historical consciousness of the Confucian literati, I point out that literati differed in expressing their individual perspectives concerning historical events. In addition, I argue that respective Confucian authors reflected their personal attitudes, altering tone and style to imply rather than state their messages. Moreover, I describe how literati expressed their ideology through creative adaptation of *Outlaws of the Marsh* as they participated in the invention of sequels.

To identify my arguments, I use Yu Wanchun’s *Quelling the Bandits* as my primary text.⁶ This late Qing tale of chivalry is regarded as a politically conservative fictional narrative; however, this loyalist fiction narrates how a Confucian scholar expressed his ideal of imperial rule by managing private revenge and thereby establishing public order. In *Quelling the Bandits*, the Emperor consolidates his authority by carrying out legal justice. In the following sections, I will first examine *Quelling the Bandits* in its inheritance of Jin Shengtan’s *Outlaws of the Marsh* in light of the formations of vindictive characters and narrative developments through personal revenge. Then, I will move on to examine its parallels with *Outlaws of the Marsh*; moreover, I will analyze Yu’s study of strategic implications especially in his sympathetic illustrations of Liangshan bandits. Finally, I delve into how my main text develops the implied message in sympathy with Yu Wanchun’s explicit goal of taking revenge on abusive ministers: the significant moral advance over *Outlaws of the Marsh*. By highlighting the Emperor as

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the punisher of villains, the Confucian loyalist accomplishes poetic justice, which is significant in the Emperor’s personal presiding over public executions on behalf of victims of abusive power. In addition, I will argue that the author meticulously manages style and description as a means to vindicate the imperial application of legal justice.

The Legacy of Outlaws of the Marsh

Before and after Yu Wanchun’s writing, the Qing empire received both foreign and domestic challenges such as the outbreaks of the Opium Wars (1840-42, 1856-60) and the Taiping Rebellion (1849-64). Accordingly, Yu Wanchun’s Quelling the Bandits carries specific historical significance, first because it produced heated political debates over banditry, and at the same time because the author tried to express his politics through fictional narrative. Yu started to write the story in 1826 and completed it in 1847, which later on Yu’s son Longguang edited and first published in 1851 in a moveable type edition. Yu’s friend Xu Peike provided financial assistance and published the first woodblock edition in a small format in 1853, Nanjing. With the Taiping army’s occupation of Nanjing, coincident to its publication year, Quelling the Bandits immediately became politically significant. For the relevant historical records, Luo Ergang 羅爾綱 explores publications banned and destroyed by the Taiping government. In particular, Luo details the case of Quelling the Bandits and refers to the prefaces to its reprints. In 1871, Qian Xiang 錢湘, in his preface to a reprint,

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emphasizes the inextricable connection with domestic disorders, specifically the Taiping Rebellion: “The community leaders of this province hurried to print a xiuzhen ban (portable edition) and spread Quelling the Bandits to various towns. After this time, the social and political situations gradually normalized. Who will believe that this is not because of the contribution of Quelling the Bandits? . . . So Quelling the Bandits became popular around the Yangzi region that someone even commentated on this book; therefore, the rebels hated this book, destroying the woodblocks in Suzhou 蘇州.”

Moreover, the Qing officials of Nanjing retreated to Suzhou but did not forget to carry the woodblocks; thus, Quelling the Bandits met its first reception among readers who were immediately affected by contemporary warfare.

Expressing Resentment

Regarding this political reception, Quelling the Bandits further proposes discussions in relation to the legacy of Outlaws of the Marsh. As its alternative title Jie Shuihu quanzhuan 結水滸全傳 (Conclusion to the Complete Outlaws of the Marsh) suggests, Quelling the Bandits inherits the late Ming and early Qing scholar Jin Shengtan’s 70 chapter edition, continuing and concluding Jin’s Outlaws of the Marsh with an additional 70 chapters and a jiezi 結子 (epilogue). In the author’s original preface, Yu underlines his succession to Jin’s position: “[Song Jiang’s 宋江 zhong 忠 (loyalty) and yi 義 (righteousness) are only from his mouth and actually his mind is full of banditry; in this way, he comes into being tremendously treacherous and unbelievably

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vicious. Jin Shengtan’s criticism has never been clearer: ‘Where is [his] loyalty? Where is [his] righteousness?’ In short, those who are loyal and righteous would not become *qiāngdào* 强盜 (bandits); in other words, bandits cannot be loyal and righteous” (1).  

Yu Wanchun’s abhorrence of bandits results from his earlier career when he accompanied his father to put down a series of peasant revolts. According to his younger brother Yu Quan 俞鑾, Yu Wanchun was startled to learn that Han Chinese used *Outlaws of the Marsh* to deceive and mislead the Li 黎 people in the Hainan 海南 island.  

Furthermore, Yu received an urgent report that people of Guiyang 桂陽 attempted to serve Luo Guorui 羅斡瑞 (with a nickname “Song Dage” 宋大哥 [Big Brother Song]) as a leader while plotting an uprising against the Qing government.  

Yu’s participation in quelling the bandits motivated his refusal to glorify the bandits, which corresponds to Jin’s motive in his edition and commentary on *Outlaws of the Marsh*. Being worried about such a poisonous influence, Yu created *Quelling the Bandits* and tried to curb the notion that “loyalty and righteousness” was inherent in the original *Outlaws of the Marsh*.  

Following Jin’s harsh criticism of Liangshan bandits led by Song Jiang, the loyalist author projects his anger in writing *Quelling the Bandits*. Moreover, this furious authorial stance negates the historical authenticity of the full-length edition of *Outlaws of the Marsh*, supplanting it with Yu Wanchun’s succession of Jin Shengtan’s edition. In

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11 For the pagination of primary Chinese text, including the author’s own preface and epilogue, I put parentheses. My edition of *Quelling the Bandits* has two volumes, but the pages continue through volumes, so I only put page numbers without specifying volumes. All translation is mine, unless otherwise specified.


13 Yu Quan, “Xuxu,” p. 1049. Banditry was popular among peasants and widespread to various regions. Another historical record reaffirms this phenomenon. Peasants even respected Dao Zhi 盜跖 (fl. 475 BC), one of the most notorious bandits in Chinese legend, and built temples in honor of him. The famous general of the Huaijun 淮軍 (Huai Army), Yuan Jiasan 袁甲三 (1806-63), the granduncle of Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859-1916), was horrified to learn of this during his inspection tour to Huaibei 淮北. See Elizabeth J. Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), pp. 63-64.
the “Epilogue,” Yu first time uses his zi 字 (courtesy name) Zhonghua 仲華 to conclude that the Liangshan bandit heroes were fabricated by twisting historical records:

Zhonghua comments: The 108 bandits came to this end, which confirms Lu Junyi’s 盧俊義 dream at that time. I heard that Shi Nai’an 施耐庵 and Jin Shengtan also said that. In fact, there were no stories such as Song Jiang’s 梁江’s acceptance of zhao’an 招安 (offer of amnesty), his suppression of Fang Lai 方臘 (d. 1121), and his living as a loyal minister and dying as a holy spirit.

In addition, there was no story of so-called Hunjiang long 混江龍 Li Jun 李俊 escaping overseas to become the king of Xianluo guo 暹邏國 (Siam). These are all fabricated by those who were born with bandit mentality. Because they so much admired and adored the 108 bandits, they wanted to learn from the bandits. This world is qingping 淸平 (clear and at peace) with wangfa senyan 王法森嚴 (strict imperial law); therefore, how are they permitted to behave like that, not to mention to strut around this world? (1037-38)

By discrediting the authenticity of the second half of the complete Outlaws of the Marsh, Yu criticizes Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 who is believed to have portrayed the Liangshan bandits as loyal and righteous spirits. As Jin Shengtan argues in “Du Di wu caizi shu fá” 讀第五才子書法 (How to read Outlaws of the Marsh), the fullest version of Outlaws of the Marsh, especially those parts Jin left out, cannot be a serious work like Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 Shiji 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian, 91 BC) in which “suyuan” 宿怨

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14 In Chapter 119 of the full-length edition of Outlaws of the Marsh, Li Jun 李俊, along with other six Liangshan members, sails abroad and becomes the king of Siam. Others such as Tong Wei 童威 and Fei Bao 費保 also took official positions, occupying coastal territories and lived well. See Shi Nai’an 施耐庵 and Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, Shuihu zhuan: Sida mingzhu mingjia dianping 水滸: 四大名著名家點評 [Outlaws of the marsh: The great four works with commentaries by famous writers], annot. Jin Shengtan and Li Zhuowu 李卓吾, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), p. 891. For English, see Sidney Shapiro, trans., Outlaws of the Marsh, vol. 4 (Beijing: Foreign Languages, 1993), p. 2107. Here Yu Wanchun criticizes not only the original Outlaws of the Marsh but also the sequels such as Chen Chen’s 陳忱 (c. 1613-70) Shuihu houzhuan 水滸後傳 [A sequel to Outlaws of the Marsh, 1664]. Chen developed Li Jun’s story and reflected the Ming loyalism which has been often discussed in relation to Zheng Chenggong’s 鄭成功 (1624-62) conquest of Taiwan. Actually, more than 20 years after Jin Shengtan’s edition, Chen expressed scorn for Jin’s criticism of the Liangshan bandits. Yu Wanchun, an ardent follower of Jin, must have disapproved of Chen’s supplementary project. For the distinct approaches to Outlaws of the Marsh between Jin and Chen, see Ellen Widmer, The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalism (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1987), p. 8.
(harboring a grudge) or “fafen” 发憤 (projecting anger) motivated the writing.15 Yu further condemns the motive of Outlaws of the Marsh as indulgence in personal pleasure: “[People with bandit minds] babbled away these stories while imagining the dignity the bandits enjoyed at that time, expecting benefits even after being bandits by looking forward to governmental recognition” (1038). To Yu, the representation of Liangshan bandits as heroes was an unbearable thing; for this reason, he emphasizes that Quelling the Bandits counters the projection of anger for which people respect Outlaws of the Marsh. Suggesting instead his creation as a “wonderful” example of loyalty and righteousness, Yu reestablishes the distorted values which Liangshan bandits brought forth; in doing so, he wants to complicate anger, grudges and calls for revenge while devaluing those embedded in the original Outlaws of the Marsh.

Intending to inherit Sima Qian’s and Jin Shengtan’s writings of anger, Yu Wanchun reflects his literary resentment in the creation of fictional characters. Facilitating the progress of events, his vengeful characters are conscious enough to respond quickly to conversations, behavior, and narrative flows. For example, the first chapter, Chapter 71 of Quelling the Bandits begins with the fire that breaks out in Zhongyitang 忠義堂 (Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness).16 Informed of this, Song Jiang

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16 By including the mysterious fire that breaks out in Zhongyitang 忠義堂 (Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness), Yu Wanchun continues and develops Jin Shengtan’s criticism of the Liangshan bandits. In the last chapter of Jin’s edition of Outlaws of the Marsh, Lu Junyi 盧俊義 has a dream in which the 108 sworn brothers, including Song Jiang and
becomes upset and orders a summary execution of the 32 guards who were on duty when the mysterious fire occurred: “According to our code, those who mistakenly burnt down the Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness along with invaluable facilities inside, and those who did not save lingqi 令旗 (command banners), lingjian 令箭 (command arrows), bingfu 兵符 (military tablets), and yinxin 印信 (official seals) at the time of the barracks fire, will be beheaded immediately regardless of rank, high or low. . . . If I don’t make rewards and punishments fair, how can I command our group?” (4). Even though representing the outlaw bandits, Song sticks to the outlaw’s code as if he were carrying out official business. A moment later, Song pretends to be generous and does not really comprehend the ominous sign: “This is all because I, Song Jiang, myself am to blame; being not loyal and filial everyday, Heaven shows this fire as a warning omen. If I don’t correct this, you brothers will have to discipline me” (4). Illustrating the bandit leader as an inconsistent character quickly changing from mercilessness to humility, Yu presents Song as a figure of brigandage and brutality. In the name of titian xingdao 替天行道 (carrying out the Way in the name of Heaven), Song is arbitrary in carrying out codes; moreover, the loyalty and righteousness only serve as a rhetorical rationale for the ill-tempered bandit leader. While demonstrating this quick and vengeful personality, Yu expresses his antagonism towards the Liangshan bandits, especially to the bandit leader Song Jiang.

_Private Revenge_

In contrast, the main protagonists Chen Xizhen 陳希貞 and his daughter Chen Liqing 陳麗卿 are swift in punishing the evil-doers, but they restrain themselves especially when it comes to the punishment of unscrupulous government officials. Called an “accomplishment of vengeance” (23) by the local people, Liqing’s blow on Gao Yanei’s 高衙內 ear instigates the Gao family’s desire for retaliation. Being afraid of the Gao family’s resentment and waiting for the right moment to escape, Xizhen plots a delay pretending to take Gao Yanei as his son-in-law. In Chapter 74, Xizhen invites Yanei to a banquet celebrating their wedding and embarks on his escape plan during which Liqing has another chance to punish the villains:

Xizhen laughed, “My girl, you are impatient. You don’t know that one blow is not enough for his crime. When his evil reaches its limit, he will be punished for yuan 冤 (injustice). He will finally meet a terrible end. So just wait for the day and let him go today. Last time in Yuxian’guan 玉仙觀 (Temple of the Jade Immortal), you wanted to keep a souvenir; today, you are allowed to have another chance but be careful not to kill him.” . . . [Liqing] held the lantern to look close and cut off Gao Yanei’s two ears and nose with bloody hands. Then, she looked at Sun Gao 孫高 and Xue Bao 薛寶 saying, “These guys are no good either!” Liqing also cut their ears off. When she approached Gao’s two attendants, Xizhen stopped her: “What’s your need for them? You go hurry to get some medicine and stop their bleeding; otherwise, they will bleed to death.” Liqing retracted her hands and sheathed her knife; taking a lantern, she fetched an ointment and rubbed it into their wounds. (58)

This passage contrasts with the case of Song Jiang who executes his brothers according to the bandit’s code. The fire in the Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness, under Yu’s hands, connotes a Heavenly sign foreshadowing the eventual annihilation of the Liangshan bandits. As a result, Song Jiang is responsible for killing his innocent sworn brothers; by contrast, Xizhen is generous enough to control his personal revenge. By creating an impetuous daughter who is submissive to her self-possessed father, Yu ideally illustrates
how the villains deserve revenge while loyal and filial characters preserve their own moral values. In particular, vengeful anger forms a fundamental component driving narrative development throughout Quelling the Bandits. Yu’s treatment of anger not only constitutes his criticism of Outlaws of the Marsh, but also creates characters whose thirst for vengeance prompts subsequent events.

The inclusion of filial piety increases the thirst for vengeance. Filial piety provides a justification for the loyalists to seek vengeance; especially, the literary illustration elicits sympathy when loyal figures are aggrieved by suspicion from abusive government officials. In Chapter 83, Liu Guang 劉廣, a relative to Chen Xizhen, is implicated through Ruan Qixiang’s 阮其祥 slander that Liu and his son have communicated with the Liangshan bandits to plot against Prefect Gao of Yizhou 沂州. Liu is a filial son who risks his life to verify Lady Liu’s whereabouts. In addition, his sorrow before Lady Liu’s dead body mandates the need for revenge: “On that day, Liu opened Lady Liu’s coffin and the dead body still looked the same. Crying too much, Liu passed out and recovered. After cleaning the body with fragrance, Liu prepared a decent coffin; then, he redressed her with fengguan xiapei 凤冠霞帔 (phoenix cap and embroidered vest)” (222). Before this arrangement, Liu’s resolve for revenge becomes persuasive in that filial piety should be accompanied by his revenge against unscrupulous officials. In the midst of preparing a plan to save his family, Liu receives a letter informing him of his mother’s untimely death:

Liu Guang was startled and felt his heart jumping. He opened the letter immediately. It read: “Our Lady Liu was struck with stomach illness, and Prefect Gao did not allow me to treat her, not to mention setting her free. While the Prefect was on leave for the Dusheng 都省 (Department of State Affairs), Ruan Qixiang was even more specific. Lady Liu passed away at xu
time on the 14th day.” Reading this line, Liu Guang cried out and fell backward, bleeding from the mouth, and passed out. People around hurried to assist him and he recovered only after several hours. He became really angry and in his fury drew his sword, smashing the stone on the roadside. He swore, “Gao and Ruan, you two bastards; I will catch you and chew your hearts and lungs, or I am no true man!” He struck the stone in rage; it sparked and finally split into pieces. (211)

Gao and Ruan’s merciless treatment of Liu’s feeble and sick mother enrages Liu and drives him to vengeance. Besides taking Liu’s mother as a prisoner, Gao did not allow her medical treatment; in this way, Gao’s group becomes responsible for Lady Liu’s death. Previous textual evidence portraying Liu as a filial son further confirms the tremendous sorrow Liu experiences. After capturing Gao and Ruan, Chen Xizhen (who formerly was a reserved person restraining his daughter from killing Gao Yanei) suggests that Liu offer them as sacrifices for late Lady Liu: “In the morning, Liu Guang prepared spirit tablets for both Lady Liu and Liu Lin’s 刘麟 wife. After bathing Gao and Ruan, he bound them together making them kneel down before Lady Liu’s spirit tablet. Being accompanied by two sons, Liu opened their bellies and took out their hearts, offering them to Lady Liu” (242-43). Revenge in the name of filial piety thus gives the Liu family the right to carry out bloody and brutal executions without being blamed for mercilessness; in particular, their punishment of unscrupulous officials becomes heroic.

By justifying Liu’s revenge, however, Yu risks destabilizing his overarching plan for upholding loyalty. In exchange for Liu’s successful revenge, he provokes government officials to bleed, not to mention the destruction of government facilities. According to Yu’s motive for writing Quelling the Bandits, banditry should be discarded and suppressed because loyalty and righteousness are the outlaw’s only excuses to justify their treacherous banditry. In the wake of Yuanbi zhai’s 猿臂寨 (Monkey Arm Fortress)
attack on Yizhou city, Yu counts the number of casualties which Yizhou officials sustained along with the fire which destroyed all the government structures (224-25). Before this allegation, Chen Xizhen explains his execution of Gao: “You should not suspect that I am rebelling against the government. Because this bastard Gao Feng 高封 exploited people, he is my da chouren 大仇人 (archenemy); for this reason, I cannot pardon him” (242). In addition, the text explains that Liu and the Monkey Arm Fortress group protected the people and left the official storehouse intact. Despite these arrangements, Chen and Liu are complicit in banditry similar to the Liangshan brothers. Illustrating the loyal and filial figures accomplishing their revenge, Yu Wanchun reiterates the slogan of Liangshan bandits, “weimin chuhai 為民除害 (eliminating the harm to protect people).

**Strategic Implications**

In order to criticize Song Jiang’s Liangshan bandits, Yu contrasts them with Chen Xizhen’s loyalists; in particular, he suggests zhao’an, the offer of amnesty, and Song’s rejection of it as the most crucial elements. While Song pretends to look forward to the imperial amnesty as his chance to show his loyalty, he secretly dispatches Guo Sheng 郭盛, disguised as a wuji 武妓 (camp follower), to assassinate the imperial envoy Hou Meng 侯蒙. To credit this assassin under Chen Xizhen’s order, Wu Yong 吳用 even deceives the readers of *Quelling the Bandits* with these remarks: “That martial courtesan is no other than Chen’s daughter Liqing. That bastard is jealous of our acceptance of the offer of amnesty so he ordered his daughter to assassinate the imperial envoy, stealing the zhaoshu 詔書 (imperial message) and sealing off our way back” (345). In contrast, Chen
Xizhen receives the offer of amnesty while delivering Mengyang 蒙陽 where the Liangshan bandits are surrounding its xiancheng 縣城 (county seat). In Chapter 101, Yun Long 雲龍 suggests that Chen relieve Gao Qiu 高俅 who is now under siege. Despite his former grudge against Gao, Chen rescues him in the name of protecting the tianzi’s 天子 (emperor) territory (472-73). Thus Yu illustrates that Chen is a loyal figure who can disregard a private grudge for the sake of proving his loyalty towards the emperor.

“Dangerous” Parallels

Chen Xizhen’s reception of the emperor’s offer of amnesty, however, creates a parallel structure with Song’s reception in the full-length edition of Outlaws of the Marsh. Insofar as the element which distinguishes Chen from Song is whether they accept the offer of amnesty, Yu’s parallel turns out to be problematic; that is, Chen’s response to the offer can signify Yu’s affirmation of Song Jiang. In detail, Chen establishes the Monkey Arm Fortress after his escape from Gao Qiu’s pursuit, which comprises the similar destiny to the formation of the Liangshan in Outlaws of the Marsh. In his extensive study of late Qing fiction, David Der-wei Wang points out this “dangerous” parallelism which may disrupt Quelling the Bandits as its reaction against Outlaws of the Marsh:

For both Chen Xizhen and Song Jiang, rebellion is a condition that can be excused by an intention to serve the emperor. Echoing Jin Shengtan’s argument, Yu Wanchun regarded Song Jiang as a dangerous impostor, an ambitious traitor. But if Chen Xizhen’s experience is so similar to Song Jiang’s, what is the hidden moral quality that makes Chen Xizhen a hero while leaving Song Jiang a bandit? At various points in [Quelling the Bandits], one feels Yu Wanchun must have been aware of the dangerous
parallel between the Liangshan stronghold and Monkey Arm Fortress, and between Song Jiang and Chen Xizhen.¹⁷

According to Wang, *Quelling the Bandits* substitutes Chen in Song’s role in the original *Outlaws of the Marsh*. Other textual examples further support Wang’s argument. For instance, Chen receives the offer of amnesty and participates in the military expedition to annihilate the Liangshan bandits. Likewise in *Outlaws of the Marsh*, Song accepts Zhang Shuye’s 張叔夜 (1065–1127) offer and starts his career as a government official to defend the Song against the invasion of the Liao 遼 (916–1125); furthermore, he sacrifices his sworn brothers while quelling the series of rebellions Wang Qing 王慶 and Fang La initiate. Not only does Yu make parallels by juxtaposing Chen with Song, he also borrows additional tales from *Outlaws of the Marsh* to portray innocent officials whom unscrupulous officials falsely charge with treason. Among others, Lin Chong 林沖 in the original *Outlaws of the Marsh* punishes Gao Yanei for his attempted seduction of Lin’s wife, which forces Lin to go into exile and to join the Liangshan Fortress. Lin’s hardship is equivalent to the case of Chen Xizhen and Chen Liqing. When Gao Yanei humiliates them and Gao Qiu chases them, the Chen family subsequently establish the Monkey Arm Fortress after cutting off Yanei’s ears and nose.

Taking over the outlaws’ chivalric adventure, the loyalists in *Quelling the Bandits* prompt questions regarding how fictional narratives could successfully reflect the historical backdrop of late imperial China. Noting chivalric fiction’s popularity in the late Qing (as is also the case of *Quelling the Bandits*), David Wang argues that the government’s repatriation of outlaws signifies dwindling governmental administrative

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power: “If the heroes of late Qing chivalric fiction are guilty of selling out to the government, isn’t the government equally culpable for making deals with ruffians and bandits rather than suppressing them? When a government has to solicit erstwhile outlaws’ assistance to exercise its powers, isn’t this a sign of the decline, not the triumph, of its legitimacy?”

According to Wang, the outlaws’ collaboration with the government, though it is intended to inspire loyalism, implies doubts about late Qing rule. Wang suggests that Chen’s return to the imperial army contrarily disrupts the Confucian loyalist’s plan for upholding the late Qing officialdom. And of course, towards the late 18th and early 19th century, Qing China did indeed experience a series of domestic rebellions. With this historical context at hand, Wang pushes his argument further to propose that the incapable late Qing government was envisioned in the reincarnation of Song Jiang of *Outlaws of the Marsh* in Chen family of *Quelling the Bandits*. Being equally popular around the time of two distinct dynastic collapses, the outlaws’ return to the government corroborates Wang’s end of the dynasty phenomenon. Yu’s *Quelling the Bandits* agrees with Jin Shengtan’s condemnation of outlaws, but the Chen family and other followers return to imperial rule by “intercepting” Song’s chance. In this sense, this late Qing chivalric fiction challenges Jin Shengtan who simply removed Song’s repatriation to and service for the Song government.

Jin Shengtan’s historical consciousness is well known concerning his objection to brigandage. Predicting or possibly hearing about the incessant outbreaks of peasant

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18 Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor*, p. 120.

19 The religious, secret, and local societies of the time included Sanhethui 三合會 (Three Harmonies Society), Sandianhui 三點會 (Three Dots Society), Tiandihui 天地會 (Heaven and Earth Society), and Bailianjiao 白蓮教 (The White Lotus Society). In particular, the Nian 捻 Rebellion (1851-68) along with the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64) are known to have accelerated the collapse of the Qing. See Susan Mann Jones and Philip A. Kuhn, “Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion,” in *The Cambridge History of China: Late Ch‘ing 1800-1911, Part 1*, eds. Dennis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 132-44.
rebellions, Jin deliberated on the problems resulting from the imperial amnesty. In the 14th year of Chongzhen 崇禎 reign (1641), Jin wrote his three prefaces to his 70-chapter edition Outlaws of the Marsh. Along with the prefaces, he added “《Songshi gang》《Songshi mu》批語 (Critical comments on Songshi gang and Songshi mu) in which he counts eight disadvantages resulting from the amnesty. Reflecting on the Song and appearing to learn from previous historical records, Jin articulates his political position supporting total annihilation of bandits instead of giving them a chance for “she” 赦 (pardon) and “shu” 賞 (compensation).20 According to James B. Parsons’s research on the fall of the Ming the peasant rebellions gave rise to, Jin’s concern was based upon the historical reality of his time. Delving into the issues of the Ming suppression of bandit leaders such as Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606-45) and Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠 (1606-46), Parsons delineates the imperial army’s fatal mistakes caused by accepting their surrender. For example, in 1634, Li surrendered after the siege of Chexiang 車箱 Gorge in Henan 河南 and the Supreme Commander Chen Qiyu 陳奇瑜 (d. 1645) accepted this offer with the official supervision of the rebels’ return to northern Shanxi 陝西.21 In 1638, Zhang likewise surrendered to the Supreme Commander at that time Xiong Wencan 熊文燦 (d. 1640) with the generous terms of serving as a government commander to help the imperial army to exterminate remaining

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rebels.\textsuperscript{22} The outcomes were catastrophic; soon, these imperial pardons backfired because both Li and Zhang broke their surrender agreements, which provides a further historical lesson in that the Ming imperial army should have mercilessly suppressed the bandits to preclude the dynastic collapse followed by Chongzhen emperor’s suicide in the spring of 1644.

Nevertheless, loyalism did not always result in the suppression of peasant rebellions. In \textit{Gui Zhuang ji} \textit{歸莊集} (Works of Gui Zhuang), Jin Shengtan’s contemporary Confucian loyalist Gui Zhuang (1613-73) wrote a short essay titled “Zhu xiegui” 誅邪鬼 (Exorcise the demon) in which Gui condemns Jin’s edition of \textit{Outlaws of the Marsh}:

\begin{quote}
In Suzhou, there was a person named Jin Shengtan whose personality was so idiosyncratic and outrageous that he did not care about courtesy and shame. He had some literary talent which only increased his viciousness. Earlier, he made a commentary on \textit{Outlaws of the Marsh} and titled it as \textit{The Fifth Book of Genius}; the printing was of excellent quality and widely circulated. I read this book and say, “This is a \textit{changluan zhi shu} 倡亂之書 (book that foments chaos).” . . . Numerous literati read his books and were drawn to them. One day, one of my friends confessed he admires Jin’s talent; but in my view, Jin cannot be pardoned even in death because his books still exist and will spread a poisonous spirit to the world. He does not even deserve to be condemned as a demon.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

According to Gui, Jin’s edition of \textit{Outlaws of the Marsh} failed to suppress rebellions; instead, the book became popular among Confucian literati because of Jin’s talent in interweaving stories and superior handling of styles. Gui’s criticism completely contradicts the function Jin intended in his prefaces and also his historical criticism of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Parsons, \textit{Peasant Rebellions}, pp. 62-63.
\end{itemize}
widespread brigandage. The way Jin reflected his additional political concern through his literary talent is significant. Maram Epstein underscores writers’ differing recognition between political spirit and fictional style: “Unlike the Li Zhi commentary, which praised [Outlaws of the Marsh] for its style but based its defense of the novel on its vigorous political spirit, Jin Shengtan claimed canonical status for the novel by introducing it as a masterpiece of composition on a par with the Records of the Historian, even while admitting its problematic political content.”24 As Epstein points out, Jin Shengtan opposed Li Zhi’s approval of bandit loyalty and righteousness. However, Li and Jin agreed in admiring the stylistic superiority of Outlaws of the Marsh. As a result, the stylistic achievement of Outlaws of the Marsh survives in Jin’s edition and commentary, which further illuminates the buried and implied messages Jin could not explicitly propose.

Sympathy for Bandits

In The Novel in Seventeenth-Century China (1981), Robert E. Hegel notes an implicit literary technique which enables Confucian authors to deliver additional political arguments. Hegel explains how the late Ming peasant rebellions came as worries to Jin Shengtan which forced him to project resentment either in his prefaces or in commentaries. In addition, Hegel recognizes the persistent or even increased popularity of Outlaws of the Marsh thanks to Jin’s editorial changes. Exploring reasons for this

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popularity, Hegel pays attention to the prevailing sympathetic overtones towards the Liangshan bandits:

Although certain heroes, with Sung Chiang [Song Jiang] as a prime example, repeatedly affirm their loyalty to the established system in the person and position of the emperor (at least in the earlier versions of the novel), circumstances invariably arise that prompt them to act violently and outside the law. Sung Chiang, humiliated by a mistress who flaunts her adultery before him, murders her to vindicate his honor. Wu Sung [Wu Song] surrenders to the authorities after killing his adulterous sister-in-law and her paramour to avenge his murdered brother. And then rapacious officials move to have both men punished unduly. Can the reader fail to grasp the implicit condemnation of the political system here?25

According to Hegel, the original Outlaws of the Marsh indicts the political system which did not serve to make fair judgments. Though Jin’s political stance condemns banditry, in his commentary he could not curb his sympathy for the bandits. For example, Jin understands that the Liangshan outlaws are not the most fundamental problem because the ruling officials cause them to revolt, as Jin’s commentary puts it “luan zi shang zuo” (political disorder is generated from above).26 In this way, Confucian literati could deliver their critical comments towards government officials even at the risk of countering their political conviction to quell the bandits; that is, the historical milieu such as late Ming and late Qing cannot be the only decisive factor for their writings of outlawry. Confucian loyalists could explore the reasons for widespread banditry and develop implicit criticism through sympathetic illustration. Therefore, Jin’s legacy, instead of delimiting the subsequent fictional narratives, may have encouraged literary

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26 Hegel, Novel in Seventeenth-Century China, p. 79. Hegel refers to the first paragraph in Jin Shengtan’s opening commentary in Chapter One. Regarding why Outlaws of the Marsh begins with Gao Qiu’s 高俅 events, instead of those of Song Jiang and his sworn brothers (亂自下生), Jin Shengtan explains that Outlaws of the Marsh was intended to elucidate that the ruling officials are responsible for the rise of the Liangshan bandits. See Shuihu zhuan huiping ben, eds. Chen, et al., vol. 1, p. 54.
creativity in the sympathetic illustration of bandits, the agony of loyalists who are struggling with the abusive officials, and finally, the punishment of corrupt officials.

Actually, the accusation of government officials corresponds to the historical records of the ceaseless outbreaks of peasant rebellions. In her search for the reasons for popular revolts in Huaibei 淮北 area, Elizabeth J. Perry points out the failure of government as one of the most fundamental factors: “In periods when the state endeavored to enlarge its presence by imposing higher taxes or mobilizing troops, these ongoing strategies could be activated for joint resistance struggles. In this way, government intervention played a critical role in converting preexisting forms of collective action into open rebellion.” 27 Initially, banditry was a measure of self-defense against another outlaw force; as administration abused its power (often accompanied by corruption), the peasants considered it as unbearable, reacting with organized and full-scale rebellions. Moreover, Perry observes that the peasants’ resistance to the abusive administration persisted at least from 1845 to 1945, in the form of rebellious movements such as the Nian, the Red Spears and Mao’s Communists. Yu Wanchun must have realized that the bandits could have been mere victims of abusive power; furthermore, the peasants would forever be sympathetic subjects regardless of the dynastic change from Ming to Qing. The Qing government, unlike the Ming, may have revised its military tactics from appeasement to annihilation; nevertheless, the outcome is questionable whether the suppression of peasant rebellions would surely bring on a stable imperial

Implicitly, Yu Wanchun raised this question: Is the annihilation of bandits an effective and justifiable measure when the real problems are left untouched?

Insofar as sympathetic description of bandits is one of Jin Shengtan’s undeniable literary commitments, Quelling the Bandits “faithfully” embraces Jin’s legacy concerning the Liangshan bandits who criticize unscrupulous ministers. Even though banditry should be prohibited, loyalists must have sympathized with the people (especially those former officials) who were driven to banditry to escape from corrupt officialdom. In Chapter 133, Quelling the Bandits shows particular compassion for Lin Chong who experienced the same trouble as the Chen family; in addition, sympathetic sworn brothers who are aware of his unresolved grudge carry out revenge on behalf of Lin:

Zhu Tong 朱仝 and Lei Heng 雷横 said, “Congratulations, Brother Lin. We have avenged you.” Lin Chong asked what kind of vengeance it was; then, the two offered Gao Qiu’s head saying, “This is Gao Qiu’s head. Because we wanted to clear your worries, we did this.” Seeing this, Lin raised his upper body to receive it and looked at it. He clenched his teeth and said, “Because of you I became shenbai mingsang 身敗名喪 (body ruined and name disgraced); this is all because of you that I could not preserve my life today!” Saying this, Lin threw the head out the window, shattering it into pieces. Lin cried out loud once and fell down on his deathbed. People around were surprised, hurrying to get a close look. Soon they realized he was dead. Everybody wept; among them, Song Jiang cried so much that he almost passed out. (933-34)

Lin’s death results from his mental shock after he heard from Wang Jin 王進. In the middle of competing in martial arts with Lin, Wang also develops psychological warfare. Wang sympathizes with Lin’s hardship caused by Gao Qiu but at the same time he scorns

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28 The Qing generals were much more aggressive and brutal in their tactics for finding measures for military campaign for suppression. For example, the famous Taiping general, Yiwang 翼王 Shi Dakai 石達開 (1831-63), wanted to save his men by surrendering himself to the Qing army camp. Shi and his top lieutenants received lingchi in Chengdu 成都; but his unarmed followers of about 2000 were all massacred and other remaining forces about 4000 also faced the similar fates. The Qing generals also appeased the rebels; but it was only a deceptive strategy to disarm the remaining forces, which later on turned out to be annihilation of rebels. See Jen Yu-wen, The Taiping Revolutionary Movement (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 318-19.
Lin’s bandit life and his rejection of the offer of amnesty: “You worked as a Jiaotou 敎頭 (Drillmaster) of the Dianshuaiyu 殿帥府 (Imperial Body Guards) and so do I now. You were under Gao Qiu’s command and so am I now. Gao wanted your life; likewise, how can I be free from his poisonous hands?” (930). While Wang criticizes Lin’s fake intention to repatriate, he enhances the psychological appeal by understanding Lin’s agonizing escape from Gao Qiu. The author of Quelling the Bandits shows his sympathy for Lin and rewrites the narrative in that the Liangshan brothers successfully capture Gao and offer the unscrupulous minster’s head at Lin’s deathbed.29 Yu Wanchun learned from Jin’s edition of Outlaws of the Marsh in that the explicit criticism of the outlaws coexists with implicit sympathy for them. In addition, Quelling the Bandits makes progress from Jin’s edition; for example, this fiction of loyalism even allows the outlaws to avenge the victims of abusive officials. The implicit sympathetic message comes true in Quelling the Bandits thanks to Yu Wanchun’s stylistic changes and narrative variations; he further develops these to include legal methods to exterminate the vicious ministers.

Envisioning Imperial Vengeance

Current scholarship pays little attention to the comprehension of overall political strategy in Quelling the Bandits. In Ming Qing xiaoshuo caizheng 明清小說采正 (A collection and correction of the Ming and Qing fiction, 1992), Ouyang Jian 歐陽健 interprets the reason for the sympathetic illustration of bandits from the perspective of a

29 In the full-length edition of Outlaws of the Marsh, Gao Qiu is the most representatively unscrupulous official appearing from the first chapter to the last. Gao is responsible for driving Lin Chong 林沖 to banditry; furthermore, he poisons Song Jiang and Lu Junyi to death because he is jealous of the imperial favor for the Liangshan brothers. Yu Wanchun changes this original storyline and allows Lin Chong and others to take revenge on him by decapitating him. For Gao Qiu’s plots, see Chapter 120, Shi and Luo, Shuihu zhuang, vol. 2, p. 900.
“chongtu” 衝突 (conflict) between the author’s political ideology and his literary cultivation: “Quelling the Bandits, as a sequel, bases its creative representation upon the previous editions of Outlaws of the Marsh. These specific conditions prevented the author from contradicting the original story’s neizai guilü 內在規律 (underlying principles) between thematic ideology and narrative structure.”30 Ouyang summarizes conventional scholarship on Quelling the Bandits as follows: The sympathetic illustration of bandits reflects Yu Wanchun’s compassion resulting from his vacillating political ideology. Objecting to this scholarship, Ouyang argues that Yu’s opposition to outlaws is consistent and solid throughout the piece.31 In addition, sympathetic illustration of bandits is only an unavoidable stylistic choice because Yu could not ignore the stylistic superiority of Outlaws of the Marsh. Yu merely imitated the style of Outlaws of the Marsh; as a result, the sympathetic recreation in Quelling the Bandits contradicts his “ultraconservative” politics. Ouyang convincingly points out that Yu’s stylistic imitation of Outlaws of the Marsh endangers his political ideology. Nevertheless, Ouyang neglects the political implication Jin Shengtan carried with his sympathetic illustration. As a matter of fact, Jin worked on his stylistic change: He explicitly stated the need for suppression of bandits while implicitly evoking sympathy for the bandits. Instead of duplicating the style without the underlying political belief, Quelling the Bandits provides a new angle of how the implied message develops to envision the author’s distinct politics.

30 Ouyang Jian 欧陽健, Ming Qing xiaoshuo caizheng 明清小說采正 [A collection and correction of the Ming and Qing fiction] (Taipei: Guanya wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 1992), p. 446.
31 Ouyang, Ming Qing xiaoshuo caizheng, p. 445.
Punishing Abusive Ministers

Focusing on this contradiction, Western scholarship also regards *Quelling the Bandits* as a political fiasco; but scholars differ in that they consider the implied message significant. For example, Shuhui Yang agrees with Ouyang in that *Quelling the Bandits* should be understood from the “law of probability and necessity”: “[Yu Wanchun’s] project falls short of its purpose in spite of, or rather precisely because of, his extraordinary literary sensitivity and the great pains he took over twenty-two years in trying to make his sequel mimetically a natural outgrowth of the first seventy chapters of *Shuihu zhuan*.”32 According to Yang, *Quelling the Bandits* has rich textual evidence—heroic, sympathetic and even touching episodes for bandits, which suggests the author’s “literary sensitivity” in constructing a successful sequel. Thus, this stylistic manipulation destabilizes Yu’s political aim of quelling the bandits. Meanwhile, Yang makes it clear that he differs from David Wang’s view. Though Yang concurs with Wang in pointing out the sequel’s unstable political project, he opposes Wang’s view that “the novel contains a dimension replicating its historical context, a time of ideological breakdown.”33 Both Yang and Wang debate regarding whether the failed political project results from its stylistic inheritance from Jin Shengtan (Yang’s) or from the reflection of late Qing ideological crisis (Wang’s). Nevertheless, they both single out the suppression of bandits as its unique political goal; in doing so, they pay little attention to that an important political message grows out of a sympathetic illustration of bandits. Further textual readings of revenge underline imperial maneuvers (on behalf of victims of abusive


33 Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor*, p. 137.
power) against treacherous ministers by way of the official legal system. In so doing, the sympathetic illustration sheds light on the long overlooked authoritative loyalism, “imperial triumph of judicial justice.”

In fact, *Quelling the Bandits* displays more than a contradiction between political ideas and stylistic manipulation. Yu Wanchun engages with implicitly sympathetic illustration and further develops it to construct an explicit narrative structure. This argument becomes compelling when the discussion topic moves from sympathy for bandits to punishment of unscrupulous officials. Yu’s political idea includes sympathetic illustration of bandits because sympathy to the bandits mobilizes the antagonism towards abusive officials. Thus, the implicit message in *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *Quelling the Bandits* develops to the successful vengeance against the real instigators of rebellions, the invincible, unscrupulous ministers such as Gao Qiu (d. 1126), Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047-1126) and Tong Guan 童貫 (1054-1126). Towards the end of the full-length edition of *Outlaws of the Marsh*, the Liangshan bandits and their eventual demise explain how traditional Chinese fictional narrative elicits a tragic mindset. *Outlaws of the Marsh* forms a tragic conclusion in which Liangshan heroes are destined to meet *tusi goupeng* 兔死狗烹 (the hounds are cooked once all the hares are bagged).34 Before this morally unacceptable conclusion, readers of *Outlaws of the Marsh* feel sympathetic to the Liangshan heroes

34 Song Jiang loses his sworn brothers in a series of expeditionary missions for suppressing rebellions. When he successfully accomplishes his missions and receives the emperor’s favor, Gao Qiu persuades the emperor to dispatch an imperial envoy and secretly poisons Song Jiang and others. In Chapter 120, Song’s last words, without asking his remaining brothers for revenge, reaffirms his loyal and righteous resolve, which elicits the reader’s sympathy: “The emperor sent me some poisoned wine the other day, and I drank it. I’m going to die soon. All my life I’ve tried to adhere to two principles—loyalty and righteousness. I would never practice deceit. Now, though I am innocent, the imperial court is causing my death. But I’d rather the emperor wronged me than wrong the emperor. I was afraid that after I died you would rebel and spoil our reputation for loyalty and righteousness (忠義之名), earned while acting in Heaven’s behalf (替天行道) in Liangshan Marsh. And so I asked you here and gave you the poisoned wine also. When you return to Runzhou 润州 you’ll surely die.” See Shi and Luo, *Shuihu zhuan*, vol. 2, p. 898. For English, see Shapiro, trans., *Outlaws of the Marsh*, vol. 4, pp. 2127-28.
while criticizing the ministers. By depriving them a chance for eventual poetic justice, *Outlaws of the Marsh* forms a representative Chinese tragic aesthetic with which Confucian literati identify by comparing it to their marginalized fate. In contrast, *Quelling the Bandits* annihilates the Liangshan bandits; at the same time, this loyalist novel also eradicates abusive ministers. In this way, *Quelling the Bandits* decreases the “dangerous” sympathetic mindset from readers because the evil ministers cannot outlive the Liangshan bandits.

In punishing abusive ministers, Yu Wanchun has a more urgent request than discouraging the sympathetic readership for bandits. On the surface, the treacherous ministers are to blame for making up slander, which propels the repetitive cycles of the loyalist hardships. Further deliberation, however, demands a search for its cause, and the fundamental problem lies in the emperor himself. Suggesting Qu Yuan (340-278 BC) as the archetypal character of the Chinese tragic narratives, Zhang Fa 張法 notes Qu’s literary technique in “Lisao” 隱騷 (Encountering sorrows) is prudent and “risk-free” for criticizing hunjun 昏君 (a deluded ruler): “The ruler [King Huai of Chu 楚懷王 (r. 328-299 BC)] is originally qingbai 淸白 (unblemished), but jianqing 姦佞 (crafty and fawning people) have deceived and misled him. They are really bad because they

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35 Zhang Fa 張法 compares the tragic narratives of China with those of the West. The Shakespearean tragedy, for example, *Romeo and Juliet*, criticizes “feudal” tradition with the collapse of two gender roles. In contrast, in the Chinese counterpart, as is seen in “Jianjia” 謝葭 [The reeds] of *Shijing* 詩經 [Book of songs], the criticism is replaced by “wenhua lixiang de li” 文化理想的禮 (the courtesy of cultural ideals) when the one side retreats. In return, the moral integrity of the pursuer grows with the increased level of bei 悲 (sorrow). This preservation of li is most conspicuous in *Outlaws of the Marsh* because the loyal sworn brothers perish one by one while the abusive ministers live pleasantly. The Liangshan brothers remain faithful to the emperor’s order despite the villains’ death trap. See Zhang Fa, *Zhongguo wenhua yu beiju yishi* 中國文化與悲劇意識 [The Chinese culture and tragic consciousness] (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1989), pp. 33-39.
deceive the ruler and exploit the subjects (欺上壓下).”³⁶ The loyalists such as Qu Yuan knew very well that the fundamental problems originate from the emperor’s forgiveness and failure to censure the treacherous court officials. However, they were not allowed (or did not want) to claim straightforwardly the emperor’s responsibilities; for this reason, they took a roundabout statement with the criticism of the abusive ministers.³⁷ In Outlaws of the Marsh, Gao Qiu, Cai Jing and Tong Guan all take advantage of the Emperor’s grace and favor. As a result, the criticism of abusive ministers indicates that the Emperor has made mistakes; moreover, the presence of the villainous officials would further call into question the Emperor’s capacity and qualifications for his rule of empire.³⁸ In this sense, the punishment of treacherous ministers is mandatory because otherwise Yu Wanchun is obliged to embrace the criticism of the emperor, a most blasphemous approach for those who endorse a strong imperial administration.

Instead of increasing sympathetic appeal, Quelling the Bandits achieves poetic justice by avenging the victims of abusive power. Though Yu Wanchun’s primary goal was to quell the bandits, he could not allow the protected status of the unscrupulous ministers. As long as the imperial palace is full of villains, peasant rebellions will never stop, which will make Yu’s efforts useless and irresponsible. Switching from demonstrations of sympathy to disciplinary measures, Quelling the Bandits vividly punishes the major vicious ministers by driving them to private and public execution. In

³⁶ Zhang, Zhongguo wenhua yu beiju yishi, p. 115.
³⁷ Zhang, Zhongguo wenhua yu beiju yishi, p. 115.
³⁸ Robert E. Hegel also makes this point. In his Guanhuatang 貫華堂 edition, though Jin Shengtan truncated the second half of the original Outlaws of the Marsh and made it ambiguous towards the emperor’s ruling capacity (also the ends of the unscrupulous ministers), Heaven’s intervention for exterminating the rebels (in its last chapter) suggests the impotence of imperial rule. See Robert E. Hegel, “Conclusions: Judgments on the Ends of Times,” in Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation: From the Late Ming and to the Late Qing and Beyond, eds. David Der-wei Wang and Wei Shang 商偉 (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), p. 531.
Chapter 98, when Gao Yanei is newly assigned to the post in Caozhou 曹州, Gao’s arrival instigates Lin Chong’s vengeful fury. Sworn brothers of Liangshan form a united front and finally succeed in capturing Gao Yanei, celebrating the victory with a bloody feast:

Song Jiang ordered his men to close the banquet and to bring the *shenwei* 神位 (spirit tablet) of Lin Chong’s wife. Lin was appreciative. Others had already finished cleaning up Gao Yanei, putting a gag in his mouth and tying him up. Song ordered, “First, take out three cups of blood and make a sacrifice for our late Lady Lin.” The men answered and made three cuts on Yanei’s body. The men offered the blood wine and Lin carried out the memorial service. Lin expressed his gratitude each time.

... After drinking three times, Lin ordered the use of the recipe for lamb’s eyes; then, one subordinate cut out Yanei’s eyes, with fresh blood spilling all over his face. When the subordinate reached for Yanei’s ears, they fell off at his touch. The subordinate picked them up and laughed, “Honorable leaders, these ears are fake.” Lin laughed, “How can they be fake, who dared to cut them off first?” The bandit leaders seated around all laughed. By this time, Yanei had already lost consciousness. (430-31)

This passage forms a parallel with Liu Guang and Chen Xizhen’s execution of Gao Feng and Ruan Qixiang. Lin’s personal revenge results from his flight from officialdom after Gao Qiu’s oppression. In addition, Gao’s forceful marriage of his wife prompted her to commit suicide. Instead of filial piety in Liu Guang’s case, Lin accuses the Gao family of selfish desire of coveting another man’s wife and driving a loyal official out to banditry. This execution scene is spectacular: the procedure is detailed in gruesome images of extracting blood, eyeballs, and ears. With this, the vicious officials start to experience a terrible fate; in so doing, the readers of *Outlaws of the Marsh* finally feel relieved from their dissatisfaction over the villains still being victorious while the Liangshan heroes perished.

Although Lin’s revenge on Gao appeals to sympathetic readers, the glorified loyalists such as the Chen family are deprived of chances to punish unscrupulous officials. In Chapter 98, right after Gao Yanei’s execution, the Daoist hermit Sunguan’s 笋冠
admonition to Song Jiang suggests the reason why Chen Xizhen cannot carry out morally justifiable vengeance: “Why are you concerned about corrupt officials? *Xingshang chuzhi* (punishment and reward, dismissal and promotion) are the emperor’s job; *tanhe zouwen* (impeachment and recommendation) is *taichen*’s (admonishing officials) job; *lianfang jiucha* (investigation and regulation) is *sidao*’s (inspection officials) job. What position do you have that you can intervene in other people’s business?” (436-37). According to Sunguan, a sincere loyalist should not privately punish government officials because it may challenge the emperor’s sacred imperial power. This excludes all individual revenge against corrupt officials except for the emperor’s direct order or the legal procedure governed by imperial edict. As a result, the elimination of loyalist’s revenge against villainous ministers results from the author’s loyalist mindset in which the emperor should be the only person who can punish government officials.

*Public Execution: A Case of Lingchi*

In this respect, Chen’s replacement of Song’s role turns out to be a careful political narrative strategy. By having Song Jiang and the Liangshan bandits reject the generous imperial offer, Yu Wanchun defines them as outlaws; in this way, the novel also authorizes their right to practice personal revenge. While the Liangshan brothers celebrate the successful accomplishment of Lin Chong’s personal revenge, Chen and

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39 This also applies to another Ming literatus Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502-68) who wrote *Baojian ji* (The story of the precious sword, 1547). Portraying Lin Chong as a confrontational character rather than patient, Li modifies Lin’s personality differing from the one in *Outlaws of the Marsh*. In this drama, Lin is actively involved in his criticism of abusive ministers such as Gao Qiu and Tong Guan 童贊 (1054-1126). Nevertheless, Lin does not cross the line; that is, he always chooses a legitimate method by proposing memorials. In the end, Lin is finally offered a chance to punish Gao Qiu and his son, which is only after his repatriation, and, more importantly, when the emperor has realized what was wrong and what was right. See Zhang, *Zhongguo wenhua yu beiju yishi*, pp. 118-19.
other loyalists enjoy the spectacle held according to the legal procedure prepared for outlaw bandits. Since the time he delivered Gao Qiu, Chen is entitled to execute legal justice when he punishes the Liangshan rebels. In Chapter 110, the royal forces defeat Song Jiang who falls into a trap Zhen Dayi 真大義 and Wei Fuliang 魏輔梁 set up with their deceptive capitulation. In the execution scene, the captured outlaws such as Sun Li 孫立 are sentenced to a form of lingchi 凌遲 (death by slicing):

Next day, Xizhen ordered Sun Li to be bound and taken to the crossroad to commence punishment. An executioner came to report, “I have a plan; first, we use a tiny needle to pierce his skin and use a knife to cut out small pieces, then we bathe his wounds with salt water. In case he passes out, we pour hot water on him not to let him die. With this prolonged execution, he will receive all the suffering.” Tingyu 廷玉 was really glad; rewarding the executioner with a grand prize, he ordered him to apply the measure accordingly. Sun Li continued to receive the cuts from chen 辰 time to the end of shen 申 time and finally perished. The executioner hanged Sun’s head high for display. (598)

In the above passage, Chen applies lingchi to Liangshan rebels and displays it as a warning announcing the end of the outlaws. Loyalist officials show no mercy in cruelly executing Sun; that is, they feel no guilt over the procedure because they are confident of its justice based on a fair legal judgment. As critics such as Lu Xun sum up the description as “sha fengjing 煞風景 (ruthless illustration), the public execution by the method of lingchi minimizes sympathy; instead, the bloody illustration provokes a sense of horror in the name of impartial and strict application of public justice.40 While Lin Chong’s execution of Gao Yanei is understandable because the outlaw’s personal revenge discloses their brutality, the government officials can also justify their brutality in the name of establishing public order.

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The ultimate goal of public execution, especially that of lingchi, is a manifestation of absolute sovereignty in late imperial China. The function and intended effects of public execution can profit from the studies of cultural criticism explaining the establishment of sovereignty through spectacular execution. In *Discipline and Punish* (1978), Foucault presents an example of Damiens the regicide in 1757 Paris. Defining the scaffold scene as a form of “infinite vengeance,” the cultural critic points out rebellion as a direct challenge to the ruler:

The public execution, then, has a juridico-political function. It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular. The public execution, however hasty and everyday, belongs to a whole series of great rituals in which power is eclipsed and restored (coronation, entry of the king into a conquered city, the submission of rebellious subjects); over and above the crime that has placed the sovereign in contempt, it deploys before all eyes an invincible force. Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength.\(^{41}\)

Preparing it as a spectacle open to the public and encouraging people to watch, the challenged sovereignty reasserts power. Simultaneously, it illustrates to others what a failed rebellion would be like: brutal, shameful and spectacular. In *Quelling the Bandits*, loyalists such as Chen Xizhen are aware of this spectacular effect lingchi produces. The late Qing Confucian loyalist Yu Wanchun reflects his belief in sacredly inviolable sovereignty while making sure of the process, borrowing the executioner’s words. Before this manifestation of power through public execution, Yu may have deliberated on the ways of legitimately punishing unscrupulous officials. The Liangshan bandits’ punishment of officials should be prohibited because it is only the accomplishment of

outlaws’ personal revenge. In addition, the Chen family and other loyalists are not allowed to perform the public execution against the villainous ministers because they should not follow the outlaw’s example; in particular, their individual revenge may challenge the legal system the emperor does his best to establish and uphold.

Meanwhile, the gruesome details of lingchi suggest that Yu Wanchun’s political concerns influence his stylistic changes. In “Imagined Violence,” Robert E. Hegel argues that detailed description of violence is uncommon in traditional Chinese fictional narrative. Presenting examples such as Lin Chong’s vengeance on Lu Qian and Yang Xiong’s killing of his wife, Hegel explains the reason for insufficient detail in fiction with readers’ favor in entertainment: “[The emphasis on action] leaves the details of the violent act to the reader’s own creative participation in imagining the story’s details.”

Quelling the Bandits displays detailed description of lingchi; nevertheless, the description is not “sufficiently” comprehensive as Yu Wanchun clarifying the measures necessary for causing maximum level of pain. Leaving only sketchy contours of the bloody execution ground, without detailing the condemned’s sufferings as well as where and how deep the cuts are, the author demands that his readers conjure up the images according to their own imaginations. A question still remains whether an author can control the level of descriptions in fictional narratives. Hegel’s study underscores the distinction between fiction and law; that is, the level of description is contingent upon the author’s choice of style in light of his purpose and readerly interest. The fictional

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descriptions cannot be “abundantly” graphic as the crime reports are;\textsuperscript{43} but, an author, as long as he is not crossing the line, is able to control his style so as to elucidate his political strategy. In \textit{Quelling the Bandits}, Yu Wanchun can either criticize outlaw’s brutality or acknowledge public justice with relatively detailed description. When the emperor is personally involved in a public execution, however, the author carefully controls the level of description, which turns out to be effective for elevation of the loyalist ideology.

\textit{Imperial Rules of Legal Procedure}

Insofar as the public execution represents the legal justice of the sovereign, the fictional loyalism reaches its climax when the emperor condemns unscrupulous officials. Commanding the public execution, the emperor is the only person who is legally entitled to punish villainous ministers. In this way, the emperor can restore the authority challenged by a series of rebellions; at the same time, he can proclaim himself as a guardian of poetic justice (the collapse of villains) which was missing from all previous editions of \textit{Outlaws of the Marsh}. Nevertheless, the emperor’s order of public execution always risks a danger because the brutality and gruesome details may cause a backlash, undermining the emperor’s benevolence. In \textit{Death by a Thousand Cuts} (2008), Timothy Brook and others discuss differing illustrative styles of tortured and mutilated bodies from Europe to China:

Europeans regarded such images of official cruelty as acceptable means to stimulate lawful behavior and religious piety and to mobilize public loathing for society’s enemies. Chinese writers and illustrators were equally keen to

\textsuperscript{43} Crime reports (esp. the homicide cases), unlike fictional narratives, provide all forensic information necessary for drawing fair judgments. Hegel clarifies the nature of crime reports as “precise formulaic descriptions of the physical effects of those violent acts on the bodies of the victims.” See Hegel, “Imagined Violence,” p. 63.
vilify evil, and used visual means to do so, yet they did not pursue the same work of gruesome representation. Extreme bodily suffering was not something to celebrate visually, nor was its depiction a sight to contemplate on a regular basis. The infrequency of Chinese images of cruel punishments has influenced the scholarly literature on Chinese punishments, which has tended to use the same few images over and over again, often with complete disregard for their historical provenance or the period they are supposed to depict, thereby reinforcing the decontextualization that dogs the study of Chinese torture.44

Brook and others argue that Chinese literati were not inclined to portray the horrifying images (both in written and illustrated forms). Mediaeval Europe prioritized official cruelty despite the Christian tradition in which the mutilated body may symbolize the “crucified body of Jesus.”45 In contrast, Chinese emperors and jurists were reluctant to apply lingchi for different reasons. The mutilation of the condemned often evoked heroic images as is seen in the public execution the Taiping Yiwang 翼王 (Wing King) Shi Dakai 石達開 (1831-63) received after his capitulation.46 Besides, the public execution could have done damage to the administration, seriously implicating the emperor. For example, the Southern Song loyalist Lu You 陸游 (1125-1210) proposed a memorial


45 Premodern China did not have the strong Christian tradition of Jesus Christ who was nailed to a cross and left to die slowly, whose images have long been illustrated and printed to glorify his suffering. In the West, the public execution, as a result, has overlapped with the religious motif. Fearing this, successive administrations thought out ways to remove this dangerous association, but they could not perfectly check this and came to feel skeptical of the terrorizing effects the public execution was believed to cause. See Brook et al., Death by a Thousand Cuts, p. 21.

46 The execution of Shi Dakai was surely intended to give a public example for those who revolted against the regime and also those remaining Taiping rebels. In contrast, the popular response at that time regarded Shi as a martyr, even as an excellent example of heroism. The Qing official Liu Rong 劉蓉 (1816-73) also perceived this while he was personally supervising Shi’s lingchi and left its record in Yanghuitang wenji [A collection of Liu Rong]: “The spirit of resolution (堅強之氣) was emitting from his face and his words had nothing vulgar without begging for mercy. . . . When receiving the punishment, his expressions were at peace (神色怡然).” See Jian Youwen 簡又文 (Jen Yu-wen), Taiping Tianguo quanshi 太平天國全史 [A complete history of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom], vol. 2 (Jiulong: Mengjin shuwu, 1962), p. 1543. A more detailed description is in Ren Naiqiang’s 任乃強 “Ji Shi Dakai beiqin jiushi” 紀石達開被擒就死事 [A record of Shi Dakai’s capture and execution]: “Townsmen gathering to see the execution were numbered hundreds of thousands, layers of crowds and a mountain of people. The Wing King and Zeng Shihe 曾仕和 were tied on the crosses and faced each other. . . . When Zeng screamed out of pain, Shi gently held it back, saying, ‘How can’t you hold out this brief moment (須臾)?’ . . . When the execution came to the end after one hundred more cuts, Shi was already dead.” See Jian, Taiping Tianguo quanshi, p. 1560.
titled “Tiaodui zhuang” 條對狀 (Memorial of itemized answers) and asserted that the use of lingchi would eventually impair the emperor’s benevolence: “Any penal system must include benevolence to work efficiently. This is so obvious! In the hope of restoring the compassion of the ancient sages, a special order (should go out) to all magistrates prohibiting the punishment of dismemberment, so as to highlight Your Majesty’s benevolence and increase the happiness of the empire’s Great Peace.”

The late Qing loyalist Yu Wanchun may have supported the use of lingchi as a means to imprint the “triumph of legal justice” on remaining and potential rebels. However, Yu also learned from the tradition of Chinese scholarly and popular literature which abstains from the vivid description of lingchi; in fact, Yu has no interest in questioning the emperor’s benevolence.

*Quelling the Bandits* proposes the emperor as a central figure who carries out the judicial justice; at the same time, the imperial management of the judicial system illuminates the poetic justice and as a result the outlaws’ personal revenge. In Chapter 111, the loyalists are recalled to the capital for imperial compliments for their successful military expedition against Liangshan. By chance, the loyalists capture the secret agent Shi Qian 時遷 who has facilitated Cai Jing’s communication with Song Jiang.

Applying interrogation, they realize Cai’s collaboration with the Liangshan outlaws, which is further corroborated by Cai’s son-in-law Liang Shijie’s capitulation.

Then, the imperial judicial system works as follows: Chen Xizhen informs the Libu 史部

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47 Brook et al., *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, pp. 80-81.

48 The accomplice should be secured first in order to condemn a suspect. In *Outlaws of the Marsh*, one of the reasons for the emperor not to accuse Gao Qiu for poisoning Song Jiang and others is because the treacherous ministers acted first to cover up their crime by killing the imperial messenger whom they have asked to put poison in the imperial wine bestowed to the sworn brothers. See Shi and Luo, *Shuihu zhuan*, vol. 2, p. 901.
(Board of Personnel) of this while directly reporting this to Zhong Shidao 種師道; at the same time, Zhixian 知縣 (District Magistrate) of Yifeng 儀封, Zhang Mingke 張鳴珂, proposes a memorial. With the knowledge of Cai’s high treason, the emperor gives his arrest order to the Xingbu 刑部 (Board of Punishments) and simultaneously orders the Sanfasi 三法司 (Three Judicial Boards) to investigate the case. With Shidao’s acquisition of the “blasphemous” letters, Cai’s treason finally prompts a public execution:

The Emperor read through the letters and yelled, “This treacherous subject is deceiving me!” Then he handed the letters down to the Three Judicial Boards and ordered to zhidui 質對 (cross-examine) Cai Jing with them. As soon as Cai looked at the letters, he became silent and just kowtowed, saying, “Cai Jing is condemned; Your Highness, please zhengfa 正法 (execute the criminal).” The Three Judicial Boards confirmed the crime and offered a memorial shortly. In three days, the emperor placed an order to tie Cai Jing and Shi Qian up together and escort them to the shicao 市曹 (market place). People of Dongjing 東京 (Kaifengfu 開封府) all felt gratified. Soon, Cai followed by Shi met bloody execution. Cai’s family fortune was all confiscated by the government. (612-13)

The Emperor shows off his monarchical dignity by presiding over the public execution of the treacherous official. He manages the execution, but he distinguishes his treatment from that of the outlaws in that he engages the legal administration, underlining that his subjects applaud the execution with joy.49 Furthermore, the execution does not intend to increase brutality with detailed gruesome reports; rather, the legal process emphasizes that the public execution is the result of a fair judicial decision.

49 The imperial maneuver here is remarkably in contrast with Outlaws of the Marsh. In Chapter 120, the full-length edition Outlaws of the Marsh, the emperor learns that Song Jiang and others were poisoned to death by the imperial messenger. The emperor is upset and scolds Gao Qiu and Yang Jian 楊戩 for their involvement, but he quickly and easily gives in when Cai Jing and Tong Guan make up with covering words. The criticism first goes to the villains in the palace; but readers cannot overlook that the emperor is to blame (or at least impotent) for the death of Liangshan brothers. People were sad with this outcome, commemorating the Liangshan brothers by offering sacrifices and building shrines. See Shi and Luo, Shuihu zhuan, vol. 2, p. 901.
According to *Songshi* 宋史 (Dynastic History of the Song), Cai Jing’s execution contradicts historical facts. Unlike Yu Wanchun’s arrangement, the minister Cai was neither executed by the method of *lingchi* (or beheading) nor condemned of treason. The loyalist writer was desperate to eliminate the treacherous minister by means of the most dreadful corporal punishment; at the same time, the author wanted to portray the emperor as *mingjun* 明君 (an enlightened ruler) who can comprehend high treason.

Moreover, the emperor is the only person who is allowed to punish government officials according to the imperial legal code. In so doing, *Quelling the Bandits* even risks the criticism the loyalist author repeatedly put forward: The Liangshan bandits actually did not receive the offer of amnesty and the stories of their being loyal subjects are mere fabrication. Yu Wanchun had to modify the historical records because he could not risk the more serious danger of destroying the overarching criticism of the treacherous ministers. For example, Yu writes that Song Jiang and his sworn brothers were irrelevant to the suppression of the Fang La rebellion (1120-21). The *Dynastic History of the Song* confirms Yu’s correction; but Tong Guan, another treacherous subject, was the

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50 “Jianchen” 姦臣 [Treacherous ministers] no. 2, “Liezhuan” 列傳 [Memoirs] no. 231, *Songshi* 宋史 [Dynastic History of the Song, 1345] juan 472, writes, Cai Jing, with all of his family fortunes, moved into the south after being informed from the northern borderline of the imminent Jin 金 (1115-1234) invasion. Shiyushi 侍御史 (Attendant Censor) Sun Di 孫覿 and others offered memorials for rebuking Cai as “jian’e” 姦惡 (crafty and evil), but this was more because he exceeded his authority such as corruption and abuse, not because he committed high treason such as communicating with enemies and rebels. In the end, Cai was sent to exile and died on the road. See Tuotuo 脫脱 (Toghto) et al., *Songshi*, ed. Zhonghua shuju bianjibu, vol. 11 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), p. 10623.

51 Yu Wanchun’s project of portraying an enlightened ruler also appears to contradict the historical facts. In 1127, Jingkang zhi bian 靖康之變 (the Jingkang Incident) broke out and the two Song emperors Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100-26) and Qinzong 欽宗 (r. 1126-27) were taken prisoners, which marked the fall of Bei Song 北宋 (the Northern Song, 960-1127). Neither of the emperors returned and died in the Jin territory in humiliation with the “honorary” titles, Hunde gong 昏德公 (Duke of Confused Virtue) and Zhonghun hou 重昏侯 (Marquis of Double Confusion), respectively. For more detailed information, see Patricia Ebrey, “Introduction,” in *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics*, eds. Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 16-17.
government official who actually suppressed the rebellion. While referring to the historical records, Yu Wanchun is successful in nullifying the Liangshan brothers’ heroism; but he finds it problematic to satisfy his writing motive as long as he is faithful to historical records. Yu Wanchun’s choice is, of course, the reinforcement of his fictional loyalism by “fabricating” the historical records as he makes up Cai Jing’s death by public execution.

The emperor’s judicial justice is further supported by the case of another execution of a treacherous minister, specifically Tong Guan. In Chapter 123, Zhang Shuye receives an imperial order appointing him as Jinglue Dajiangjun (General-in-chief of Military Commission) to suppress the Fang La rebellion. Before his relocation to Muzhou, Zhang devises the plan to jianxian zidai (recommend a wise man to replace himself) and recommends He Taiping to be Libu Shangshu (Minister of Personnel). From a conversation with Tong’s son Zhu’er, a loyal figure Gao Jian learns that Tong has received Song Jiang’s youshui (bribe) and succeeds in obtaining Song’s letter inscribed with the date of receipt and Tong’s signature. Then, Tong is also executed following the Emperor’s application of legal justice: “Minister He came in and reported Tong Guan’s treason to the Emperor with Tong’s letter as evidence. The Emperor listened to He and looked over Tong’s letter and became greatly angry, ‘This is why he repeatedly offered memorials to stop the expedition against the Liangshan bandits!’ Instantly, the Emperor ordered Tong to appear. The Emperor saw Tong and did not say anything but just threw Song’s letter

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down at his feet. . . . In three days, the Three Judicial Boards offered a memorial confirming Tong’s crime, which was followed by the imperial order to execute Tong in the market place. . . . Everybody was joyous” (789). The investigation process and execution of Tong nearly duplicate those in Cai’s case. There is no need for variation because the treacherous officials are punished following the same imperial law and code. Because the Emperor rules his dynasty according to the legal system, he can even justify his bloody execution thanks to the omission of brutal details prepared by the loyalist author of Quelling the Bandits. Moreover, the Emperor becomes the “true” heroic figure who carries out poetic justice, which in the various Outlaws of the Marsh editions was left impossible to achieve when they only sympathized with the bandits.

In order to highlight the emperor and his legal rule, Quelling the Bandits carefully controls literary style and narrative structure. For the Confucian loyalist Yu Wanchun, the glorification of the Liangshan bandits was unbearable; at the same time, his loyalist mindset could not accept the glory and fame the vicious officials enjoyed. Because of the legacy of resentment of Outlaws of the Marsh, Yu was able to engage creatively with the politics implied by sympathetic illustrations of outlaws. Delving into the rudimentary assets embedded in that sympathy, Yu successfully developed a literary technique to punish the vicious officials without intensifying further sympathy for bandits. Thanks to his loyalty for the imperial rule, Yu figures out this concern by empowering the emperor with the most authoritative capacity to eliminate all abusive political power. In this way,

53 Tong Guan’s treason is not based upon the historical facts either; but his execution is more or less based on facts. When Qinzong decided to carry out a personal expedition before the Jin invasion, the emperor ordered Tong to defend the capital. Against this imperial order, Tong served the former emperor Huizong to move south. Meanwhile, he ordered his personal guards to shoot down the imperial bodyguards for their slow advance on a bridge, which brought about other officials’ memorials of criticism. As a result, Tong was demoted and driven to serve in the south, but Jiancha yushi 監察御史 (Investigating Censor) Zhang Cheng 张澂, receiving the imperial order accusing Tong of shi da zui 十大罪 (ten great crimes), caught up with him on the way and decapitated him on the spot. Tong’s head was sent to the capital and displayed in a market place. It appears that Tong may have received his execution because of the political clash between the two emperors. See Tuotuo et al., “Huanzhe” no. 3, p. 10577.
the vengeance theme in *Quelling the Bandits* relocates its focus from personal revenge to public justice, with the imperial legal rule as the only legitimate practitioner of poetic justice.

**Conclusion**

With Yu Wanchun’s *Quelling the Bandits* as a primary text, I have discussed how a late Qing Confucian loyalist expressed his belief in imperial rule through vindictive fictional narrative. The late Qing historical turmoil represented by widespread banditry motivated Yu’s loyalist writing; in addition, Yu inherited Jin Shengtan’s *Outlaws of the Marsh* in terms of not only his political idea but also his respect for the literary heritage. To be specific, Yu made a sequel in light of Jin’s truncation of bandits’ service for the Song, instead creating Chen Xizhen to accept the offer to eliminate the bandits’ acceptance of imperial amnesty. Embracing the style of *Outlaws of the Marsh*, Yu developed his narrative by interweaving vengeful character’s conversations, events, and authorial comments. As a result, the author could successfully construct a loyalist narrative within a framework in which damaged honor or filial piety drove figures to commit themselves to personal revenge against abusive officials. Meanwhile, Yu committed himself to the stylistic manifestations of *Outlaws of the Marsh* in order to shape a parallel structure with *Quelling the Bandits*: The Chen family punish government officials and return to serve the emperor. I have explicated the ambiguity inherent in this “dangerous” parallelism, which might disrupt the overarching loyalist political ideology.

Exploring the technique of sympathetic portraits of bandits, I argued that Yu Wanchun engaged a strategy endorsed by Confucian literati as a means of implying an
additional political message. Through a narrative modification from *Outlaws of the Marsh*, I underlined the author’s creative development of sympathetic character portraits, which he effectively used to admonish and physically punish abusive ministers.

Detailing the imperial legal procedure, *Quelling the Bandits* illustrates how the Emperor personally presided over the public execution to punish treacherous evil officials. In this way, the Emperor’s elimination of unscrupulous officials is expressed through meticulous stylistic and narrative innovation. The Liangshan bandits celebrate their execution of Gao Yanei; but the gruesome details only display the outlaws’ brutality and at best the accomplishment of personal revenge. In contrast, the loyalists’ application of *lingchi*, despite its ghastly description, demonstrated the application of legal justice to the rebels who undermined public order. In addition, the emperor became the central character who executed the archenemies of *Outlaws of the Marsh*; for this reason, he was portrayed as a heroic figure who was not a mere sympathizer for victims of abusive power but an enforcer of poetic justice. Thanks to Yu Wanchun’s loyalist point of view and his strategic writing, the emperor was represented as benevolent enough to comprehend personal revenge; at the same time, the imperial monarch came to have capacity to strictly but impartially manage legal justice. The monarch becomes the ideal defender of public order through a legal and impartial imperial rule.
Chapter Two

Remembering Revenge: Wu Jianren’s *A History of Pain* and Late Qing Pessimism

Introduction: Revisiting China’s Shame

Towards the end of the Qing empire, intellectuals differed in proposing how to appropriate the late Ming memory. The Boxer Uprising (1900-01), for example, incited controversial arguments regarding China’s future. According to the Boxer Protocol, the Qing government had to agree to the humiliating terms and conditions set by the eight allied nations; in detail, the unequal treatment included the infringement of Chinese sovereignty, punishing the responsible Qing officials, and tremendous indemnities. Consequently, the Boxer catastrophe exacerbated the dynastic fall while accelerating the foreign encroachment in Chinese territories. In the face of this political turmoil, Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873-1929), Kang Youwei 康有爲 (1858-1927) and others tried to consolidate the Guangxu 光緖 emperor’s (r. 1875-1908) power even after their failed attempt with the Hundred Days’ Reform in 1898. To them, the Qing empire might duplicate the route of the former Ming which had perished after the outbreaks of peasant rebellions and the subsequent Manchu invasion. In contrast, Sun Yat-sen’s (1866-1925) political league considered the failure of the Boxer Uprising as a sign of inability; at the same time, they recollected the late Ming Manchu conquest as a shameful experience for the Han Chinese. For example, Zou Rong 鄒容 (1885-1905) in *Gemingjun* 革命軍 (The

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1 The agreement was made in September 1901 and the details are as follows: “In this [Boxer Protocol], the Qing agreed to erect monuments to the memory of the more than two hundred Western dead, to ban all examinations for five years in cities where antiforeign atrocities had taken place, to forbid all imports of arms into China for two years, to allow permanent foreign guards and emplacements of defensive weapons to protect the legation quarter in perpetuity, to make the Zongli Yamen into a fully prestigious Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and to execute the leading Boxer supporters, including the Shanxi governor Yuxian. They also agreed to pay an indemnity for damages to foreign life and property of 450 million taels (around £67 million or $333 million at the then current exchange rates), a staggering sum at a time when the entire annual Qing income was estimated at around 250 million tales.” Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 235.
revolutionary army, 1903) regarded the Manchus as a mortal enemy, mandating revenge even by means of exterminating the Manchus.\(^2\)

As a result, the formation of nationalism is complicated especially when the intellectuals relied on historical analogy. Sun Yat-sen and Zou Rong politically differed from Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865-98) and Liang Qichao; but the late Qing literati all agreed to circulate the late Ming record, Wang Xiuchu’s 王秀楚 “Yangzhou shiri ji” 扬州十日記 (The record of Ten Days in Yangzhou).\(^3\) As political ideas differed, the same record conveyed different interpretations; that is, the Yangzhou account either justified taking revenge on the Manchus or mandated loyalty for the Qing emperor. In the midst of heated discussions of late Qing nationalism, Wu Jianren 吳趼人 (1866-1910) wrote *Tongshi 痛史* (A history of pain, 1903-06) in order to formulate an anti-foreign discourse. Whether he intended or not, his revenge through historical analogy influenced and was influenced by the intellectual debate of the time. For example, Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨 interpreted *A History of Pain* as an indication of Wu Jianren’s ideological change from the anti-Manchuism to Qing loyalism.\(^4\) Meanwhile, Wu Jianren confessed that he had a different motive (因別有所感故爾爾) when writing about the Southern Song.

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\(^2\) On the basis of racial discourse, Zou Rong 鄒容 (1885-1905) put forward his historical criticism. For instance, Zou gives a harsh comment to Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-72) for suppressing the Taiping Rebellion; instead of being a hero, Zou remarks, Zeng was a slave for the Manchus and a butcher for killing his own people. See Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 236.

\(^3\) See David Der-wei Wang 王德威 and Wei Shang 商偉, “Introduction,” in *Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation: From the Late Ming and to the Late Qing and Beyond*, eds. David Der-wei Wang and Wei Shang (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), p. 7. In addition, Wang and Shang note the late Qing literati’s interests in the late Ming and early Qing, esp. as in the case of Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873-1929). Liang learned from the scholars such as Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-95), Gu Yanwu 魯炎武 (1613-82), Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水 (1600-82) and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-92).

collapse.\textsuperscript{5} Using \textit{A History of Pain} as primary text, in this chapter, I delve into Wu Jianren’s exploration of the late Ming Confucianist’s mindset.\textsuperscript{6} He had his own reasons for beginning with and also for leaving his analogical criticism unfinished.

I will begin with Wu Jianren’s use of revenge for formulating nationalism. While inspiring revenge against the Mongols, the late Qing nationalist represents the intellectual concerns at the time in which China’s contemporary crisis resulted from a lack of nationalism. As a strategy, Wu Jianren discovers that the Chinese are dedicated to private revenge; accordingly, he makes efforts to develop a desire for national revenge by reminding readers of their traditional cultural pride. Next, I will discuss Wu Jianren’s historical analogy in which he reflected on Southern Song events in order to criticize late Qing problems. The racial discourse, however, tended to mobilize the Chinese trauma to inspire anti-Manchuism. I will situate \textit{A History of Pain} in the middle of changing forms of memory narrative; in doing so, the historical analogy is ambiguous enough to nourish the literature of vengeance. Finally, the generic illustrations of atrocities will be my topic of discussion. Besides the catastrophe caused by foreign invasion, Chinese history is full of other atrocities, which were exacerbated during the periods of dynastic change. Wu Jianren wanted to overcome the racial discourse; for this reason, he revealed the historical pessimism. The author assumed that violence would continue as long as the society is not morally righteous. This moral motive controls Wu Jianren’s writing practice. He


would run the risk of fabricating the historical records because he could not discourage
his criticism of morally despicable happenings.

The Literature of Vengeance

Wu Jianren published *A History of Pain* in one of the most influential periodicals
of the time, Liang Qichao’s *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 (New fiction, 1902-06). Comprising
27 chapters, *A History of Pain* was serialized from October 1903 to January 1906 and
was left unfinished when *New Fiction* discontinued publication. In this historical novel,
Wu rewrites the collapse of the Southern Song (1127-1279), which the Mongol invasion
brought about. The author refers to historical records, particularly *Songshi* 宋史
(Dynastic History of the Song, 1345). Ranging from the seventh year of Duzong’s 度宗
(r. 1265-74) Xianchun 咸淳 reign (1271) to the restoration movement after the last
emperor Zhao Bing’s 趙昺 (1272-79) suicide, Wu reconstructs the ten year period with
diverse historical figures and events. Being conscious of the previous historical novels
such as Luo Guanzhong’s 羅貫中 (c. 1330-1400) *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (The romance
of the Three Kingdoms), the author clarifies the lessons to be taken from the traumatic
experience. In doing so, Wu provides readers with a standard by which to tell the good
from the bad. Wu’s fictional representation of the dynastic collapse vocalizes a thirst for

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7 Liang Qichao published *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 [New fiction] in November 1902 in Yokohama, Japan, and moved its
place of publication to Shanghai next year. Wu Jianren’s contribution to *New Fiction* results partially from his
friendship with Liang. Wu and Liang came from the same town, Foshan 佛山, Guangdong 廣東, and they both
attended Foshan shuyuan 佛山書院 (Foshan Academy). More importantly, Wu agreed with Liang’s political idea of
reformation as well as his *xiaoshuojie geming* 小說界革命 (revolution in fiction). Liang wrote the article “Lun
xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” 論小說與群治之關係 [On the relationship between fiction and the government of the
people] in his first issue of *New Fiction*. See Ren Baiqiang 任百強, *Xiaoshuo mingjia Wu Jianren 小說名家吳觐人
[The famous novelist Wu Jianren]* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2006), pp. 59-61. For Liang’s article in
English, see Gek Nai Cheng, trans., “On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People,” in
revenge reflected in the conversations among characters, graphic descriptions of events, and authorial interventions.

*A Thirst for Revenge*

The multiple biographies and essays about Wu Jianren all note his satirical stance towards the late Qing society. Right after his death in 1910, Li Jiarong 李葭榮 (1874-1950) wrote an eulogy which observes that Wu’s laments on the deteriorating conditions of China had been persistent. Moreover, Zhou Guisheng 周桂笙 (1873-1936), who collaborated with Wu in publishing the fiction magazine *Yueyue xiaoshuo* 月月小說 (All-story monthly, 1906-08), recollected his upright personality; accordingly, his spirit would not have been amused even with the posthumous praise for his writings because he would have rather lived in distress than give up his self-esteem. In *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略 (A brief history of Chinese fiction, 1925), Lu Xun refers to Zhou’s comments and interprets Wu’s outright and passionate style as an influence from his personality. No doubt, Wu Jianren is remembered as the forerunner of what Lu Xun called *qianze xiaoshuo* 譴責小說 (novels of censure). His works represent the

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8 See Li Jiarong 李葭榮 (Li Huaishuang 李懷霜), “Wo Foshan ren zhuan” 我佛山人傳 [A biography of Wu Jianren, 1910], in *Wu Jianren yanjiu ziliao*, ed. Wei Shaochang, p. 11. Wu Jianren’s national concern derives from his Guocui 國粹 (National essence) idea: “Wu Jianren was born at the time of the transition periods between the old and new. He lamented the declining national strength and the weakening people’s power. His request for reformation appeared often in his writings and he was really rigorous in deciding what to choose and reject; for this reason, he did not blindly swim with the tide. In the past ten years, Wu upheld the National Essence idea and his anger grew and exploded. Wu once had a friend who respected foreigners and looked down upon his own people. Wu went to see him and slapped his face. Initially, the friend was upset, but later on felt ashamed of his mistake, and finally shed tears with regret.”


intellectual satire of every corner of late Qing, when the empire was on the decline due to a series of social disorders and foreign invasions. The late Qing author varied his sources from social satire to historical fiction; but he was consistent in expressing his worries about China with exaggerated and blunt illustrations.

In *A History of Pain*, Wu Jianren reinforces his criticism by developing a stark contrast among characters. His direct, black-and-white style leaves no middle ground in light of their moral conduct. For example, Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236-83), Zhang Shijie 張世杰 (d. 1279) and Lu Xiufu 陸秀夫 (1236-79) are patriotic ministers who dare to sacrifice their lives without leaving a lingering desire for power and glory. In contrast, Jia Sidao 賈似道 (1213-75), Liu Mengyan 留夢炎 (1219-95) and Zhang Hongfan 張弘范 (1238-80) are treacherous collaborators who gladly give up their loyalty as long as they can secure their leisure in the Mongol court. As the story develops, the patriots and collaborators all perish. However, death is even more decisive in judging their morality because the loyalists leave heroic and brave reputations while the traitors find their ends shameful and humiliating. According to his preface to *Liang Jin yanyi* 隨晉演義 (The romance of the Former and the Later Jin, 1906-07), this arrangement had an advantage for advancing a new form of historical fiction, distinguishing itself from the traditional historiography and previous *yanyi* 演義 (romance) genre. For instance, Luo Guanzhong’s *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* 吳承恩 詭異三國志 attracted more readers than Chen Shou’s 陳壽 (233-97) *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms, 297); nevertheless, the historical novel tended to indulge in *fuhui wuji* 附會無稽 (digressing and unfounded) incidents because it *yin’er buzhang* 隱而不彰 (camouflaged without
direct statement) the historical truth. Consequently, the popular reading audiences (as opposed to the literati) had appreciated merely the mysterious and strange events.¹¹ Unlike previous historical novelists, Wu Jianren underlines the need for choosing a straightforward manner; in this way, commoners are able to recognize the perennial honor of patriotism; meanwhile, they are guided to look down upon transient glory after selling out one’s country to barbarians.

From the beginning of his new historical novel, Wu Jianren criticizes those who collaborate with foreign invaders. This emotionally overwhelming narratorial comment serves as the central argument. In detail, Wu announces his national resistance slogan in that the collaboration is unthinkable because such a shameless Chinese reaction to foreign invasion would play the central role in national collapse:

But people of each country, once they are determined to recognize their fatherland, should become ghosts of their country as they were born in their country. No matter how violent and repressive our enemies are, I always dare not to betray my liangxin (conscience), not to forget my genben (origin), or even not to flatter the foreigners. Likewise, no matter how strong our enemies are, they will never be able to destroy my country. If they had to destroy my country, they first of all have to exterminate our race, leaving not a single person in sight. In this way, they can only conquer our soil without leaving any trace of man. (7)¹²

This resolute and vindictive narratorial voice fears not so much the massacre as the spirit devoid of resistance. The most dreadful thing for the author is to witness the terrible calamities occurring repeatedly whenever the foreigners invaded the Southern Song, the Ming and the Qing. Wu Jianren may have deliberated on the reasons for this series of massacres. His conclusion is that the recurrent cataclysm must have resulted from the


¹² Through this chapter, the numbers in parantheses indicate the page numbers in the original Chinese text. Exceptions are the years of publication, personal data, and historical events. All translation is mine, unless otherwise specified.
spiritual weakness of Chinese who were noncommittal in resisting foreign invasion. Ironically, total massacre would be gladly embraced if the elimination of the race could signify that the Chinese are resolved to counter collaboration. In doing so, the extinction of the Chinese would rather be a positive and hopeful sign because this means that China still preserves its spiritual dedication. As a result, the anxious author points out the mental weakness as the major cause behind the national crisis, and hereby puts his priority on mobilizing patriotism among the Chinese.

To expedite his position, Wu Jianren justifies the cause for revenge. At the same time, the late Qing fiction writer explores ways to develop private revenge into a redemption of the collective. Regardless of their commitment to collaboration or patriotism, the Southern Song Chinese were of one mind in feeling shame when their families and ancestors were insulted. National salvation is contingent upon the success of national revenge; furthermore, filial piety can further national salvation in the name of taking revenge on the barbarians and avenging the ill-fated emperor. In Chapter Nine, loyal ministers such as Hu Chou 胡仇 feel ashamed when they are unable to avenge their families and ancestors. When Hu wants to take revenge on the Mongols, his personal vengeance has a potential for accomplishing the national revenge:

“Without country, what’s the use of family? So I left my home and followed the Grand Councilor Wen. This military expedition was meant to accomplish my sichou 私仇 (personal revenge) while relying on the country. I think, by now my ancestral tombs would have been robbed by the Tartars. Why shouldn’t I avenge this broken family and these open ancestral tombs? In the battlefield, I will surely seize the Tartars and taste their flesh!” . . .

“There has to be a military expedition, retrieving cities, cutting off the Tartars; in this way, my vengeance will finally be accomplished.” Bai Bi 白璧 said: “What you say, brother Hu, is still the principle of zhongjun baoguo 忠君報國 (being loyal to the ruler and paying our debt to the country).” Zong Ren 宗仁 said: “Brother Hu’s words are tongqie 痛切 (acute); however, he did not develop his meaning in a smooth manner. What
he calls ‘revenge’ is ‘being loyal to the ruler and paying our debt to the country,’ and this is what is called ‘revenge.’ When the two things are combined, we become brave and courageous.” (90-91)

Reflecting on the conversations among these loyal characters, the author underscores the inevitable linkage between the personal and collective vengeance. According to the author, the Chinese have a positive value thanks to the Confucian teachings: One is required to protect his family and pay homage to the ancestors. When these responsibilities are in danger, personal vengeance becomes justified for avenging the whole family. The problem, however, lies in the methods and degrees in order to fulfill the vengeance. Because the family disorder derives from the Mongol invasion, vengeance cannot be restricted to individual concerns but should expand to the level of demolishing the entire Mongol force. To accomplish vengeance, as a result, the vengeful Hu Chou should explore a form of military expedition in which he can maximize the death and destruction. Wu Jianren illustrates ways to inspire a sense of collective identity. One of the essences of Chinese culture, filial piety, hereby becomes a source for invigorating the national resistance.

The late Qing and modern Chinese intellectuals were worried about imminent national collapse. Moreover, they demanded that the reformation of China should begin with nationalism. Exploring the literary representation of late Qing and Republican China, Jing Tsu argues that modern identity came to possess the “emotional resolution.” In specific, Tsu discovers that Chinese failures contributed to the national salvation because the awareness of crisis prompted humiliation and shame: “If only one would turn against oneself in a moment of truthful recognition, one could then dispel the delusion that lies at the root of Chinese characteristics. . . . By keeping alive China’s humiliation
as a nation, one can properly keep intact one’s passion for its survival. The urgency of national salvation is forever preserved as the most promising possibility for the nation.”\textsuperscript{13} The recognition of Chinese downfall destabilizes the long-time arrogant belief that China should be the center of the whole world and be regarded as the most civilized country. As a result, the perception of shame is essential and constructive for saving China because it can effectively inspire people’s nationalism. On the need for eliciting the shame and humiliation, Wu Jianren would have agreed with Tsu’s arguments. Nevertheless, their methods took different routes for recognizing the problematic “Chinese characteristics.” Notably, injured cultural pride paves the way for realizing contemporary disaster. The recognition of failure benefits from successfully reminding people of their old memories of the powerful and glorious Chinese civilization.

\textit{The Making of National Shame}

As a strategy for formulating national shame, Wu Jianren preconditions that the Chinese culture had been incomparably civilized. In Chapter 18, being asked to surrender, the patriotic minister Wen Tianxiang stands firm and humiliates the collaborators including Zhang Hongfan: “How can I pursue individual fortune and glory? Also, these \textit{huguan hufu} \text{(barbarian clothes)} are only fit for barbarians. When Chinese put them on, it will not only be inglorious but also as if we put a signboard around our necks, on which is written \textit{maiguo qiurong} \text{(I secured glory by selling my own country). You gentlemen may regard this as glory but you make me feel uncomfortable}” \cite{179}. Chinese pride still affects the collaborators because they feel

ashamed (179). Furthermore, cultural pride becomes more powerful when the Yuan emperor recognizes the loyalist mindset. The barbarian monarch respects Wen’s upright spirit, ordering the Chengxiang 丞相 (Grand Councilor) Boluo 博羅 (c. 1246-1313) to persuade the loyalist. Even after executing him for defiant refusal, the Yuan emperor commemorates him with the posthumous title Lulingjun gong 盧陵郡公 (the Duke of Luling) and the epithet Zhongwu 忠武 (Loyal and Brave) (191). In doing so, *A History of Pain* advances the cultural pride, which is significant in arousing the shame in collaboration; at the same time, the fictional representation of the dynastic fall promotes incorruptible loyalism which even the barbarian monarch desperately needs and admires.

Wu Jianren strategically puts forward that the Chinese culture is superior to foreign cultures. Even though the Southern Song is on the verge of collapse, their sense of cultural superiority reinforces the loyalist cause. In the late Qing, the emphasis of cultural pride, no matter how it had been, served also as a strategy popular among the intellectuals. Witnessing late Qing political conditions deteriorate, the intellectuals pointed out the absence of national shame as most problematic cause. In particular, they presented contrasting examples in which other less powerful and traditionally inferior countries were responsive to national shame. In *Speaking to History* (2009), Paul A. Cohen provides Fangshi’s 放士 article published in 1904. China did not confront the Germans when they invaded the Temple of Confucius in Shandong 山東 in 1897. Moreover, the Chinese even received the Russian occupation of Manchuria as a friendly maneuver. These foreign invasions were humiliating because the places were from
where the Chinese culture and the Qing imperial family originated. Explaining reasons for these phenomena, Fangshi contrasts it with the response from a neighboring small country: “Even Korea, when Russian cavalry had recently violated its borders, attacked the Russians and forced them to retreat. If such a paltry little country could behave in this way, how was it that China was incapable of doing so? The answer . . . lay in China’s imperviousness to insult and humiliation. If the Chinese people were to avenge themselves against their enemies, they must first develop a clear sense of national shame.”

Fangshi was not the only person who was concerned about the national enervation. Intellectuals, such as Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾 (1818-91), Wang Tao 王韜 (1828-97), and Liang Qichao, realized that the most urgent concern is increased Chinese indifference in the face of a national crisis rather than the threat of foreign invasions. As a result, all efforts to arouse the sense of shame would become useless as long as the Chinese are indifferent to national concerns. The realization of shame only applies to the individuals who can consider national humiliation as the one inflicted on their own bodies.

The emphasis of Chinese cultural superiority is meaningful insofar as this strategy implicates individuals. Patriotism should be defended with one’s life, as the Song loyalists all had been killed in the war, executed for refusing surrender, and committed suicide. For this reason, national shame must always inspire individuals with a sense of urgency. Regarding how to individualize the national shame, A History of Pain presents...

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14 See Paul A. Cohen, Speaking to History: The Story of King Goujian in Twentieth-Century China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 38. For Fangshi’s original article, see Fangshi, “Lun xue Guochou yi xianli Guochi” 論雪國讎宜先勵國恥 [In order to avenge national hatred one should first encourage national humiliation], Dongfang zazhi 東方雜誌 [Eastern Miscellany] 1.4 (June 1904), pp. 65-67.


an example of a tempestuous response from collaborators. Instead of being impervious to shame, treacherous characters such as Zhang Hongfan become all sensitive and responsive to humiliation; this is especially so when individuals perceive personal humiliation in addition to cultural pride. In Chapter Four, after his heroic confrontation with Zhang Hongfan’s Yuan force, the loyal Song general Zhang Gui 張貴 suffers an arrow wound on his shoulder and becomes a prisoner. Laughing at Hongfan’s urge to surrender, Zhang Gui criticizes the traitors with the remarks which instantly cause him to be slaughtered:

“. . . Even though you murdered all Chinese and conquered the entire Chinese soil, changing tangtang da Zhongguo 堂堂大中國 (great China) into a Tartar land, what will be the glory for you, Zhang Hongfan? You have no manners; in the body your ancestors gave to you, there would be nothing Chinese, not even counting a hair; but you put on the barbarian hat and clothes. After you die, how would you dare to meet your ancestors, not to mention others? This is not just me cursing you; instead, I curse you not only on behalf of Chinese spirits and country ancestors but also on behalf of your ancestral shrines.” (39)

This passage reiterates the criticism in that collaborators shamelessly take on barbarian identities and serve the barbarians. The magnificent Chinese should feel this collaboration shameful and humiliating, but collaborators have no sense of shame. The response from the collaborators, however, is far from being impervious to humiliation; instead, they react violently: “Hearing this speech, they sweated on their backs, but after a while, their shame changed into rage (老羞成怒); they did not care about their master Zhang Hongfan, and did not wait for his order; they took out their swords and slashed Zhang Gui to death” (40). Zhang Gui’s words are not only humiliating but also infuriating. In fact, Zhang Gui’s words differ from the plain and usual provocative remarks; they emphasize that the collaborators will dishonor their ancestral shrines by
becoming unfilial sons. Even though they are indifferent to national shame, the collaborators consider Zhang’s criticism as outrageous and insulting. When Chinese perceive the national shame as being personal, they are likely to respond vehemently.

Thus, *A History of Pain* is a representative example of the literature of vengeance, which explored literary strategies for inspiring national shame. According to Ouyang Jian, the literature results from the intellectual responsibilities for delivering China from *wangguo miezhong* 歐陽健 亡國滅種 (national collapse and racial extinction). Especially since 1903, when Russia took over Manchuria, the intellectuals became active in developing methods to avenge the humiliated nation. For its political background, however, Ouyang notes the gemingpai’s 革命派 (the revolutionary group) routes as opposed to gailiangpai’s 改良派 (the reform group). The revolutionary group resisted and abhorred the foreigners; more importantly, they focused critically on the Manchus, at that time rulers of China. The revolutionary group considered the Qing empire as the source for all the problems China experienced. As a result, they thought that the collapse of the empire would be the first step for improving the political situation. In the middle of this fierce political debate, Wu Jianren wrote *A History of Pain*; but he never revealed any resolve.

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17 Ouyang Jian 歐陽健 identifies the fictional narratives written under the revolutionary group’s *jiuwaang aiguo* 救亡愛國 (national salvation and patriotism) theme. For example, in 1903 alone, the revolutionary group produced *Xuelei hen* 血淚痕 [The trace of blood tears], *Xuehen hua* 血痕花 [A flower of blood trace], *Yingxiong guo* 英雄國 [A country of hero], *Tong ding tong* 痛定痛 [Pain after pain], *Wangguo hen* 亡國恨 [Sorrow of national collapse], *Yanzi wo* 燕子窩 [The nest of Yanzi], Zhendan nüshi ziyouhua's 震旦女士自由花 (Zhang Zhaotong 張肇桐) *Ziyou jiehun* 自由結婚 [Free marriage], Xuanyuan Zhengyi's 軒轅正裔 *Guafen canhuo yuyanji* 瓜分慘禍預言記 [The prophet of the disastrous partitioned country], Lengqing nüshi’s 冷情女史 *Xichi ji* 洗恥記 [A record of clearing the shame]. In the following years, the representative works are Tongkusheng Dier’s 痛苦生第二 (Chen Tianhua 陳天華) “Choushi” 仇史 [A history of vengeance, 1905], Yushi Cilang’s 殊世次郎 (Huang Xiaopei 黃小配) *Hong Xiuquan yanyi* 洪秀全演義 [The romance of Hong Xiuquan, 1906]. See Ouyang Jian, *Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi* 晚清小說史 [A history of late Qing fiction] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1997), pp. 266-89.


for destroying the Qing empire. Nevertheless, the prevalent anti-Manchuism in late Qing implicates Wu Jianren’s political motive embedded in his literature of vengeance. In addition, because Wu Jianren illustrates the dynastic collapse caused by the barbarian invasion, his historical fiction is always open to the interpretation that it is an analogy for contemporary China, especially when the old memories of China flourished.

**Mirroring the Past to Serve the Present**

Wu Jianren’s didacticism invites the late Qing readers to apply historical examples to judge contemporary events. The lessons of the Southern Song are more than criticism of previous collaborators; instead, the author emphasizes that the painful lessons are meaningful insofar as they criticize what is taking place in the late Qing. Prompting the shameful memories of national collapse, Wu Jianren believes in the effectiveness of his literary technique: “I am angry at those Zhongguoren 中国人 (Chinese) who are not very loyal and upright. They often surrender our zuguo 祖国 (fatherland) to enemies; furthermore, they even guide the enemies to kill our country men” (7). Wu continues, “In this way, they do not feel ceyin xiulu 惩隱羞恥 (sympathy or shame) but regard this behavior as glorious. I really do not understand what their hearts are made of. Thus, I will record their activities and want to give readers a chance for jiegu jianjin 借古鑒今 (seeing the present through the past)” (7-8). Wu Jianren projects his anger and clarifies that the Song-Yuan transition makes an excellent parallel to the late Qing. The retelling of the dynastic collapse suggests that the author had predicted the imminence of dynastic change. And the efforts for inspiring the national shame also indicate the absence of national consciousness among the Chinese. Nevertheless, the recollection of national
disaster facilitates the vicarious experience for those who might have forgotten and been unprepared for a large-scale cataclysm.

A Curious Case of Historical Analogy

Wu Jianren’s analogical approach is successful only when the disparate events and periods can properly signify anti-foreign as well as anti-collaboration messages. To accomplish this purpose, A History of Pain should clarify that the past events are related to the present; that is, the successive generations continue to evaluate the predecessors according to the same moral standards. For example, Zhang Hongfan, who played a remarkable role in the fall of the Southern Song, wanted to announce his achievement. However, his stone inscription backfired when a conscientious Confucian scholar of the Ming found it incomplete:

Zhang Hongfan, after taking Aishan 厭山, held a grand banquet in the Xiangxing 祥興 emperor’s (r. 1278-79) palace. On a rock, he inscribed seven huge characters: “Zhang Hongfan destroyed the Song right here.” Zhang thought he achieved magnificent glory and left a historical marker to announce to the whole world and also to the later generations. Who knew that later in the Ming, however, one great Confucian scholar whose name is Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428-1500) would come around. Chen’s pen name is Gongfu 公甫, born in Baisha xiang 白沙鄉, Xinhui 新會; this is how he was called “Master Baisha.” This Master Baisha had an occasion to look at this inscription and said: “These seven characters are not enough to carry his achievement. I would like to add one more.” Then, the master, above of the “Zhang” 張 character, added the “Song” 宋 character, which now reads as follows: “The Song minister Zhang Hongfan destroyed the Song right here.” (178)

Zhang Hongfan’s inscription has been transmitted to successive generations. Zhang’s intention was to celebrate his accomplishment; however, his ambitious plan turned into mockery because the Ming Confucianist did not evaluate Zhang’s achievement of fame and fortune but rather his treachery. Zhang changed sides from the civilized Song to the
barbarian Yuan. In this way, Wu Jianren juxtaposes himself with the Master Baisha who remembered the painful past and rewrote the events in light of loyal and upright morality. From bygone history, Wu presents examples of inevitable retribution, which justifies his need to engage with the past before the immediate emergency.

However, the technique, which associates the traumatic experience with the present demands, inevitably runs the risk of ambiguity. The criticism of collaborators is conspicuous in Wu Jianren’s novel; but the political message of anti-foreign aggression can be unclear even to the level of contradicting the author’s original plan. Readers may wonder: Does Wu Jianren include the Manchus (the members of the Qing empire) among the foreigners who invaded and victimized China? This question is relevant to how a reader would interpret Wu Jianren’s planned implications. Despite the author’s forthright introductory comments, his literary technique multiplies the questions regarding how to find correct matches for the Mongol invaders and the Song imperial family. For example, Qian Xingcun comprehends that Wu Jianren’s criticism of the Song collaborators refers to the late Qing counterparts from the Opium Wars to the Boxer Uprising. Meanwhile, Qian regrets that the author is unclear in distinguishing the Manchu rulers from the Han people.20 On the other hand, Ouyang Jian 欧陽健 opposes interpreting A History of Pain as a work intended to inspire anti-Manchu ideology: “Because Wu Jianren’s choice of sources is limited to the collapse of the Southern Song, his historical analogy could not develop into equating the Mongols in the fiction with the Manchus of his time.”21 Regardless of Wu Jianren’s intended message, the anti-Manchu theme has always

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20 See A Ying, Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi, p. 176.

received critical attention. In his time, a historically-oriented text would inevitably be viewed politically.

With reference to other anti-Manchu tales, Wu Jianren’s *A History of Pain* can be misunderstood as a work of Han Chinese nationalism. For instance, Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875-1905), a member of Tongmenghui 同盟會 (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, 1905), wrote popular anti-Manchu works in which he praised the late Ming loyalists while criticizing the collaborators.²² Chen even copied passages from “The Record of Ten Days in Yangzhou” to show that his rewriting of the massacre is based on historical facts.²³ In 1905, Chen, using his pen name Tongkusheng Dier 痛哭生第二, published “Choushi” 仇史 (A history of revenge) in two chapters. In *fanli 凡例* (general principles) section, Chen clarifies that he inherited Wu Jianren’s legacy though he shifted the historical background from the Song-Yuan transition to the Ming-Qing:

This book continues the project *A History of Pain* began. Wu Jianren’s *A History of Pain* displays a *zhuanglun* 莊論 (serious argument) and implies it with *weiyan* 微言 (nuances); in doing so, the fiction intends to *yingu jianjin* 引古鑒今 (borrow the past to reflect the present), leading our people to *jianjie zhi ganchu* 間接之感觸 (indirect feeling). Alas! The disaster at hand is really serious! Because an indirect satire is impossible to become instantly effective, I deliberated on this issue and committed myself to *zhenbi zhishu* 振筆直書 (writing in a straightforward manner). I also portrayed the vivid descriptions of the sadness and madness our people have experienced and wanted to disclose the barbarian violence. In this way, the speaker is not to blame while the listeners are excited, which would make this story as

²² In *Meng huitou 猛回頭* [Wake up!, 1903], Chen Tianhua commemorates the late Ming loyalists such as Hong Chengchou 洪承疇 (1593-1665), Shi Kefa 史可法 (1601-45) and Yan Yingyuan 閻應元 (d. 1645), while he calls Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠 (1606-46) and Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606-45) as *er zai* 二賊 (the two bandits) for inviting the Manchus to China. In *Jingshi zhong 警世鍾* [Alarm to arouse the age, 1904], Wu Sangui 吳三桂 (1612-78) and Kong Youde 孔有德 (c. 1602-52) are called as *gou nucai* 狗奴才 (dog slaves) for their contribution to the establishment of the Qing dynasty. See Qin Yanchun 秦燕春, *Qingmo Minchu de wan Ming xiangxiang* 清末民初的晩明想象 [Imagination of the late Ming in the late Qing and the early Republican China] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008), p. 346.

²³ This refers to his other work *Shizi hou 獅子吼* [The howling of the lion, 1904-05]. See Qin, *Qingmo Minchu de wan Ming xiangxiang*, p. 346.
valuable as Ziyouthn 自由魂 (The soul of freedom) and The Revolutionary Army?" 

According to Chen Tianhua, “A History of Revenge” differs from Wu Jianren’s work only in the level of historical analogy; moreover, his work is “better” in inspiring the anti-Manchuism due to its discussion of the late Ming collapse. Actually, Chen’s work has a similar structure to A History of Pain in that Qing Taizong 清太宗 (r. 1626-43) in concert with Fan Wencheng 范文程 (1597-1666) and the capitulated Ming general Li Yongfang 李永芳 (d. 1634) puts an end to the Ming. The characters are all paralleled in light of loyalists, the collaborators, the barbarian and the Chinese monarchs. Moreover, the Southern Song massacres are replicated in the late Ming. Though Chen is dissatisfied with the indirect parallelism, he understands that the illustration of the Southern Song collapse might suggest a criticism of the Manchus. As a result, the comprehension of historical fiction is a matter of differing political perspectives; in other words, Wu Jianren’s novel, however indirect it is, connotes the anti-Manchu perspective.

Only after publishing A History of Pain, Wu Jianren explicitly opposed the revolutionary group. Discussing the “focalized character or center of consciousness,” Patrick Hanan notes Wu Jianren’s self-expression through the protagonist Li Ruoyu 李若愚 in Shanghai youcan lu 上海游駕錄 (Adventures in Shanghai, 1907). Unlike his

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25 In his other fanli 凡例 (general principles) section, Chen Tianhua makes a list of references about the late Ming events: Mingshi gao 明史稿 [A manuscript of the Dynastic History of the Ming], Mingji baishi 明季稗史 [An unofficial history of the late Ming], Jingtuo yishi 荊駝逸史 [An unofficial history of camels in Hawthorn], Yongli shilu 永歷實錄 [A chronicle of the Yongli emperor], Nandu xinlu 南部新錄 [A new record of the Southern capital], Shengchao yishi 勝朝遺事 [The events of the former dynasty], Qingshi jilüe 清史紀略 [A brief record of Qing history], and Qing mishi 清秘史 [A secret Qing history].

previous historical novel, Wu Jianren’s political idea here is straightforward: “In any case, the time is not ripe for revolution, because if China descends into civil war, the foreign nations will only make further encroachments, as both the government and the rebels vie for the foreigners’ support.”27 This textual information indicates the author’s political commitment to the Reformation Group. Disapproving of anti-Manchuism, Liang Qichao along with Kang Youwei believed that “[the] internal fighting would only undermine the struggle of the ‘yellow race’ against the ‘white race.’”28 One may question whether Wu Jianren transitioned from an anti-Manchu revolutionary to a Qing loyalist;29 for example, Zhang Binglin (1869-1936) became an ardent anti-Manchuist only in 1897.30 In opposition to this assumption, Hanan interprets the transition according to Wu Jianren’s “change of emphasis” made in his “conception of the Chinese crisis.”31 Instead of changing his political viewpoint, Wu Jianren varied his objects of criticism; at the same time, he controlled his style from an analogical critique to an explicit satire. While constructing his historical analogies, Wu Jianren had firmly believed that the collapse of the Southern Song would clearly suggest anti-foreign positions (not including the anti-Manchuism), and eventually the accomplishment of national defense. In contrast to Wu Jianren’s expectation, the racial discourse of his time heavily influenced and distorted his ambition for historical fiction.

27 Hanan, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, p. 179. For the Chinese original, which Hanan also refers to, see Wu Jianren, *Shanghai youcan lu* 上海游驂錄 [Adventures in Shanghai, 1907], in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi*, vol. 34, pp. 484-545.


29 For example, Qian Xingcun understands that Wu Jianren could not finish *A History of Pain* due to his ideological change, his opposition to anti-Manchuism. See A Ying, *Wan Qing xiaoshuo shi*, p. 178.


31 Hanan, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, p. 180.
Competing with Racial Discourse

As Wu Jianren intended, his historical fiction prompted readers to reflect on late Qing events. Furthermore, the political discussion of nationalism influenced the novel’s historical analogy. According to Suisheng Zhao, the late Qing had two different stages of “ethnic/racist nationalism.” Witnessing the Opium War and intensifying foreign encroachments, the intellectuals considered the white European imperialists as the primary menace. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, they invented anti-Manchuism: “The Manchus were reconceptualized as a racial group different from the Han people. Revolutionaries believed that just as there was a racial conflict between the yellows and the whites, so there was between Manchus and Han. The revolution was to overthrow the minority Manchu rulers and to drive the Manchus out of China proper and back to Manchuria on the northeast frontiers, from where they originally came.”

Sometime around the turn of the century, Chinese nationalism shifted from resistance against the Western invaders to the destruction of the Qing empire. In “Imagining Boundaries of Blood” (1997), Kai-wing Chow delves into Zhang Binglin’s appropriation of “yellow race” on which Zhang constructed the Han Chinese concept on the basis of the historical origins of civilized culture: “[T]he comparison between ‘yellow’ and ‘white races’ was used to underline the notion that the Chinese were the most civilised. It was intolerable for the most civilised Chinese to subject themselves to the rule of a less


33 Zhao, Nation-State by Construction, p. 63.
civilised and different race, namely the Manchus.”  Zhang distinguished the Manchus from the Han Chinese according to a level of civilization. When the late Qing engages in this racial discourse, the Southern Song forms a historical analogy with the late Ming because barbarian tribes had invaded China and had repeatedly destroyed Han Chinese empires.

The formation of anti-Manchuism results from the political demands of the revolutionary group; more importantly, the process always requires the community to retrieve past events, which enables it to construct a new historical narrative. As a strategy for justifying political mobilizations, James V. Wertsch and Zurab Karumidze pay attention to the invention of “narrative templates”: “Narrative templates mediate what can be termed ‘deep collective memory,’ a form of representation that is deep both in the sense that it is largely inaccessible to conscious reflection and in the sense that members of a collective tend to have deep emotional attachment to it. This emotional dimension is evident in those instances where it is clear that questioning a collective’s narrative template is taken to be a personal attack on group members themselves.”

Narrative templates are developed to justify political actions. Accordingly, the construction of anti-Manchuism signified a challenge to the existing narrative template: the resistance to the foreign invaders while being loyal to the Qing emperor. Moreover, the new narrative template came into shape by means of importing and excavating the records of the late Ming, which shocked the Chinese out of sudden realization of the forgotten Manchu atrocities.

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34 Chow, “Imagining Boundaries of Blood,” p. 41.

Regarding the political usage of late Ming memories, Qin Yanchun 秦燕春 discusses how the revolutionaries such as Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 and Chen Shaobai 陳少白 (1869-1934) brought back from Japan the Chinese records of the late Ming catastrophe. In addition, the political group duplicated and distributed them to acquaintances inside and outside China. Qin also refers to Lu Xun’s essay “Zayi” 雜憶 (Random memories, 1925) in which the revolutionaries looked forward to taking revenge on the Manchus by reminding the Han Chinese of the hardships the ancestors had experienced. In particular, Wang Xiuchu’s “The Record of Ten Days in Yangzhou” became a classic example for the revolutionary group when they justified their confrontation against the Manchus. In the record, the late Ming survivor of Yangzhou detailed his horrifying accounts of the ten day-long massacre. “The Record of Ten Days in Yangzhou” was officially proscribed in the 53rd year of the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1788); but this account of the late Ming was transmitted (possibly by a secret hand copy) to the Daoguang 道光 reign (1821-50) when it was collected in Jingtuo yishi 荊駝逸史 (An unofficial history of camels in hawthorn). With the beginning of the 20th century,
the Yangzhou account, along with other similar kinds, was repeatedly discussed and popularized in multiple periodicals.\textsuperscript{39} The revolutionary group was foremost in reprinting and circulating the once forgotten memory of late Ming atrocity. Consequently, the recollection of the Ming collapse augmented the anti-Manchu movement.

Despite its different political significance, “The Record of Ten Days in Yangzhou” has a remarkable similarity to the major themes found in Wu Jianren’s \textit{A History of Pain}. The criticism of collaborators also gets special attention in the late Ming account. Furthermore, the criticism develops into the absence of national shame with an example of a woman who lost her chastity. A passage from the Yangzhou account illustrates how the sense of shame inspires a national concern:

\begin{quote}
The women were put in a side room wherein were two small square tables, three dressmakers, and a middle-aged woman, who was also working on some garments. She was a local person, heavily made up and gaudily dressed, who gestured, talked, and laughed smugly. Every time the soldiers ran across some good item, she would beg them for it, brazenly using her \textit{meitai} 媚態 (fawning charms). I regretted that I was unable to draw out the soldier’s sword to cut off this \textit{yinnie} 淫孽 (prostitute). One of the soldiers at one point remarked, “When we campaigned in Korea (1627 and 1636-37), we captured women by the tens of thousands, and not one \textit{shijie} 失節 (lost her chastity). How is it \textit{tangtang} Zhongguo 堂堂中國 (that wonderful China) has become so \textit{wuchi} 無耻 (shameless)”? Alas, this is why China is in chaos.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} The collections of the late Ming accounts were published and reprinted in Shanghai, 1897, and the titles are as follows: \textit{Mingji baishi huibian} 明季稗史匯編, \textit{Mingji beilüe} 明季北略 and \textit{Mingji nanlüe} 明季南略. Especially with the turn of the century, the Revolutionary Group reached its highest point with its publications. The accounts turned into various forms such as essays, biographies and poems, and the general atmosphere of the time was “periodicals all discuss the late Ming events” (無報不談明末事). See Xia Xiaohong 夏曉虹, \textit{Wan Qing nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo} 晚淸女性與近代中國 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004), p. 116.

\textsuperscript{40} Wang Xiuchu 王秀楚, “Yangzhou shiri ji,” in \textit{Siku jinshu} 四庫禁書 [Banned books of the Four Treasuries], eds. Li Zhaoxiang 李肇翔, et al., vol. 6 (Beijing: Jinghua chubanshe, 2001), p. 4423. See Lynn A. Struve, ed. and trans., “‘Horrid Beyond Description’: The Massacre of Yangzhou,” in \textit{Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers’
Concluding with a lamentation, Wang Xiuchu sums up the reason for the Chinese crisis. Besides the Manchu invasion, Wang deliberates on the fundamental psychological dimension after witnessing how women humiliated themselves and their bodies before the Manchus. The Han Chinese women do not resist. They do not even feel saddened in receiving the Manchus; instead, they flatter the soldiers as if they had no knowledge of the massacre. Furthermore, they feel no sense of shame for their collaboration, which is more striking when the Manchus sneer at them by comparing them with the women of the long time tributary country Chosŏn 朝鮮 (1392-1910). As the late Qing intellectual Wu Jianren points out, this late Ming witness also realizes that the Chinese crisis did not lie in the barbarian invasion; rather, the shameless Chinese mentality was responsible for that calamity. Regarding the anti-Manchu idea, Wu Jianren differed from those who promoted the late Ming memoir; nevertheless, they all agreed that the reflection of the painful experience would consolidate the efforts for saving China from the barbarian occupation.

In the middle of this racial debate, Wu Jianren must have feared the confusion his historical fiction would provoke. Furthermore, the author, who had been dedicated to finding a way to save China, could not abide the political manipulation of the Han Chinese nationalism. This is related to the transient nature of anti-Manchu discourse. For instance, Liang Qichao disagreed with Sun Zhongshan’s zhongzu geming 种族革命 (ethnic/racist revolution) because he thought a zhengzhi geming 政治革命 (political

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revolution) would be the best way for renovating China.\textsuperscript{41} In the wake of the Revolution of 1911, Sun and other leaders realized that the maintenance of ethnic discrimination would invite the dissolution of the former Qing empire. As a result, the revolutionary group took measures to embrace the Manchus: “Only by defining the Chinese nation as one that transcended Han identity could the state legitimately lay claim to the frontier regions inhabited by non-Han peoples. . . . Sun modified his Three People’s Principles by eliminating anti-Manchu content from the principle of Nationalism and stressed the equal international status of the Chinese nation-state with other nation-states.\textsuperscript{42}” In the long run, Sun’s initial anti-Manchu racialism turned into the five nationalities of Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui and Tibetan, which the Qianlong emperor developed long before. Even Wang Xiuchu’s “The Record of Ten Days in Yangzhou,” once the classic of anti-Manchuism, was used as a previous example of foreign invasion to accuse the Yangzhou natives who collaborated with the Japanese in Shanghai, 1932.\textsuperscript{43} Wu Jianren, though he did not live to see the disappearance of anti-Manchuism, looked forward to a morality grounded in stable Confucian ideals. His search for moral righteousness testifies to his belief in the power of history with which he hoped to transcend racial discourse.

**Fictional Revenge on Unjust History**

In his study of the genealogy of violence, Michael Berry explores the literary methods with which modern Chinese writers illustrated atrocities. When those writers narrate the painful events, the works of vicarious experience are defined as “imaginary

\textsuperscript{41} See Zhao, *Nation-State by Construction*, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{42} Zhao, *Nation-State by Construction*, pp. 67-68.

\textsuperscript{43} See Finnane, *Speaking of Yangzhou*, p. 78.
trauma”: “Freud and others have written about the important place of fantasies in the construction of traumatic memory, but by ‘imaginary trauma,’ I mean not a conflation of traumatic memories and the fantasy component that often becomes intermingled with them, but rather a trauma constructed purely on the textual level, without direct experience or observation.”44 Instead of the projection of direct and personal experience, Berry focuses on the literary capacity of imagining traumatic events. Berry acknowledges the powerful imaginations of writers who portray probable characters and events in concert with the construction of time and space. As a result, the impact of the imaginary trauma “are in fact no ‘less real,’ or less powerful.”45 In this respect, the retelling of the past, though it may not duplicate what really happened, is able to impress readers emotionally and morally.

Illustrating Repeated Catastrophes

Wu Jianren believes in the inspiration inherent in the records of traumatic experience. Moreover, his usage of historical analogy reinforces the impact because the late Qing readers would connect past events to those happening in their own time. A History of Pain includes passages illustrating the atrocities the Mongol soldiers provoked. In Chapter Three, Wu Jianren presents details of terror when the barbarian force captures the front line city Fancheng樊城. After the tenacious confrontation, the Song generals Fan Tianshun范天順 (d. 1273), Niu Fu牛富 (d. 1273) and his lieutenant Wang Fu王福


45 Berry, History of Pain, p. 18.
all kill themselves; subsequently, Fancheng falls to the Mongol hands and experiences a horrible massacre:

Zhang Hongfan ordered the *tucheng* (massacre of a whole city) to begin. These Tartar soldiers are by nature barbarous and brutal. They enjoy debauchery and robbery; and they do whatever they like to do. So you can imagine how they would behave under the order of massacre. The miserable Fancheng people were left to horrible murder: no light from the sky, layers of piled bones, and flowing fresh blood. These atrocities cannot be specified. Readers, this is what will happen to our race after the alien race becomes victorious! Are you scared or not? (30)

The Han Chinese collaborator Zhang Hongfan is upset because Niu Fu has injured his shoulder with a spear. Furthermore, Zhang becomes furious when he learns that all of the Song generals would rather commit suicide than surrender. Detailing the terror with horrible visual images, the narrator expects this terror, pointing out that the Mongols are “by nature” merciless, cruel and inhuman. In the last two sentences, the narrator intervenes and verifies the account’s validity. In doing so, Wu Jianren underscores that the painful past of the Song-Yuan transition still has an awe-inspiring effect. In light of historical analogy, this terrible memory will reoccur whenever foreigners invade China.

Compared with the records indicting the Manchu atrocities, Wu Jianren’s illustrations of terror serve as a basic template. For example, Chen Tianhua’s “A History of Revenge” illustrates the Manchu massacre taken place in Fushun. In Chapter Two, the Han Chinese collaborator Fan Wencheng persuades the Ming general Li Yongfang to capitulate. As soon as the strategy works out, Qing Taizong enters the city and orders a massacre: “[The Manchus] killed whoever they ran into and looted whatever they saw. In an instant, gutters all turned red and bones and flesh flew; sounds of swords and cries echoed throughout the mountains and valleys; the sky and the earth turned dark and the sun and the moon lost their light. This is an example to see how the alien race
treats our people (異族待本族人之一斑). Are you scared or not?" The Manchus
display the same level of monstrosity as the Mongols did; the author dramatizes the
graphic details with the addition of the auditory images. Because Chen intended to
directly inspire the anti-Manchuism, he made his objective manifest by changing the
responsible person from Zhang Hongfan to Qing Taizong. Nevertheless, the Manchu
slaughter does not considerably differ from the passage in *A History of Pain*. Even
though Chen Tianhua and Wu Jianren took different political routes, they are similar in
illustrating massacres for which the barbarians are responsible. This may have resulted
from Wu Jianren’s stylistic influence on Chen Tianhua; but, the illustrations suggest the
repeated patterns of atrocities taking place across time, place, and even political belief.  

As a matter of fact, Wu Jianren notes the large scale catastrophes repeatedly
occurring through Chinese history. No doubt, the barbarians are to blame for the
atrocities; nonetheless, Chinese literati have recorded the perennial violence which has
often nothing to do with the foreign aggression. In this respect, the foreigners are only
partially responsible and the discussion of atrocities necessarily include issues broader
than the racial confrontation. Even though the revolutionary group learned from Wang
Xiuchu’s “The Record of Ten Days in Yangzhou” for consolidating their anti-
Manchuism, the declining morality (especially the shameless women) had been the


47 Wang Xiuchu’s “Yangzhou shiri ji” also includes similar illustrations: “Fires had started all over the city—more
than ten close by and innumerable ones farther away. The red glare was reflected in the sky like lightning; the
crackling of the fires bombarded my ears incessantly. Faintly one could also hear the most pitiful sounds, and the
mournful aura was extremely chilling—\textit{can buke zhuang} 慘不可狀 \textit{(horrid beyond description)}. ” Wang Xiuchu,
“Yangzhou shiri ji,” p. 4421. For the English translation, I refer to Struve, ed. and trans., “\textit{'Horrid Beyond
Description': The Massacre of Yangzhou},” p. 35.

48 In particular, Lengqing nüshi’s “Xichi ji” illustrates how the Jianmu 賤牧 barbarians (a metaphor for the Manchus)
terrorized the people of Hanguo 漢國 (a metaphor for the Han Chinese): “Alas! These are the terrible descriptions of a
fallen country. Compared with Chinese case, however, Hanguo is much better. Yangzhou Shiri 揚州十日 (Ten Days in
most infuriating and disappointing experience for the late Ming witness. Wang Xiuchu discovered that the massacre took place not simply because the Manchus invaded China. Instead, the Chinese themselves invited them due to their moral corruption. For Wu Jianren, such atrocities have occurred for as long as the Chinese civilization continued:

“...Speaking of avenging the nine generations is what Mencius called *bici* (narrow-mindedness). If one claims himself a *zhishi* (person of ideals and integrity), then, he should be patriotic and benevolent. This time China is under foreign encroachment, but he does not strive to be self-dependent. Also, tens of thousand Chinese people who are abroad now receive foreign abuse, but he does not care to save them; instead, he goes back to the old stories that happened three hundred years ago. In this vein, Han Gaozu (r. 202-195 BC) and Ming Taizu (r. 1368-98) can be said to take over China with greetings and concessions. Whenever dynastic changes took place, a form of brutality broke out [regardless of ethnic differences of Barbarians and the Han Chinese]. If one wants to avenge the nine generations, where should he go to avenge the eighteen, twenty seven, and thirty six generations?”

On the basis of historical examples, Wu Jianren underscores that the mass destruction has always accompanied dynastic change. Thus, racial discourse is only applicable for defending China from the current foreign oppression. The late Ming memory cannot be considered as a racial confrontation because the Han Chinese have also caused catastrophes equally disastrous as the Yangzhou massacre. Actually, firsthand accounts of the Boxer Uprising reveal both foreign instigators and domestic victimizers. Paul A. Cohen presents multiple accounts of individuals who witnessed the brutality. Cohen details the national atrocities coupled with the expeditionary force’s advance to the

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50 Paul Cohen argues that individual accounts should complement historical records: “Death, in such accounts, becomes a collective marker. It stands as a metaphor for the cruelty of the Boxers or the brutality of the foreign relief forces or the suffering of the Christians or the slaying of innocents. But its meaning as an expression of individual experience is largely lost.” See Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 175.
capital city; simultaneously, he complicates the experience by including sources in which the Boxers brutalize the Chinese. The accounts specify where the fires were set, what the Boxers vocalized, and how people perished.\textsuperscript{51} Nevertheless, the illustrations show only the altering level of details because the people feel the events were just as atrocious as those the foreigners provoked.\textsuperscript{52} As a result, Wu Jianren has a reason for generalizing his illustrations of the Mongol atrocities without distinguishing them from those of the Manchus, the Western imperialists, and the Chinese Boxers.

Insofar as the Boxer Uprising exemplifies the domestic origins of Chinese catastrophes, the responsibilities implicate the Qing rulers (including the Han Chinese). Regarding the intellectual concern about the atrocities, David Der-wei Wang presents an example with Youhuan Yusheng’s 憂患餘生 (Lian Mengqing’s 連夢靑 pen name) \textit{Linnü yu} 險女語 (Women’s words overheard, 1903-04).\textsuperscript{53} In Shandong, the protagonist Jin

\textsuperscript{51} Zhongfang shi’s 仲芳氏 account, for example, clarifies that the Boxers were also to blame for the calamities in Beijing: “For days on end, during the daylight hours, thick smoke could be seen, billowing up into the sky one moment, dispersing the next. Everywhere people circulated stories that such and such a place had caught fire or that so-and-so’s whole family had been killed; or there would be shouts that the foreign buildings on East Jiaomin Lane had caught fire, and everywhere people would cry out ‘Burn incense, destroy the devils.’ One person would start the shouting, then everyone else would chime in. People were in a constant state of agitation. . . . They were all afraid that near them there might be Christians residing or property belonging to Christians, that the Boxers would be provoked to set these places on fire, that the calamity would spread in every direction, making no distinction between good people and bad, and that they would die without a proper burial.” See Cohen, \textit{History in Three Keys}, p. 199.

\textsuperscript{52} For instance, Hong Shoushan records his experience of the fall of Beijing in gruesome details, which represents the conventional form of atrocious illustrations: “Within the capital and in an area outside it extending over a hundred li in all directions, the dead numbered in the tens of thousands. Corpses were piled up everywhere with no one to bury them [. . .] and the stench of the rotting flesh and bones strewn across the roadways was unbearable. The extreme suffering of the common people was everywhere in evidence. Thousands of homes were burned down by the raging flames, which day and night lit up the sky. In my judgment, the capital has not suffered such cruel devastation since the beginning of the Qing.” See Cohen, \textit{History in Three Keys}, p. 174.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Linnü yu} 險女語 [Women’s words overheard] was originally serialized in Li Baojia’s 李寶嘉 (Li Boyuan 李伯元) (1876-1906) \textit{Xiaoxiang xiaoshuo} 鏡像小說 [Illustrated fiction, 1903-06] from 1903 to 1904, 12 chapters in total. From Chapter Five and on, Liu E 劉鶚 (1857-1909) put \textit{pingyu} 評語 (comments) with the title “Dieyin jiaping” 蝶隱加評. In the story, the main figure Jin Bumo 金不磨 is from Zhenjiang 鎮江, Jiangsu 江蘇, and takes a journey to the north after hearing the news about the fall of Beijing. Jin is determined to rescue the refugees by selling all of his family fortunes. See Jiangsu sheng Shehui kexue yuan Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu zhongxin wenxue yanjiusuo 江蘇省社會科學院明淸小說研究中心文學研究所, ed., \textit{Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao} 中國通俗小說總目提要 [Complete abstracts of Chinese vernacular fiction] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi, 1990), p. 881.
Bumo 金不磨 is startled to see countless heads of the Boxers hung on trees. The Boxers are to blame for killing Christians and inviting the foreigners to devastate China; however, they are also the victims of political struggle: “[Jin Bumo] is disheartened by the fact that these Boxers were killed not by the foreign invaders but by Yuan Shikai’s troops. Yuan ordered the massive decapitation to intimidate Boxer sympathizers and to demonstrate his independence from the Qing court. In doing so, Yuan fostered his own power, and in that sense, the Boxers were killed only to further one man’s ambition.”

Historical records become evidence for the Confucian scholar’s lamentation, “Killing people without first educating them is called exploitation” (不教而誅, 是為虐民).

Yuan Shikai, the governor of Shandong, wanted to appeal to foreigners, so he put down the Boxers, making them “by far the largest number of...”

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54 This appears in Chapter Six. For the Chinese original, see Youhuan Yusheng 豫患餘生 (Lian Mengqing 連夢靑), Linnü yu, in Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi, vol. 41 (Nanchang: Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 461-62.


56 Youhuan, Linnü yu, p. 462. This passage is originally from “Yaoyue” 壹曰 section, The Analects. Zizhang 子張 asked about si e 四惡 (the four wicked practices) and Confucius answered: “To impose the death penalty without first reforming the people is to be cruel; to expect results without first giving warning is to be tyrannical; to insist on a time limit when tardy in issuing order is to cause injury. When something has to be given to others anyway, to be miserly in the actual giving is to be officious” (不教而殺為之虐; 不戒視成為之暴; 慢令致期為之賊; 當之與人也, 出納之吝為之有司). See the bilingual edition, D. C. Lau, trans., The Analects (Lun yü), 2nd ed. (1979; Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1992), pp. 202-05. Liu E comments that Mei Tongling's 梅統領 (The Commander-general Mei) army massacred the Boxers because of his xifen 私忿 (private anger), not because of the gongzui 公罪 (public crime) claimed to the Boxers. See Youhuan, Linnü yu, p. 466. The Commander-general Mei is Mei Dongyi 梅東益 (1838-1903) who was at the post of Zhili Huaijun Youyi Tongling 直隸淮軍右翼統領. The Christians praised Mei for his protection of churches; but, Mei was ruthless in putting down the Boxers. In August, 1900, for example, ten thousand Boxers assembled from Ningjin 寧津, Dongguang 東光 and Nanpi 南皮 and attacked Cangzhou 滄州, which only met Mei’s brutal suppression leaving countless corpses all around the area. See Liao Yizhong 廖一中, et al., eds., Yihetuan da cidian 義和團大辭典 [A grand research dictionary for the Boxer Uprising] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995), pp. 369-70.
In the face of this intellectual concern, Wu Jianren may have questioned himself: What is the source of all these repeated atrocities? Yuan Shikai is ethnically a Han Chinese, but his succession of Chinese kingship would not guarantee peace and harmony among the Chinese. His conclusion is to explore an answer in traditional morality; in doing so, the late Ming memory finds its application in Wu Jianren’s criticism of unjust history.

Dynastic Change and Moral Principles

In Chapter 23, the Song loyalists plan to restore the Han Chinese empire. Hu Chou, after killing two Mongol officials, disguises himself as a drug peddler. Hoping to encounter a patriot to work with, Hu sings a song of patriotism. A man of stout build named Li Fu 李復 recognizes Hu’s message and is glad to join the restoration project. Li is mandated to avenge his father, who had been slaughtered, even before he was out of his mother’s womb. Only at the age of 16 or 17, Li learned of his father’s untimely death and made up his mind to take revenge on the Mongols. Li is a filial son who remembers the vengeful will of his father; moreover, he had to postpone taking vengeance until he satisfied another filial duty—taking care of the widowed mother. Meanwhile, the Mongols had already destroyed the Southern Song; consequently, the filial and patriotic son feels frustrated: “Regrettably, I conceive this thirst for revenge but still find no place to entrust myself. I have just heard your song; it touched my heart, making me shed tears; please forgive my imprudent behavior. Master, teach me how to take revenge” (228). Because Hu Chou also has the memory of having lost his family and having had

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his ancestral tombs looted, he is the most sympathetic person who can understand Li Fu’s agony caused by unaccomplished vengeance. The sense of shame inspired his furious drive for personal revenge, which is an essential process in order to prompt national salvation while being loyal to the emperor; for example, the restoration of the Southern Song can satisfy both personal and collective vengeance.

However, Hu Chou does not suggest a specific dynasty through which Li Fu can right his father’s unavenged wrong. Hu Chou is not solely committed to the continuation of the Southern Song; instead, he is willing to support any empire as long as the Han Chinese successor is virtuous enough:

“...This time we do not rise up to have the Zhao 趙 family continue the kingship but to represent China to carry on the lineage. If we intended to have the Zhao family to continue the emperor, we could easily find one; but, if the person is not virtuous enough, then what will we do? After all, China is for the Chinese. If we can dispel these Tartars, any Chinese who has de 德 (virtue) can be the emperor. Only whether the person is virtuous matters, not whether he is from the Zhao family. In light of your hermit’s plan, there will be no day for vengeance.” (228)

By emphasizing the ethnic distinction, Wu Jianren may have supported the prevalent racial discourse in which the Han Chinese are privileged to establish a legitimate regime. The Manchus differ ethnically from the Han Chinese; as a result, this passage can suggest the anti-Manchuiism as implied by the fictional loyalists who are determined to drive away the Mongols. Nevertheless, Wu Jianren’s dynastic change is achievable only after including the Manchus into the broad Chinese category. In doing so, the anti-foreign nationalism is targeted mainly on the Western invaders, the foreign “devils” of the Boxer Uprising. Meanwhile, because the Zhao family is paralleled to the late Qing Manchus, Wu Jianren also agrees on the transition from the Manchus to the Han Chinese. No matter that the Chinese are racially different, however, Wu Jianren singles out virtue as
the most important qualification necessary for taking over the imperial throne. As a result, the loyalist revenge transitions from the national defense to the search for an entity who is able to do away with moral corruption, and hereby, consolidate the morally respectable imperial rule.

In traditional China, moral conduct played a critical role in interpreting the transition of the dynastic cycle. As scholars such as Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang propose, historical novels have the narrative structure of cyclical pattern which is contingent upon the theories of moral principles such as *Wu de zhongshi shuo* 五德終始說 (cyclical theory of Five Virtues), *zhengtong* 正統 (legitimacy), and *Tianming* 天命 (the Mandate of Heaven).58 Furthermore, Chang notes the justification of historians, especially those of *zhengshi* 正史 (official dynastic histories), who illustrated the founders of new dynasties with virtues and benevolence: “But in reality, the established rule to justify dynastic legitimacy was the de facto recognition given to whoever unified China or occupied the largest part of the country. This political expediency to rationalize a de facto recognition was generally observed by traditional historiographers in all Official Histories.”59 The novelists, unlike those historians, were aware that the moral principles did not always come along with the new founders of unified empire. For example, Luo Guanzhong’s *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* challenges Chen Shou’s *Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms* in that Liu Bei’s 劉備 (161-223) Shu Han 蜀漢 (221-63) is considered as legitimate while Cao Cao’s 曹操 (155-220) Wei 魏 (220-65) is illegitimate.

In particular, the late Ming and early Qing literatus Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (c. 1630–after

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59 Chang, *History and Legend*, p. 35.
1700) demanded that moral principles should be the primary concern: “The criterion of principle ought to take precedence over territorial considerations” (論地不若論理).\(^{60}\)

The moral principles influence Wu Jianren’s historical novel; accordingly, dynastic change is meaningful only insofar as the new founder is legitimate enough to carry out morally superior kingship.

Nevertheless, Wu Jianren’s project destabilizes his overarching exploration of the virtuous monarch because he places the restoration efforts at the time of the Song-Yuan transition. His search for moral principles is pessimistic: the Mongol empire flourished after it had replaced the Southern Song; in addition, the empire claimed its legitimacy as the successor of Song China. Though dynastic change has a repetitious pattern, the moral principles may not justify the establishment of new dynasties. More importantly, the alternation of moral principles can be an elusive and idealistic prospect. In “Conclusions: Judgments on the Ends of Times,” Robert E. Hegel examines the pessimism prevalent at the end of dynasties. In late Ming, Hegel explains the pessimism with Feng Menglong’s 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) Xin Lieguo zhi 新列國志 (New chronicles of the Warring States, c. 1630):

However, [Feng’s] condemnation of ineffective leadership would have struck a responsive chord among his politically engaged contemporaries. And what does it suggest when the novel ends with the suffering caused by a strong and determined leader? A warning about the complex consequences that may obtain when a new dynasty replaces the old and corrupt one,

perhaps? Or that mere unity may never be stable over time, or that leaders cannot be relied on to create lasting stability? By ending with the beginning of the inexorable Qin decline, this novel seems to be structured to question whether order “naturally” succeeds disorder; rather, disorder is predicted to continue—echoing Mencius.61

Hegel points out that the literati relied on the strategy of indirect criticism for the purpose of projecting their pessimism. Feng’s historical novel, despite its fictional background during the Warring States, denotes his worries about the Ming-Qing transition. Thus, Feng’s narrative indirectly fictionalizes Huang Zongxi’s 黃宗羲 (1610-95) explicit remark: “Whether there is peace or disorder in the world does not depend on the rise or fall of dynasties, but upon the happiness or distress of the people.”62 Furthermore, Hegel underscores that the literati’s pessimism is not specific to a single dynastic change; instead, this mindset has roots in the representative Confucian text Mencius, continuing its influence on the historical novels at the imminent fall of the Qing. For example, Liu E’s 劉鹗 (1857-1909) Lao Can youji 老殘遊記 (The travels of Lao Can, 1904-07) is left unfinished because the author was unable to incorporate his hopeful vision: “[T]he conventional discourse of fictional historical narrative did not allow the presentation of a present-day decline into chaos; deliberately avoiding this discourse would seem to problematize conventional optimism about happier futures to come.”63 Originally, the historical pessimism resulted from a disappointment of and an opposition to the Manchu conquest. Later on, pessimism became a general criticism of human history: The rule of


62 Hegel, “Conclusions,” p. 546. For Hegel’s original source, see Wm. Theodore de Bary, trans., Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince, Huang Tsung-hsi’s “Ming-i tai-fang lu” (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 95. Huang Zongxi refers specifically to the rise of the Qin 秦 (246-207 BC) and the Yuan 元 (1271-1368) as the examples of intensified disorder. See the same page, de Bary’s book.

moral principles would be doubtful regardless whether the dynasty is Han Chinese or Manchu.

Although Wu Jianren intended to carry on his project of national salvation, critics had debated his works and pointed out his “conservative” attachment to traditional morality. For instance, Wang Guowei 王國偉 criticizes the previous scholarship on Wu Jianren’s literary career; at the same time, Wang emphasizes the need to investigate Wu’s unchanging belief in the “restoration of traditional morality”: “People simply tend to judge Wu Jianren’s huifu jiu daode 回復舊道德 (restoration of traditional morality) from the perspectives of ideological backwardness and conservatism. Thus, they could neither explore the detailed contents embedded in the ‘traditional morality’ nor examine his xinli dongji 心理動機 (psychological motivations) and lishi yujing 歷史語境 (historical contexts) in relation to his advocating traditional morality.” According to Wang, the evaluation of Wu’s writings would be biased if critics approach them from his political position countering the revolutionary group. For this reason, Wang argues, scholars should delve into literary manipulation of traditional morality in light of his engagement with the late Qing context, not from the simple dichotomy between the revolutionary and the conservative. Actually, Wu Jianren focuses on traditional morality, which “vacillates” in the narration of A History of Pain; furthermore, this vacillation in

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64 In “Shanghai youcan lu ziba” 上海游驂錄自跋 [A note to Adventures in Shanghai, 1907], Wu Jianren defends traditional morality and wants to deliver his idea through fiction: “In this present society in crisis, we urgently need to restore our traditional morality (回復我固有之道德). Not only do we have to weichi 維持 (inherit) it, but also we have to shuru 輸入 (import) the [Western] civilization; in this way, we are able to gailiang 改良 (reform) and gexin 革新 (renovate) China.” See Wu Jianren, “Shanghai youcan lu ziba,” in Wu Jianren yanjiu ziliao, ed. Wei Shaochang, p. 149.

the long run completes his moralistic view, a vision which can be fulfilled only through the writings of vengeance.

*Restoration of Traditional Morality*

Wu Jianren reflects his pessimistic historical discourse by including the conventional signs of dynastic fall. In Chapter One, the incapable emperor Duzong is to blame for the dynastic collapse as he is *huangyin jiuse* (indulging in wine and women) and *gongshou quanjian* (submitting to villainous retainers) (10). In specific, the emperor counts on the treacherous ministers such as Wu Zhong and Jia Sidao (10). From an analogical perspective, Michael Berry explains Wu Jiaren’s criticism of Qing corruption: “Here we see also a parallel to the late Qing, when the excesses of the Dowager Empress’s court in the face of imperialist conquest, uprisings, and eventually revolution, were all too transparent.” Berry’s argument about parallelism, however, becomes debatable because the novelist could not agree with the general pattern of dynastic change according to the alternation of moral principles. In particular, Wu Jianren was unable to concede that the barbarian empire would establish moral rule. Because the coming dynasty would be morally illegitimate, and probably even worse, the empire on the verge of collapse should elicit literati sympathy.

Further textual examination reveals that Wu Jianren underlines the Qing imperial family’s hardship. Escaping from the allied foreign forces, Empress Dowager Cixi 66

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66 In “Benji” 本紀 [Basic annals] no. 46, *Songshi* 宋史 [Dynastic History of the Song, 1345] juan 46, the editors (in *zan* 贊 [commentary] section) point out that Duzong had problems; but they consider the fall of the Southern Song from the principles of dynastic change inevitable regardless of kingship. Because the Yuan had Tianming 天命 (the Mandate of Heaven), the rise and fall of dynasty are not decided by one or two monarchs (歷數有歸, 宋祚尋訖). See Tuotuo 脫脫 (Toghto et al., *Songshi*, ed. Zhonghua shuju bianjibu, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), p. 617.

(1835-1908) and the Guangxu emperor had to flee to Xi’an 西安 in August 1900 and returned to Beijing only in January 1902. The literati, who were worried about the collapse of moral principles, felt responsible for the national crisis. As a result, the imminent fall of Qing empire, though the imperial family is the most responsible, prompts the late Ming loyalism, echoing Shi Kefa’s 史可法 (1601-45) last remorseful words: “I regret only that the death of our former Emperor (Chongzhen 崇禎) has not been avenged.”

In Chapter 19, Quan Taihou 全太后 (the Empress Dowager Quan) and the Deyou 德祐 emperor (r. 1274-76) are in the Mongol captivity and the narrator’s sympathetic overtones are conspicuous:

Looking inside, [Hu Chou] could only see one middle-aged woman all in tattered old clothes, sitting cross-legged on the tukang 土炕. On a small table placed on the tukang a candle burned, as a 10-year-old boy sat with mianhuang jishou 面黄肌瘦 (a sallow and impoverished face). The woman, holding a little bunch of paper, taught the child how to discern characters. Readers; this lady and this child are the Empress and the Emperor. How pitiful to be humiliated by the foreigners! They were driven to these miserable conditions in which the Emperor was not permitted to read books. The Empress had no other way but to teach him only how to recognize a few characters. (188)

As Ouyang Jian presents this passage as an example countering anti-Manchuism, Wu Jianren portrays the imperial family driven to a miserable and humiliating condition; in doing so, the Empress Dowager of the Southern Song overlaps the image of Empress Dowager Cixi. Moreover, Wu Jianren illustrates this imperial agony as dramatic as the loyalist Hu Chou is startled to discover and laments. While sympathetic with the imperial family, the author of the historical novel had to fabricate official dynastic histories and even create events. In 1906, the first issue of All-Story Monthly includes

68 Struve, ed. and trans., *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm*, p. 31.

Wu Jianren’s regret of his fabrication in *A History of Pain*: “Writers of the historical novel should make it a rule to take facts from official dynastic histories. They should not mislead readers with an excuse of ‘mirroring the past to serve the present.’ Also, they should not either *xudan* 虛誕 (exaggerate or fabricate) or contradict official dynastic histories . . .” Wu admitted his previous “fabrication” and promised not to distort the historical details in the future.

However, Wu Jianren had no other choice but to fictionalize the past events because he had to carry out his criticism according to moral principles. In the first issue of *All-Story Monthly*, Wu Jianren wrote another article distinguishing historical novel from fictional creation. In “*Lishi xiaoshuo zongxu* 歷史小說總序 (General introduction to the historical novel, 1906), the historical novel’s complementary function is clear: “I really hope that those who read my historical novel today would feel as if they met an old friend when they read official dynastic histories tomorrow. Moreover, I also believe that those who were not interested in official dynastic histories yesterday would enjoy the pleasure of reading my historical novel today.” Wu Jianren defines “novel” not as a conventional fictional work, but as an explanatory and supplementary reference to comprehending official dynastic histories. Consequently, Wu Jianren’s historical novel becomes controversial when incorporating individual criticism. The preservation of historical facts is possible only insofar as inhibiting individual creativity. For this reason, his purpose of elucidating historical records is soon contradicted in his next historical novel: “It would be even more difficult (尤難之又難) to write a historical novel without

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70 Wu Jianren, “*Liang Jin yanyi zixu*,” p. 144. Wu Jianren’s friend Jiang Zichai 蔣紫儕 sent a letter and reprimanded *A History of Pain* in that writers of historical novel should be faithful to historical evidence.

losing *zhengxiang* 真相 (historical details) and also without diminishing pleasure. Its narrative is to be modified and certain changes are inevitable through the writing process. Sometimes leaving out content, sometimes digressing, novelists have to *dianran* 點染 (elaborate) the details.72 Wu Jianren justifies his fictional elaboration while contradicting his ambitious plan for the historical novel. In doing so, however, he is able to indulge in moral criticism.

Unlike the sympathetic illustrations of the imperial family, Wu Jianren is forthright when criticizing collaborators. As a result, the fictional representation of collaborators, thanks to exaggeration and fabrication, intensifies the effects of moral lessons and, ultimately, justifies Wu Jianren’s fictional revenge. Furthermore, the abusive ministers, who were responsible for the emperor’s lack of moral principles, are charged with collaboration. For example, Jia Sidao is portrayed as a representative collaborator who takes bribes from the Mongols and communicates with the Mongol Duyuanshuai 都元帥 (Commander-in-chief) Boyan 伯顔 (1236-95) (57). According to the *Dynastic History of the Song*, on the other hand, the minister Jia was exiled for his abusive power and particularly for his failed defense.73 Notably, moral justice is most strategic when the archenemy eventually ends with a dramatically shameful death. In Chapter Six, the punishment of Jia Sidao explains the reason why Wu Jianren fabricated the historical record. Inside the restroom at Mumian’an 木綿庵 (Mumian hermitage),

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Zheng Huchen 鄭虎臣 (1219-76) accomplishes his private revenge, which is also signified as a revenge of justice:

Zheng Huchen said: “Jia Sidao, today I kill you with my own hands. First, I avenge my father. Second, I avenge tianxia 天下 (the whole world). You had better to die than live to take punishment!” Finishing this, Zheng raised his arms high; his legs trembling, Jia tumbled over into the basin with his head down and with his legs up. Zheng held his two legs with one hand; struggling continued for a while with two hands fumbling around. After a while, however, Jia’s wriggling became subdued. Zheng released his hand: “All right, this truly is yichou wannian 遺臭萬年 (leaving a bad reputation for all time)!” (62)

Dispatched as an envoy to summon the villain, Zheng knows that Jia Sidao will only be imprisoned thanks to his previous service in the Song court. The sentence of imprisonment would not satisfy Zheng’s personal grudge; thus, Zheng acts first and his private revenge is justifiable considering that the villainous minister is selling his country to the Mongols. Moreover, the vengeful official does not need to rely on any legal measures because his reprimand is just enough for the coward to put his own head into excrement. The remaining process is to hold the legs until the treacherous subject is choked to death. The official dynastic history confirms Zheng’s revenge;74 however, Wu Jianren manipulates the records by detailing the place of revenge, the hilarious last struggle, and the moral lesson taken out of the collaborator’s last moment.

In Chapter 18, Wu Jianren remembers to punish Zhang Hongfan who contributed greatly to the rise of the Mongol Yuan and also to the fall of the Han Chinese Song. Along the route toward the dynastic collapse, the collaborator Zhang took part in every major battle with the Song; as a result, he is an essential character for creating the heroic

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74 In Songshi, Zheng Huchen 鄭虎臣 (1219-76) repeatedly pressed Jia Sidao to kill himself; but Jia did not commit it because he was still hopeful to hear a message of imperial pardon and rather waited until the imperial order was finalized. Thus, Zheng killed Jia with the following words: “I am killing you to avenge tianxia 天下 (the whole world). You have no regret, do you?” See Tuotuo et al., “Jianchen” no. 4, p. 10663.
ends of the loyalists: Wen Tianxiang’s execution after his capture, Zhang Shijie’s suicide after the defeat in Aishan, and Lu Xiufu’s jumping into the sea with the last emperor on his back. After all these achievements, Zhang Hongfan hears humiliating words from the Yuan minister Boluo:

“His Majesty has many times made conversations with me. You Chinese by nature change sides, so cannot be used importantly, needless to say receive chongxing (imperial favor). Raising a Chinese is like raising a dog. While hunting, we use them; yet, we must not feed them with the hunted game. Just give them excretions. In addition, we should make provision in case they should go crazy and bite men. In the past, using the Chinese in the war was just like releasing dogs for hunting. At this time, however, everything is in a good shape; so we should make sure to curb the Chinese because they may revolt! . . .” (183)

Instead of providing glory and fortune, the Yuan court plans to remove Zhang Hongfan, which makes Zhang feel betrayed and die of exasperation: he was only used as a means to conquer the Southern Song like the hunting dogs are destined to be cooked after the hunt is over. In reality, Zhang Hongfan died of illness resulting from a series of campaigns in the South. After returning from the battle ground, his condition became critical and Emperor Shizu of Yuan (Kublai Khan, r. 1260-94) took great care for his treatment and bestowed him posthumous titles.75 According to Wu Jianren’s fictional narrative, however, Zhang Hongfan is a representative collaborator and is portrayed as dying in disgrace. By contrast, the loyal minister Wen Tianxiang’s upright spirit appeals to Heaven; at his memorial service, supernatural events take place and quiet down only when his spirit tablet is corrected as the minister of the Song (191). In this way, Wu Jianren contradicts his definition of historical novel and freely amends official dynastic

75 According to “Liezhuan” [Memoirs] no. 43, Yuanshi [Dynastic History of the Yuan, 1370] juan 156, Zhang Hongfan died of zhangli (malaria) and received special recognitions including the posthumous title Huaiyang wang (the King of Huaiyang) and the epithet Xianwu (Dedicated and Brave), among others. See Song Lian et al., Yuanshi, ed. Zhonghua shuju bianjibu, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), p. 2454.
histories to accomplish his moral criticism. The characters are differently illustrated and evaluated; but they are all judged in light of moral principles.

At the end of Qing, Wu Jianren in *A History of Pain* reinforces his moral criticism on the basis of the historical analogy. To save China from the national crisis, the restoration of traditional morality was the most urgent responsibility he had to put forward. Nevertheless, this ambitious plan rather suggests a hopeless prospect. Despite the efforts the Song loyalists made, the Mongols were victorious and finally put an end to the empire. No matter how Wu Jianren amended and fabricated the historical records, he could not modify the dynastic alternation from the Song to the Yuan. Similarly, the late Qing literati’s historical analogies, however serious they were, could not prevent the fall of the Qing; rather, the emphasis on moral principles could have been a sign for the imminent dynastic collapse. Wu Jianren, however, had his own reasons for continuing his moral criticism. The collaborators such as Jia Sidao and Zhang Hongfan would appear not only in late Qing but also anytime China experienced foreign invasion. In addition, Wu Jianren knew very well that the collaborators would receive glory and fortune. As a result, he worked on writing vengeance, elucidating their shameful records against the criticism of fabricating historical reality; in doing so, he wanted to avenge the late Qing for its imminent national danger. And this is how the late Qing novelist took revenge on unjust history.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed Wu Jianren’s moral criticism of late Qing history. In *A History of Pain*, Wu Jianren formulated his fictional revenge while engaging with the
literati discussions of national salvation, historical narrative, and racial discourse. In the wake of the Boxer Uprising, the novelist illustrated the painful events of the Song-Yuan transition. While promoting patriotism, Wu Jianren deliberated on reasons for the national catastrophe; moreover, he emphasized the Chinese assistance to foreign invasion as the most fundamental problem. *A History of Pain* is significant in developing individual shame and humiliation into a sense of widespread national crisis. In particular, Wu Jianren elevated the Chinese cultural pride by comparing it with the barbarian culture; at the same time, he inspired a thirst for revenge with examples of the collaborators who were glad to sell their fatherland and also their consciences in exchange for glory and fortune. Reflecting on the Southern Song, Wu Jianren’s narrative facilitates the power of historical analogy; meanwhile, his analogical approach could be ambiguous and controversial in the late Qing constructions of collective memory.

Political groups all imagined the late Ming, but they differed in their political motives: Qing loyalism for anti-foreign nationalism and Han Chinese nationalism in relation to anti-Manchu perspective. Furthermore, the literature of vengeance, along with the late Ming accounts of atrocities, complicated even more the analysis of *A History of Pain*.

To elucidate Wu Jianren’s historical analogy, I examined the late Ming intellectual tendency toward historical pessimism. In the face of repeated atrocities, Wu Jianren considered the restoration of moral principles as the most urgent and conclusive measure. From multiple examples of atrocities, I noted that the illustrations take generic forms; that is, people felt atrocities equally painful, regardless whether foreigners were responsible or the Chinese were to blame. Wu Jianren searched the origins of these atrocities and discovered that the Chinese civilization is full of atrocious events.
Likewise, at the time of the Ming-Qing transition, intellectuals became doubtful of the relationship between dynastic change and moral principles; furthermore, the authors of historical novels realized that dynastic change does not testify to the alternation of moral principles. As a result, in *A History of Pain*, Wu Jianren learned from the late Ming that order and peace will come around only when moral virtue claims its legitimacy. Wu Jianren’s moral criticism, however, is meaningful because he multiplied his dedication despite his pessimism. Atrocious events would recur; moreover, collaborators would appear again and live well. However, the moral critic could not bear to witness the moral deterioration; accordingly, he had to modify and fabricate the details of official dynastic histories. In doing so, Wu Jianren was able to morally critique the unjust history and this is why he remembered China’s shame.
Chapter Three

Compiling Supernatural Revenge:
Lu Xun’s “Forging the Swords” and Expression of Complicity

Introduction: Renewing Ancient Stories

In Speaking to History (2009), Paul A. Cohen explores how modern Chinese political circles expressed their ideas through references to a traditional revenge tale. Cohen identifies the antagonistic political struggles such as contained in the Later Han scholar Zhao Ye’s 趙曄 Wu Yue Chunqiu 吳越春秋 (A chronicle of Wu and Yue, 58-75) on the basis of the woxin changdan 臥薪嘗膽 (sleeping on brushwood and tasting gall) tales of Chunqiu 春秋 (the Spring and Autumn) period (722-481 BC). This story of revenge focuses on two monarchs, Fuchai 夫差 (r. 495-473 BC) of the state of Wu 吳 and Goujian 勾踐 (r. 496-465 BC) of Yue 越. Cohen considers the feud narrative as a form of collective memory and examines how “the Goujian story has affected Chinese perceptions of their experience.”¹ That is, according to their own motives, distinct political groups engaged differently with the Chinese collective memory; in this way, they sought to consolidate their spiritual justification in the realization, remembrance and endurance of shame. Cohen’s study is significant in that he illustrates how an old revenge tale has survived for centuries through the diverse political struggles of modern China. Cohen’s study thus further illuminates a body of scholarship that examines how modern Chinese intellectuals responded to particular political exigencies through their writing practice.

For example, Lu Xun’s 鲁迅 (1881-1936) “Zhujian” 鑄劍 (Forging the swords, 1927)\(^2\) would seem to be problematic if discussed only within the framework of similar political debates. As a literary historian and intellectual writer, Lu Xun did not hesitate to express his political ideas by rewriting “old stories.” Nonetheless, Lu Xun opposed the idea that literature simply serves political ideologies: He wanted to reflect his unique philosophy through rewriting existing fictional narratives in a manner that reflects the historical backdrop of modern China. As Marston Anderson puts it, an analysis of the “iconoclastic mission” either aims to “dismantle Confucian social morality (the May Fourth)” or to “subvert the Maoist ‘revolutionary romanticism’ of the Cultural Revolution (the post-Mao periods).”\(^3\) By looking beyond the political perspective, I will analyze Lu Xun’s intellectual legacy while examining possible motives expressed through his rewriting of old tales. Though Lu Xun preserved the general plotline of the Meijianchi 眉間尺 tale, he also drew from its various versions and elaborated the original texts in order to develop his own idea of revenge. I argue that this delicate and careful elaboration may disclose Lu Xun’s philosophy as an extension of his overarching criticism of Chinese culture. In addition, I will explore Lu Xun’s strategic narrative techniques in rewriting the old tale as a unique expression of his own subjective mindset. In my analysis, Lu Xun’s revision complicates the political discussion of rewriting old tales.

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tales, expanding it to include reflections on philosophy, on culture and ultimately on Lu Xun himself.

I will start my argument with an exploration of “Forging the Swords” in relation to Lu Xun’s life, Meijianchi’s filial revenge, the problems of political interpretation, and the benefits of Lu Xun’s choice of the zhiguai 志怪 (accounts of anomalies) genre. In doing so, I will argue that Lu Xun sought to express his ideas creatively while attempting to free himself of the constraints of Confucian morality. By using the supernatural tale, I argue, Lu Xun liberated himself from the moral norms prevalent in the historical records. Next, I will further illustrate Lu Xun’s handling of narrative techniques with regard to his self-conscious formulation of an incoherent narrative structure. Proposing Lu Xun’s references to contemporary social problems to explain his inconsistency, I will note his motive of sympathy as a source for artistic formulation. In addition, Lu Xun’s narrative techniques use distortion and comic absurdity as strategies to embody his philosophical reasoning. Finally, Lu Xun’s rewriting of the Meijianchi tale effectively solidifies his criticism of the Chinese mentality. With reference to Lu Xun’s essays, prefaces and letters, I will give particular attention to the meanings inherent in decapitation. Meanwhile, I will note how Lu Xun’s textual modifications implicate the Chinese audience’s search for amusement and entertainment while the author avoids revealing his own complicity with this problematic mindset. “Forging the Swords” is an experiment in Lu Xun’s careful deliberation of literary methodology; that is, Lu Xun projected his philosophical vision of revenge while engaging the original frame of the supernatural tale. With his meticulous stylization of narrative techniques, Lu Xun reveals the Chinese mentality (including his own) as problematic. In sum, gruesome and ridiculous
illustrations of decapitation testify to Lu Xun’s philosophy of revenge, which was only possible with his literary talent.

**Retelling Old Tales**

Lu Xun started to write “Forging the swords” in autumn 1926 and published it in *Mangyuan* 莽原 magazine April 1927 with its original title “Meijianchi.” Changing its title to “Forging the Swords” first in his *Zixuan ji* 自選集 (Author’s selected works, 1932), Lu Xun included the short story in the collection *Gushi xinbian* 故事新編 (Old tales retold, 1936). In this new collection, Lu Xun rewrote ancient Chinese tales such as myth, legend and historical records set before and during the Zhanguo 戰國 (Warring States) period (403-221 BC). Notably, “Forging the Swords” takes its literary source from the Wei-Jin 魏晉 period collections such as Cao Pi’s 曹丕 (187-226) *Lieyi zhuan* 列異傳 (Chronicle of strange events) and Gan Bao’s 干寶 (fl. 315) *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (Record of the seeking the spirits). In a letter dated February 17, 1936, Lu Xun claimed that he faithfully represented the general plotline of the original text: “I totally forgot where I took the source for ‘Forging the Swords.’ I only remember that the original source was about two or three hundred characters long; I just *pupai* 鋪排 (arranged) it without any change. It is also likely that I have referred to *leishu* 類書 (encyclopedias) of the Tang 唐 (618-907) and Song 宋 (960-1279) or *dilizhi* 地理志 (monographs on administrative geographies) (in the ‘Sanwang mu’ 三王墓 [Tombs of the three kings]).

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*The eight stories in Old Tales Retold originate from three different categories: first, “Butian” 補天 [Mending heaven] and “Benyue” 奔月 [The flight to the moon] are from myths; second, “Lishui” 理水 [Curbing the flood], “Forging the Swords” and “Qisi” 起死 [Resurrecting the dead] are from legends; third, “Caiwei” 采薇 [Gathering vetch], “Chuguan” 出關 [Leaving the pass] and “Feigong” 非攻 [Opposing aggression] are from historical records.*
section); but, I had no way to look it up again.”\(^5\) This statement is further supported by Lu Xun’s compilation of *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鈎沉 (Ancient anecdotes uncovered, 1938) which includes Ganjiang 干將 and Moye 莫耶 story appearing in *Chronicle of Strange Events.*

*Lu Xun, History, and Political Interpretations*

In analyzing “Forging the Swords,” reference to changes in Lu Xun’s life can be informative. In “Xuyan” 序言 (Preface to *Old Tales Retold*, 1935), Lu Xun provides background information regarding when and how he began to rewrite the stories originating from legends and myths:

In the autumn of 1926, I was living alone in a stone house in Amoy (廈門), looking out over the ocean. I leafed through old books, no breath of life around me, a void in my heart. But letters kept coming from the Weiming 未名 Press in Beijing asking for articles for the magazine. Since I was in no mood to think of the present, old memories stirred in my heart, and I wrote the ten essays in *Zhaohua xishi* 朝花夕拾 (Dawn flowers picked at dusk). And, as before, I picked up ancient legends and the like in preparation for writing the eight stories in *Old Tales Retold.*\(^6\)

According to Lu Xun, his stay in Xiamen provided him with the time for leisurely reading through ancient texts which simultaneously motivated his writing of *Old Tales Retold.* His relocation to Xiamen, however, explains some important instances of political unrest. Financial difficulties may have driven Lu Xun to retreat from Beijing;\(^7\)

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\(^7\) The political disorder at that time may have financially impoverished Lu Xun. Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 (1865-1936), who previously retired in 1920, came back to the power in 1924. In the end of 1925, the war between Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 (1882-1948) and Zhang Zuolin 張作霖 (1875-1928) broke out, and Duan took refuge to get away from Feng’s arrest order. After Feng’s troops retreated from Beijing, Duan came back again but he was forced to resign in April
more importantly, Lu Xun was under surveillance and had received death threats from Duan Qirui’s 段祺瑞 (1865-1936) Beiyang Junfa Zhengfu 北洋軍閥政府 (The Beiyang Military Regime) due to his involvement with the March 18 Incident in 1926. In specific, after Jingbao 京報 (The Capital Daily) released a list of names of the nearly fifty rioters (including Lu Xun), friends subsequently urged him to hide out. Initially taking shelter at the Mangyuan company on March 26th, Lu Xun changed places several times in Beijing from the Yamamoto 山本 (Shanben) Japanese hospital to a German hospital, and again to a French hospital. Lu Xun’s political worries mobilized him to move to Xiamen: this historical backdrop may very well have motivated him to express his criticism of Duan’s politics in Beijing.

“Forging the Swords” begins with Meijianchi’s mission to avenge his father’s death. Filial revenge against an abusive king could imply a criticism of the abrasive warlord regime. On turning 16, Meijianchi embarks on his journey to accomplish his mission. Authorizing his act of filial revenge, Meijianchi’s mother tells him about Ganjiang’s tragic and premature death. Ganjiang’s wife Moye (though Lu Xun never specifies these names) quotes his last words directly:

“‘Do not grieve,’ he said. ‘There is no way out. Tears can’t wash away fate. I’ve been prepared for this for some time.’ His eyes seemed to dart lightning as he placed a sheath on my knee. ‘This is the xiongjian 雄劍 (male sword),’ he told me. ‘Keep it. Tomorrow I will take the cijian 雌劍 (female sword) to the king. If I don’t come back, you’ll know I’m dead. Won’t you be

1926 due to Zhang’s objection. So-called a “regency cabinet” was established after Duan, but it ran short of finance to carry out administrative works; for example, government schools were closed because they could not pay utility bills and teachers. See James E. Sheridan, “The Warlord Era: Politics and Militarism under the Peking Government, 1916-28,” in The Cambridge History of China, Republican China 1912-1949, Part 1, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 315-16.


9 Lin, Lu Xun zhuang, pp. 264-65.
brought to bed in four or five months? Don’t grieve, but bear our child and bring him up well. As soon as he’s grown, give him this sword and tell him to cut off the king’s head to avenge me!” (435-36; 82)\(^{10}\)

Meijianchi’s mother recreates the father’s cry for vengeance to her son in a dramatic but conventional fashion. The son learns that his father died before he was born and his father’s aggrieved death powerfully motivates the filial piety. Meijianchi is further enraged by his father’s head and body being buried separately at the qianmen 前門 (front gate) and in the houyuan 後苑 (back garden). All of this information about his father’s death inspires the son’s thirst for revenge: “Meijianchi felt as if he were on fire and sparks were flashing from every hair of his head. He clenched his fists in the dark till the knuckles cracked” (436; 82). In addition, the king is illustrated as being abrasive, a representative image of a despot: “The king had long since tired of his old masters’ sermons and the clowning of his plump dwarfs; recently he had even been finding insipid the marvelous tricks of rope-walkers, pole-climbers, jugglers, somersaulters, sword-swallowers and fire-spitters. He was given to bursts of rage, during which he would draw his sword to kill men on the slightest pretext” (442-43; 90). The king’s taste for entertainment instantly turns into anger; moreover, he uses the blue sword, which Meijianchi’s father had forged, to kill innocent subjects. In this way, Meijianchi can proclaim his revenge in the name of both filial piety and punishment for tyranny. In doing so, Lu Xun’s filial revenge may suggest its political implications of criticizing those who brutalized the commoners, which further mandates the contemporary need for avenging the victims of abusive power.

\(^{10}\) All the numbers in parentheses through this chapter indicate the page numbers for the quoted passages taken from the primary texts; first the Chinese original; then, the English translation.
This political interpretation of Lu Xun’s story has been widely shared by scholars who associate his vengeful mindset with revolutionary protest. In general, these political interpretations regard “Forging the Swords” as an excellent example of satirical criticism of contemporary Chinese society. For example, the short story is understood as a “Lu Xunesque” representation of people’s resistance through revenge motif: “By illustrating the collaboration between Yan zhi Aozhe 宴之敖者 (‘Entertainer of the Party’; this refers to Heise ren 黑色人 [the Dark Man])\(^1\) and Meijianchi, ‘Forging the Swords’ spills the blood of the king. . . . When the ruling class massacres people, they will provoke serious resistance even at the risk of inciting mutual collapse, which represents people’s uncompromising demand for revenge.”\(^12\) Furthermore, Lu Xun’s spirit of resistance is discussed in relation to a series of previous atrocities: The usurpation of Xinhai 辛亥 Revolution’s (1911) achievements, the martyrdom of Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907) and Xu Xilin 徐錫麟 (1873-1907), Yuan Shikai’s 袁世凱 (1859-1916) great suppression of revolutionaries, the May 30th Incident, and the case of Women’s Normal University.\(^13\)

Accordingly, the three figures in the story become allegorical: the Chinese people (Meijianchi), Lu Xun (the Dark Man) and the warlords (the king). This scholarship approaches Lu Xun’s works from his political motives and the text’s political implications; that is, the struggle against “reactionary” groups explains the intent of

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1. Yan zhi Aozhe 宴之敖者 is Lu Xun’s pen name which was used only once in “《Sitang zhuanwen zaji》 tiji” 《俟堂專文雜集》題記 [Preface to Lu Xun’s Collection of Ancient Brick Rubbings, 1924]. According to Xu Guangping 許廣平 (1898-1968), Lu Xun used a pozi 破字 (broken characters) method for comprehending its meaning: a man who was driven out (出放) of his family (家) by a Japanese woman (日女). See Lu Xun, “《Sitang zhuanwen zaji》 tiji,” in Lu Xun, Lu Xun quanji, vol. 10, pp. 68-69, esp. editor’s footnote, p. 69.

2. Lin, Lu Xun zhuoan, p. 290.

“Forging the Swords.” Although this historical criticism can suggest a strategy for associating Lu Xun with modern Chinese politics, it is always dangerous to generalize and delimit the spiritual scope of Lu Xun in spite of his reliance on classical sources to generate fictional representation.

Filial Revenge in the Supernatural Tale

“Forging the Swords” draws its textual source from the “accounts of anomalies.” For this reason, various supernatural illustrations complicate the discussion of revenge; furthermore, supernatural effects mystify the story’s larger message by making its meaning ambiguous. For example, Meijianchi uses his sword to decapitate himself, then presents the sword to the Dark Man: “The voice in the darkness was silent. Meijianchi raised his hand to draw the blue sword from his back and with the same movement swung it forward toward the nape of his neck. As his head fell on the green moss at his feet, he handed the sword to the Dark Man” (441; 88-89). Later on, the Dark Man successfully decapitates the king; but this is achievable only when the heads of all three are thrown into the same cauldron: “Presently the Dark Man and Meijianchi stopped biting. They left the king’s head and swam once round the edge of the cauldron to see whether their enemy was shamming or not. Assured that the king was indeed duanqi 斷氣 (dead), they simu xiangshi 四目相視 (exchanged glances) and weiwei yixiao 微微一笑 (smiled). Then closing their eyes, their faces towards the sky, they sank to the bottom of the water” (448; 96). With these supernatural and unrealistic events, Lu Xun’s engagement with revenge does not suggest the coherent theme of filial revenge. The Dark Man intercepts the filial revenge and finally the decapitated heads are personified; thus, these
arrangements are too supernatural to convince readers the story either signifies filial piety or criticism of villainous power. Because Lu Xun interweaves a mystery into a gruesome filial revenge tale, his story complicates the revenge motif, which ultimately renders the story as ambiguous.

Lu Xun is well known for his scholarly command of premodern Chinese culture. Though Lu Xun criticized the cultural “backwardness” of China, the modern writer spent considerable time in compiling and annotating both fiction and non-fiction works of premodern China.\(^\text{14}\) Considering his career as a literary historian, Lu Xun must have been familiar with the various revenge tales contained in Chinese historical records.\(^\text{15}\)

For instance, Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 Shiji 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian, 91 BC) includes various historical revenge cases taken from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. In “Wu Zixu liezhuan” 伍子胥列傳 (Memoir of Wu Zixu), Sima Qian illustrates filial revenge. According to Sima’s records, Wu Zixu (d. 484 BC) is a tragic figure who was determined to avenge his father Wu She 伍奢 and elder brother Wu

\(^\text{14}\) Chen Pingyuan 陳平原 discusses Lu Xun’s broad and deep knowledge of premodern Chinese studies. According to Chen’s list, Lu Xun’s four works of literary history are Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe [A brief history of Chinese fiction], Gu xiaoshuo gouchen 古小說詞典 [Ancient anecdotes uncovered], Tang Song chuanqi 唐宋傳奇集 [A collection of chuanqi in Tang and Song], and Xiaoshuo jianwenchao 小說舊聞鈔 [A record of old anecdotes in fiction]. His works of compilation and annotation are Kuaiji jun gushu jazi 會稽郡故書雜集 [A collection of ancient books in Kuaiji], Xie Cheng Hou Han shu 謝承後漢書 [The Xie Cheng edition of the Dynastic History of the Later Han], Xi Kang ji 録康集 [The Xi Kang collection], Lingbiao luyi 嶺表錄異 [A record of strange events in Lingnan area], and Hanhua shike 漢畵石刻 [Stone inscriptions of Han dynasty paintings]. Additional works are Han wenxue shi gangyao 漢文學史綱要 [A compendium of Han dynasty literary history], Siang zhuowen zuiji 佚堂專文集 [Lu Xun’s collection of ancient brick rubbings, 1924], Lu Xun jijiao shike shougao 魯迅輯校石刻手稿 [Manuscripts of Lu Xun’s compilation and annotation of stone inscriptions], Lu Xun jijiao gushi shougao 魯迅輯校古籍手稿 [Manuscripts of Lu Xun’s compilation and annotation of ancient books], and Lu Xun cang Hanhua xiang 魯迅藏漢畵像 [Lu Xun’s collection of Han dynasty portraits]. See Chen Pingyuan, “Zuowei wenxue shijia de Lu Xun” 作爲文學史家的魯迅 [Lu Xun as a literary historian], in Lu Xun yanjiu de lishi pipan—Lun Lu Xun (er) 魯迅硏究的歷史批判—論魯迅 (二) [Historical critique of the Lu Xun study: Discussing Lu Xun (2)], eds. Sun Yu 孫郁 and Huang Qiaosheng 黃喬生 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), p. 345.

\(^\text{15}\) For a collection of excerpts taken from historical records, see Wang Li 王立 and Liu Weiying 劉衛英, eds., Zhongguo gudai xiayi fuchou shiliao cuibian 中國古代俠義復仇史料萃編 [Selected historical sources of chivalric vengeance in premodern China] (Ji’nan: Qilu shushe, 2009). For the revenge theme in literature, see Wang Li 魯迅的研究的歷史批判—論魯迅 (二) [The revenge theme in traditional Chinese literature] (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998).
Shang 伍尚 after King Ping of Chu 楚平王 (r. 613-591 BC) unjustly slaughtered them.

Wu is also an audacious figure who served Helü 闔閭 the King of Wu 吳 in order to destroy his homeland Chu. Moreover, “Cike liezhuan” 刺客列傳 (Memoirs of assassins) narrates a story about the loyal minister Jing Ke 荊軻 of Yan 燕 who attempted to assassinate Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 by asking for Fan Yuqi’s 樊於期 head. Possibly serving as antecedent for “Forging the Swords,” Fan’s self-decapitation elicits sympathy, as the aggrieved general does immediately after hearing Jing Ke’s sympathetic words: “Qin’s treatment of you may be called harsh indeed, General! Your parents and kinsmen have all been killed or enslaved.” If Lu Xun had intended to express only moral concerns, Chinese historiography is full of detailed reports that are equally convincing. Without choosing this alternative, Lu Xun turned to the supernatural archive in which the intended message must always be decoded.

The revenge tales in Sima Qian’s historiography, however, restrict themes to existing moral codes such as Confucian morality. Historical events in Records of the Grand Historian were widely read, and Sima Qian’s critical remarks were respected as an excellent example of Chinese commentary tradition. For example, Sima Qian at the end of “Memoir of Wu Zixu” leaves a critique: “If Wu Zixu had accompanied (his father) She in death, how would he differ from an ant or mole-cricket? Casting aside a lesser duty, he wiped clean a great disgrace, and his name has endured through later generations.


Moving indeed, isn’t it?”

Likewise, Sima Qian defines Jing Ke’s plan as being both filial and loyal as in Jing’s words “the General’s foe will be repaid and Yan’s humiliation will be erased!”

Furthermore, Sima Qian even praises the resolute assassins, taking for granted their posthumous reputation: “[I]t is perfectly clear that they had all determined upon the deed. They did not sell their goals short. How could it be perverse that their names should be handed down to later generations?”

According to Sima Qian, the historical figures such as Wu Zixu and Jing Ke are admirable in light of their determined pursuit for their moral belief driven by filial piety or loyalty. Sima Qian’s commentary is significant in that he criticized earlier events according to the moral standards of his time; in doing so, he was later respected as a role model especially for the Confucian literati whose careers were marginalized. Thus, Sima Qian’s critique delimits the revenge motif to Confucian moral norms. If Lu Xun had taken his source from historiography (for example *Records of the Grand Historian*), he would have run the risk of reinforcing outmoded moral standards; otherwise, he would have had to modify the original storylines as he did in other pieces of *Old Tales Retold*.

In addition, the modification of the traditional sources, especially when they are the classic examples of traditional morality, results in a controversy over how effective his satire really is. Insofar as Lu Xun is to disclose his criticism in that traditional moral codes had sanctioned Chinese people with moral instructions, the modern critic has the

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responsibilities to incorporate his critical positions. Lu Xun could challenge the traditional sources with his critical modification; in doing so, the May Fourth critic had to confront the criticism of “fabricating” historical sources. More importantly, Lu Xun’s motive for criticism becomes obvious; consequently, his modification of ancient tales is prone to exaggerate its satirical effect instead of fortifying its intended criticism. Unlike historical sources, the accounts of anomalies save Lu Xun’s trouble for carrying out his confrontational task. The Meijianchi tale has multiple versions, which increases its ambiguity when the supernatural legend had been incorporated into the written records.

Editorial notes for Record of the Seeking the Spirits display the difficult task to pin down the original and conclusive source. For example, the king’s names differ from the King of Chu to the King of Jin and as well as the King Hui of Wei (r. 369-319 BC).

Also, the exact location for the Tombs of the Three Kings remains ambiguous. Alternatively, Lu Xun was able to benefit from this ambiguity because he could deliver his messages in the name of engaging with the editorial work of the Meijianchi tale.

Lu Xun explores ways to challenge conventional revenge tales by stylizing classical sources of supernatural tales. As a technique for this purpose, Lu Xun polishes

21 G. Andrew Stuckey, Old Stories Retold: Narrative and Vanishing Pasts in Modern China (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010), p. 28.

22 See Gan Bao, Soushen ji [Record of the seeking the spirits] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), pp. 128-29. The editorial notes incorporate multiple sources to compare and contrast the different editions of the Meijianchi tale. The editors look up the sources such as collections and leishu (encyclopedias): Daoshi’s 道世 (d. 683) Fayuan zhulin 法苑珠林 [Forest of gems in the garden of the Dharma, 668], Li Fang 李昉 (925-96), et al., comps., Taiping yulan 太平御覽 [Imperially reviewed encyclopedia of the Taiping era, 984]. Other sources are taken from dilizhi 地理志 (monographs on administrative geographies): Yue Shi’s 楊士 [Gazetteer of the world during the Taiping period, 976-83]. “Dilizhi” 地理志 in Fang Xuanling’s 房玄齡 (578-648) Jinshu 晉書 [Dynastic History of the Jin, 644], “Rushui” 汝水 in Li Daoyuan’s 雌道元 (d. 527) Shuijingzhu 本經注 [Commentaries to Book of Waterways, c. 515-24], Li Tai’s 李泰 (618-52) Guadizhi 括地志 [Compiled monographs on administrative geographies, 642], Gu Zuyu’s 顧祖禹 (1631-92) Dushi fangyu jiyao 證史方輿紀要 [Essentials of geography for reading history, c. 1630s-c. 1660s]. For the technical terms and sources of information, I consulted Endymion Wilkinson, Chinese History: A Manual/中國歷史手冊, rev. and enl. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000).
the original supernatural tale without destroying its overarching narrative structure.

Regarding Lu Xun’s revision, Maruo Tsuneki particularly notes Lu Xun’s elaboration of characters. For example, in his version Meijianchi’s father castigates the king’s jealous personality: “The king is caiyi (suspicious) and canren (cruel).

Now that I’ve forged two swords the like of which have never been seen, he is bound to kill me to prevent my forging swords for any of his rivals who might oppose or surpass him” (435; 82). The details of the elaboration differ from the original sources. In Chronicle of Strange Events, Meijianchi’s father hides the male sword and is killed for deceiving the king. Record of the Seeking the Spirits adds up more details in that Meijianchi’s father causes his death not only for deceiving the king but also because his forging dragged on for three years. On the basis of multiple original texts, Lu Xun applies “minor” changes, adding jealousy and fear to suspicion and cruelty. Thus, Lu Xun’s editorial change continues to produce multiple editions. Actually, historians have been suspicious whether Gan Bao compiled Record of the Seeking the Spirits; furthermore, his preface along with his biography contained in Jinshu (Dynastic History of the Jin) all the more exacerbates the authorship question. Because the Meijianchi tale has an ambiguous origin with various versions, Lu Xun’s adaptation of “Forging the Swords” is faced with less constraints and less challenged by the need of

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being faithful to the original narrative frame. With this creative freedom, Lu Xun could explore avenues to maneuver his stylistic elaboration with a revenge tale as the vehicle. In doing so, Lu Xun frees himself from Confucian moral standards while claiming “Forging the Swords” simply as another edition of the Meijianchi tale.

**Crafting Implied Messages**

Because of its ambiguous meanings, “Forging the Swords” received criticisms that oppose political interpretations. Leo Ou-fan Lee for example understands Lu Xun’s Meijianchi tale not only as a reflection of “surrealism” but also as a “metaphysical” literary fashion. Lu Xun continued presenting his “philosophy” of revenge, which took shape after “Moluo shi li shuo” 摩羅詩力說 (On the power of Mara poetry, 1908).

Accordingly to Lee, “Forging the Swords” does not carry any specific political significance; instead, it manifests how Lu Xun expressed his personal idea of revenge: “The revenge act has nothing to do with any social reality—ancient or modern—but is essentially ‘metaphysical.’ If a meaning has to be sought in this tale, we can only look for clues in Lu Xun’s personal outlook on the larger issues of life and death, life and art.”27 Rather than drawing a parallel between his revenge narrative and contemporary political events, Lee looks into Lu Xun’s philosophical venture through ambiguity which the author suggested with indirect messages. In his letter dated March 28, 1936, Lu Xun confessed that he added obscure passages: “In ‘Forging the Swords,’ I think nothing is incomprehensible except the meaning of the song. Its meaning is ambiguous. Since a strange person sings a song accompanied by a decapitated head, we ordinary people find

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it hard to comprehend.” Lu Xun’s text is complicated; but the meaning is even more ambiguous in a non-political context. For instance, Lee interprets the avenger as Lu Xun’s “inner nemesis within himself that undermines the humanitarianism of his external stances.” Lee’s argument prompts the questions of Lu Xun’s motive for writing in relation to contemporary Chinese events; instead, he suggests that Lu Xun’s old tale deepen his “philosophical” explorations.

“Transaesthetic” Formulation

Because Lu Xun has a reputation as the forerunner of May Fourth social realism, readers approach his work from a decidedly political perspective. In this regard, the supernatural treatment of fictional narrative may give rise to a challenging question: Can “Forging the Swords” constitute textual evidence for political criticism of modern China? This question asks whether the supernatural event is comprehensible enough to inspire political interpretations, particularly when an ancient Chinese tale forms its foundation. In “The Will to the Transaesthetic” (1999), Jian Xu agrees with Lee’s finding of textual ambiguity, but he nonetheless finds Lu Xun’s story politically stimulating. For example, the gruesome spectacle (such as the biting among the three chopped-off heads) should be read as having “a social reference.” To support this, Xu delves into Theodor W. Adorno’s (1903-69) aesthetic theory and argues that Lu Xun’s seemingly “disunifying” elements are essential in understanding his art form:

This radical concept has significant utility for understanding the workings of Lu Xun’s fictional art, and I think there is no better term than “truth content”


to name those effects of Lu Xun’s fiction. . . . For Adorno great works of art come into existence out of a willingness to violate artistic unity and expose a loss of coherence in face of the antagonisms inherent in social reality, to the point of risking their own deaths. The unusual strength of Lu Xun’s fictional art is not lessened by those disunifying forces that subvert the coherence of his narratives; on the contrary, his art looks to them as its very source. The essence of the complex art of Lu Xun’s short story form, so admired by later writers and critics, lies in its potential for calling forth truth content, for mediating truth content and thus articulating social contradictions.30

Adorno’s justification of incongruent artistic unity results from his preference for Franz Kafka’s (1883-1924) prose and Samuel Beckett’s (1906-89) plays. According to Adorno, a style such as the Theatre of the Absurd should reflect the problems widespread in society; thus, the author’s criticism of social reality necessarily disrupts coherent plotlines and additionally generates an inconsistent text.31 Pointing out that Lu Xun’s narrative is “metaphysical,” Xu proposes “Forging the Swords” as a convincing illustration of Adorno’s theory. That is, Xu presents Lu Xun’s puzzling arrangement as a deliberate elaboration, which should be included when discussing Lu Xun’s fictional representation. Because Lu Xun lamented having witnessed atrocities in contemporary China, he reflected his abhorrence by contradicting his own fictional narrative. Xu’s study is insightful in his relocation of Lu Xun’s works from artistic inconsistency to aesthetic sophistication.

In “Forging the Swords,” Lu Xun’s “transaesthetic” strategy reinforces delicate portrayals of fictional characters. Lu Xun not only made editorial changes to the original


Meijianchi tale but also elaborated the story by extending the narrative according to his consciousness of social reality. In fact, Lu Xun’s portrayal of characters is insufficient for them to qualify as vindictive heroes. Instead of highlighting their superior talents, “Forging the Swords” provides information which may disrupt the formation of the revenge motif. For example, Meijianchi is neither courageous nor determined to take violent action. At the moment of deciding whether he should kill a rat, Meijianchi hesitates and vacillates between sympathy and detachment:

Now this small pointed red nose struck him as *kelian* 可憐 (pathetic). He thrust his reed under the creature’s belly. The rat clutched at it, and after catching its breath clambered up it. But the sight of its whole body—sopping black fur, bloated belly, worm-like tail—struck him again as so *kehen kezeng* 可恨可憎 (revolting) that he hastily shook the reed. The rat dropped back with a splash into the vat. Then he hit it several times over the head to make it sink.

Now the *songming* 松明 (pine chip) had been changed six times. The rat, exhausted, was floating submerged in the middle of the jar, from time to time straining slightly towards the surface. Once more the boy was seized with pity. He broke the reed in two and, with considerable difficulty, fished the creature up and put it on the floor. (433; 79)

Before informing readers of the maternal request to avenge his father, Lu Xun uses this episode to illustrate Meijianchi’s indecisiveness. The mother is concerned about Meijianchi’s *xingqing* 性情 (nature) being too *yourou* 優柔 (soft), changing constantly from pity to hatred and hatred to pity without going to extremes: his mind is *buleng bure* 不冷不熱 (lukewarm) (434; 80). Predicting that his assassination attempt will fail, Meijianchi’s mother is aware that his nature is not that of a successful avenger. This passage is Lu Xun’s fictional invention which contradicts its narrative development driven by Meijianchi’s “brave” self-decapitation. Moreover, Meijianchi’s irresolution over the fate of a rat does not foreshadow his head-to-head combat inside the cauldron.
To comprehend Lu Xun’s intention embedded in his incoherent fictional representation, an overview of Lu Xun’s creative stylistic cultivation is necessary.

In his preface to *Nahan* (Call to arms, 1923), Lu Xun clarifies his style. In the name of moral responsibility, Lu Xun proclaims that he had no other choice but to avoid pessimism. Clarifying for the first time his usage of strategic “distortions,” Lu Xun underscores that his sympathetic mindset motivated him to manipulate artistically incongruous editorial works:

[Y]et, perhaps because I have not entirely forgotten the grief of my past loneliness, I sometimes *nahan* (call out) to *weijie* (encourage) those fighters who are galloping on in loneliness, so that they do not lose heart. Whether my cry is brave or sad, repellent or ridiculous, I do not care. However, since it is a call to arms, I must naturally obey my *jiangling* (general’s orders). This is why I often resort to *qubi* ("distortions").32 . . . For our *zhujiang* (generalissimos) then were against *xiaoji* (pessimism). And I, for my part, did not want to infect with the loneliness I had found so bitter those young people who were still dreaming pleasant dreams, just as I had done when young.33

This is one of the most commonly cited passages when discussing Lu Xun’s aesthetics of fictional realism. Regarded as the author’s admission of his stylistic distortions, this passage is regularly given as persuasive evidence to corroborate Lu Xun’s necessary

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32 The English translation of *qubi* should incorporate how Lu Xun creatively engaged its conventional usage. *Hanyu da cidian* [A grand dictionary of Chinese] defines the term into three different categories: first, when historians intentionally hide facts due to a certain excuse; second, when judges make a judicial decision out of sympathy, not according to the code; finally, when writers speak strategically in an “*weiwan*” (indirect) way. The dictionary presents the writings of Lu Xun and Ba Jin as examples of the third category. In addition to Lu Xun’s passage in the preface to *Nahan*, Ba Jin used *qubi* to express in “*zhuanwan mojiao*” (indirect or oblique) manner as a means to escape from the censors. See Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風 et al., eds., *Hanyu da cidian*, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe, 2003), p. 570. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang use “innuendoes” in their translation. Marston Anderson prefers to use “distortions” due to his attention to the traditional usage of the term. See Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 86-87. Lu Xun must have thought about the traditional usage of *qubi* in Chinese historiography. Nonetheless, Lu Xun’s *qubi* implies more than a simple distortion because he developed his original meaning as a means of indirection. Though I follow Anderson’s usage and translate *qubi* as “distortions,” the meaning is more complicated, which is why I always put quotation marks whenever the English translation appears.

indirection at the expense of coherent narrative flow. Lu Xun portrayed fictional characters sympathetically because he could not bear to witness them suffer in a miserable and hopeless reality. This artistic “imperfection” was also recognized by the author himself: “It is clear, then, that my short stories fall far short of being works of art.”34 Lu Xun’s self-criticism was shared by contemporary critics such as Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾 (1897-1984) who criticized Call to Arms for being yongsu 庸俗 (vulgar). Because Lu Xun’s stories are artistically imperfect, Cheng argued, his short stories cannot be called chun wenyi 純文藝 (pure literature).35 Despite this criticism, Lu Xun never changed his “vulgar” style; instead, he was even glad to embrace criticism and to elaborate on the “distorting” technique to hallmark his overarching literary strategy.

Lu Xun’s “distortion” technique, however, signifies more than a simple contradictory narrative flow. Lu Xun’s sympathy for those whose life was in pain gives rise to his artistic imperfection. Insofar as his writings can give hope for them, the May Fourth writer could “intervene” the narrative by using whatever effective means to diminish the pessimistic effect. Nonetheless, Lu Xun’s writings, though he had “enough” reason for “distorting” narratives, remain pessimistic; furthermore, the technique even fortifies the pessimistic social reality. In his preface to Call to Arms, Lu Xun presented two examples for his strategic distortions: “I made a wreath appear from nowhere at the son’s grave in ‘Yao’ 藥 (Medicine, 1919), while in ‘Mingtian’ 明天 (Tomorrow, 1920) I did not say that Shan Sisaodzi 單四嫂子 (Fourth Shan’s wife) never dreamed of her little


Engaging Lu Xun’s claim, Jian Xu notes his unwavering despondency: Lu Xun’s desperate efforts only increased the tragic consciousness of characters. Because the wreath came out of nowhere, Hua Dama’s 華大媽 (Old Shuan’s wife) superstitious belief becomes fortified; moreover, the seemingly hopeful sign fails to provide optimism: “[Old Shuan’s wife and another woman] saw the crow stretch its wings, brace itself to take off, then fly like an arrow towards the far horizon.” Likewise, the dream of Fourth Shan’s wife suggests the everlasting sorrow whenever she wakes up in the morning because she is well aware that her Bao’er 寶兒 is already dead and cannot come back to life again. Thus, Lu Xun produces a tension between his advocacy of narrative strategy and actual writing practice. More importantly, Lu Xun’s transaesthetic formulation can be an effective means to negotiate the tension between his pessimistic realism and sympathetic affection.

**From “Distortions” to “Facetiousness”**

More than ten years after having written his preface to *Call to Arms*, Lu Xun once more lamented his artistic dissatisfaction. In his preface to *Old Tales Retold* written in 1935, Lu Xun defends his style and justifies his need to work on *youhua* 油滑 (“facetiousness”). Lu Xun records, his original plan was serious; but, he was forced to

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36 Lu Xun, “Zixu,” p. 441. For English, see Yang and Yang, trans., “Preface to *Call to Arms*,” p. 38.

37 See Xu, “The Will to the Transaesthetic,” pp. 70-79.


40 The meaning of *youhua* 油滑 is more than a simple facetiousness. *Youhua* elicits absurd or anachronic effects by
surrender this initial project after witnessing how Wang Jingzhi’s 汪靜之 (1902-96) romantic poems were accused of duoluo qingbo 墮落輕薄 (depravity and flippancy).

Reminding readers of his preface to Call to Arms, Lu Xun regrets his “frivolous” writing:

“That was how I lapsed from renzhen 认眞 (seriousness) to ‘facetiousness.’

‘Facetiousness’ is the worst enemy of writing; I was hen human 很不満 (most dissatisfied) with myself.”

Admitting that “distortions” are harmful to literature, Lu Xun is aware that his reliance on “facetiousness” does damage serious literature. Intriguingly, however, Lu Xun is determined to apply the style especially when his imagination flourishes: “In some places the narrative is based on passages in old books, elsewhere I gave free rein to my imagination. And having less respect for the ancients than for my contemporaries, I have not always been able to avoid ‘facetiousness.’”

With Lu Xun’s two prefaces in hand, his style is constantly in tension with the overall narrative flow. Both “distortion” and “facetiousness” inflict artistic devaluation on writers; but, Lu Xun continues to embrace these “archenemies” because he believes that his creativity has to be responsible for reflecting his sympathy for those struggling with the “backward” China. In this way, Lu Xun pursued his own literary perfection; that is, he brought works to completion only after he composed them through his “vulgar” and “frivolous” style.

including modern elements into ancient materials; hence, the creation of chaofeng 嘲諷 (satirical criticism). See 《Lu Xun dacidian》 bianweihui 《魯迅大辭典》編委會, ed., Lu Xun dacidian 魯迅大辭典 [A grand research dictionary for Lu Xun] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2009), p. 722. Yang and Yang use “facetiousness” in their translation. Marston Anderson follows Yang and Yang’s translation. G. Andrew Stuckey also puts facetiousness, but Stuckey supplements the translated term with his occasional use of “incongruity,” “absurdity,” and “anachrony.” See Stuckey, Old Stories Retold, pp. 26-31. I follow the previous translations for youhua, but the Chinese word, considering the practical use in Lu Xun’s writings, is close to “comic absurdity.” So I also use quotation marks each time I use “facetiousness” as for the English translation of youhua.


According to Marston Anderson, “facetiousness” centers on anachrony as its conspicuous literary feature. The purpose is to satirize ancients by ridiculing them: “The quality of facetiousness, which is more often playful than tendentious, results specifically from [Lu Xun’s] liberal use of anachrony, a literary device with a rather poor reputation.”\textsuperscript{43} As for technical elaborations, Lu Xun either formulates “a clash of stylistic registers” or constructs “incongruous references to twentieth-century institutions or social phenomena.”\textsuperscript{44} Anderson presents the following examples: The king’s answer to Mozi’s words of moral teachings, “A kleptomaniac” (“Feigong” 非攻 [Opposing aggression]); the “constable” who gives a ride to Zhuangzi 莊子 to his “bureau” (“Qisi” 起死 [Raising the dead]); the pirates’ self-defense distinguishing themselves from “Shanghai bandits who would go around stripping their victims” (“Caiwei” 采薇 [Gathering vetch]). In sum, “facetiousness” illustrates ancient events as if they were happening in the modern world; in addition, the effects of xiandaihua 現代化 (modernizing) satirize traditional moral values, which is often accompanied by xixue 戲謔 (mockery).\textsuperscript{45} Though showing reluctance in provoking laughter for the most serious subjects, Lu Xun appears to be satisfied with his job as a moral critic. He wrote: “Old Tales Retold is really a collection of ‘seze’ 塞責 (not doing one’s job conscientiously); that is, every piece except for ‘Forging the Swords’ engages in ‘facetiousness.’ But for a group of wenren xueshi 文人學士 (literati and scholars), my works caused headaches. This is truly ‘Where one benefit appears, one damage will rise;
where one damage appears, then one benefit will come around’ (有一利必有一弊，有一弊必有一利).”46 Lu Xun reveals that his “facetiousness” targets those supporters of premodern culture; at the same time, he highlights that “Forging the Swords” differs stylistically from other works in the collection.

The stylistic originality of “Forging the Swords” results from the changing objects of criticism. Despite Lu Xun’s priority of criticism and mockery, the technique of “facetiousness” may destabilize his purpose: The object of criticism can be problematic when the criticism of moral values is not necessarily accompanied by that of fictional characters. Patrick Hanan, for example, identifies the coherent theme in Aina’s Doupeng xianhua 豆棚閑話 (Idle talk under the bean arbor) in the early Qing period. Considering the collection as the antecedent of Lu Xun’s Old Tales Retold, Hanan points out the Confucian loyalism as the object of satire. In particular, Hanan focuses on the tale of Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊, which had been taken by the Confucian loyalists of successive dynasties as a model for moral conducts, and probably was the reason for Aina’s and Lu Xun’s rewriting: “Writers such as Aina and Lu Xun, however, who oppose the tendency to romanticize the past, adapt the legend to make the brothers look foolish. Lu Xun makes Bo Yi senile and the actions of the brothers absurd and even contemptible. Aina treats Bo Yi as a loner out of touch with reality and makes Shu Qi think better of his loyalty.”47 Witnessing the dynastic collapses, both Aina and Lu Xun questioned the validity of traditional moral teachings. In addition, the two writers denounced the exemplary Confucian loyalists by revealing their hypocrisy and self-justification. The

46 Lu Xun, letter to Li Liewen 黎烈文, 1 February 1936, in Lu Xun, Lu Xun quanji, vol. 14, p. 17.
Chinese moral principles such as Confucianism failed to bring forth optimistic future; furthermore, the moral codes only drove people to sacrifice themselves in the name of securing morality. In “Forging the Swords,” however, this criticism is challenging for Lu Xun.

As a matter of fact, Lu Xun’s reluctance in using “facetiousness” becomes a serious issue when his fictional characters cannot be the objects of criticism. Meijianchi in “Forging the Swords” can be the primary candidate if Lu Xun’s plan was to criticize the blind respect for filial piety. As long as Lu Xun’s criticism points to traditional moral values, the literati and scholars are to blame. In contrast, Meijianchi is merely a boy who is obliged to avenge his father despite his lack of skill and lack of determination for carrying out the task. Moreover, Meijianchi’s father is also the victim of ruthless monarchy, which makes it difficult to judge whether the parents are to blame for their son’s death. In his letter, Lu Xun confessed, “‘Forging the Swords’ is the most serious among the tales in Old Tales Retold.”48 According to the author, “Forging the Swords” is devoid of “facetiousness”; as a result, scholars such as Yuan Liangjun even regard the piece as Lu Xun’s favorite because Lu Xun abstained from employing a “facetious” style.49 Lu Xun could not completely curb his use of “facetiousness”; still, the level of the technique shows a considerable decrease.50 For example, Meijianchi’s

48 Lu Xun, letter to Masuda Wataru, 28 March 1936, pp. 385-86.

49 Yuan Liangjun writes, “Other works in Old Tales Retold carry ‘facetiousness’; that is, they have humorous modern features. . . . These do not hurt 大雅 (overall elegances), but these can be 小疵 (minor flaws). In ‘Forging the Swords,’ there is absolutely no ‘facetiousness.’ This is why Lu Xun favored ‘Forging the Swords,’ isn’t it?” See Yuan, “Lu Xun weihe pian’ai ‘Zhujian,’” p. 19.

50 Kiyama Hideo 木山英雄 finds the use of “facetiousness” prevalent through Lu Xun’s entire works in Old Tales Retold. See Kiyama Hideo, Wenxue fugu yu wenxue geming—Mushan Yingxiong Zhongguo xiandai wenxue sixiang lunji 文學復古與文學革命—木山英雄中國現代文學思想論集 [Literary restoration of antiquity and literary revolution: A collection of Kiyama Hideo’s thoughts on modern Chinese literature], ed. and trans. Zhao Jinghua 趙京華 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004), p. 377. For Kiyama’s original article, which Huang Ziping 黃子平 quotes,
head swimming in the jinding (golden cauldron) mocks a dwarf who has just laughed at the Dark Man’s magic: “Then abruptly the head gave this up to start swimming against the stream, circling, weaving to and fro, splashing water in all directions so that hot drops showered the court. One of the zhuru (dwarfs) gave a yelp and rubbed his nose. Scalded, he couldn’t suppress a cry of pain” (445; 93-94). The author prompts a sense of humor and mockery; but this passage is not anachronistic. The object of criticism rather points to the violent monarch’s palace member. In short, the criticism excludes the filial son as well as the deceased father.

Because Lu Xun sympathizes with his ill-fated protagonist, “Forging the Swords” creates an incongruous revenge narrative. The conversations between Meijianchi and the Dark Man provide an example of Lu Xun’s efforts to distinguish Meijianchi from the traditional assets of filial piety. Meijianchi’s mediator the Dark Man denies any moral concerns, which is embarrassing to the young assassin. The Dark Man shows up without any reason and helps Meijianchi to escape from the arrest order. In the mountains, he suggests trading the young boy’s head and the male sword to achieve vicarious revenge. In this conversation, the mysterious stranger appears nonchalant but determined:

“You? Are you willing to take vengeance for me, yishi (champion of justice)?”
“Ah, don’t insult me by giving me that title.”
“Well, then, is it out of tongqing (sympathy) for widows and orphans?”
“Don’t use words that have been sullied, child,” he replied sternly. “Zhangyi (justice), sympathy and such terms, which once were clean, have now...
Meijianchi is wondering about the Dark Man’s interest in filial revenge. Instead of justice and sympathy—the moral terms, which have been historically regarded as the basis for revenge, the Dark Man clarifies that his vicarious revenge has nothing to do with old-fashioned moral norms. As far as literati and scholars use the moral code for their own benefit, miserable characters such as Meijianchi would repeatedly come around. As a result, Lu Xun’s anachrony only refers to the moral terms as the Dark Man calls them as “capital for fiendish usurers”: The “facetiousness” directs “justice and sympathy,” but it does not ask the miserable Meijianchi to take responsibility.

The revenge tale further develops into the complication of the Dark Man’s previous remarks. As soon as he sees that Meijianchi’s head is in trouble beside the king’s, the Dark Man cuts off his own head, which falls into the cauldron. The Dark Man’s sympathetic mind cannot bear to see the young boy’s revenge is about to fail: “The boy’s cries of pain could be heard outside the cauldron. . . . The Dark Man, rather taken aback, did not change colour. Effortlessly he raised his arm like a withered branch holding the invisible sword. He stretched forward as if to peer into the cauldron. Of a sudden his arm bent, the blue sword thrust down and his head fell into the cauldron with a plop, sending snow-white foam flying in all directions” (447; 95-96). The Dark Man’s behavior appears to contradict his negation of justice and sympathy. Lu Xun perceived his sympathy for the novice assassin; more importantly, Lu Xun (by playing the Dark Man’s role) caused the young boy to decapitate himself, which raises a question regarding how Lu Xun is innocent compared with the monarch’s brutality. Unlike the revenge motif found in historiography, “Forging the Swords” destabilizes existing moral
registers with a mysterious, supernatural, and almost “postmodern” filial revenge. While compiling and editing the various editions, “Forging the Swords” denotes Lu Xun’s embedded messages. In order to elucidate the messages buried in Lu Xun’s modern edition of the Meijianchi legend, his criticism of Chinese mindset as well as self-criticism deserves further discussion.

**Revenge Narrative for the “Mediator of History”**

On an overarching level, Lu Xun, in “Forging the Swords,” criticizes the discourse of filial piety because he believed this moral value can be the source for victimizing Chinese people. The literati and scholars, Lu Xun feared, would take advantage of the Meijianchi legend to justify their cultural authority. The criticism of traditional morality, which is consistent through *Old Tales Retold*, continues in “Forging the Swords.” Nevertheless, Lu Xun finds out his revenge narrative is a risky project because he struggles with his treatment of Meijianchi’s fate and his involvement with the filial son’s self-decapitation. Furthermore, Lu Xun’s narrative development ends with the Dark Man’s decapitation of the king; in doing so, the success of vicarious revenge may undermine cultural criticism. According to Wang Hui 汪暉, Lu Xun claimed his role as “the mediator of history” (歷史的中間物) due to his learning from traditional scholarship but his seemingly self-contradictory motto of anti-traditionalism.51 Because Lu Xun was aware that he himself was an object of criticism, he was obliged to suggest

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his contradiction in order to be free from the accusation of hypocrisy. The modern compilation of the Meijianchi legend enables Lu Xun to carry on his mediating role, which showcases the construction of implicit narrative as a way of negotiating his historical responsibilities and intellectual self-reflection.

_Psychology of Decapitation_

In his essay “Zayi” 雜憶 (Random memories, 1925), Lu Xun discusses the inception of “revenge and resistance” for the younger generations. Pointing out Lord Byron’s role in winning independence for Greece, Lu Xun unfolds the list of vengeful and resistant foreigners.\(^{52}\) For Chinese revolutionaries, Lu Xun notes those students who studied in Japan (especially members of Gemingdang 革命黨 [Revolutionary Party]). In the local libraries, they copied the late Ming survivors’ records of Manchu atrocities and brought them back to China.\(^{53}\) In review of this legacy, Lu Xun justifies revenge, identifying who is qualified to carry it out and how it can be “legitimate”: “Who will judge revenge and how can it be fair? Then I say without hesitation: I myself should judge and carry out; because God has nothing to do with it, there is nothing strange in demanding a head for eyes or eyes for a head. . . . Probably, a cowardly villain may have invented the phrase [kuanshu 寬恕 (forgiveness) is a meide 美德 (virtue)] because he offended a person and, for fear of incurring revenge, deceived people with the virtuous

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\(^{52}\) Lu Xun includes both Western and Eastern revolutionaries such as the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), the Hungarian Petőfi Sándor (1823- c. 1849), and the Filipino J. Rizal (1861-96). See Lu Xun, “Zayi” 雜憶 [Random memories, 1925], in Lu Xun, _Lu Xun quanji_, vol. 1, p. 234.

\(^{53}\) Lu Xun’s list is as the following: “Yangzhou shiri ji” 揚州十日記 [The record of Ten days in Yangzhou], “Jiading tucheng jilüe” 嘉定屠城記略 [The record of The Massacre in Jiading], _Zhu Shunshui ji_ 朱舜水集 [Works of Zhu Shunshui], _Zhang Cangshui ji_ 張蒼水集 [Works of Zhang Cangshui], and _Huang Xiaoyang huitou_ 黃蕭養回頭 [A recollection of Huang Xiaoyang]. See Lu Xun, “Zayi,” pp. 233-34.
name of forgiveness.”54 Lu Xun’s attitude toward revenge is atheistic; that is, he does not consider universal standards in carrying out the moral punishment of villains. Instead, he argues that victims of abusive power should take revenge according to their own criteria. Furthermore, Lu Xun warns that the cowards will turn into villains because they will instead victimize those who are relatively weaker: “Those cowards would not confront their enemies despite any encouragement. They only try to project their harboring anger against the weaker regardless of whether they are tongbao 同胞 (the same people) or yizu 異族 (alien race).”55 Thus, Lu Xun distinguishes his revenge from any forms of moral tradition. In particular, he emphasis lies in the “weaker’s” confrontation against the “stronger.”

In “Forging the Swords,” Lu Xun’s project lies in the transformation of traditional filial revenge into his criticism of oppressive power. This motive is well represented in the Dark Man’s decapitation of the king. Reflecting the audience’s response, Lu Xun simultaneously continues his constant criticism of Chinese mentality. The Dark Man understands the king’s personality: the most effective measure for approaching the monarch is not by presenting the most wanted assassin Meijianchi’s head but by tempting him with the thrilling pleasure as a means to alleviate his boredom:

“Your Majesty!” The Dark Man went down on one knee. “It’s dancing the most shenqi 神奇 (miraculous) Tuanyuanwu 團圓舞 (Dance of Union) at the bottom of the cauldron. You can’t see this except from close by. I don’t have any fashu 法術 (magic) to make it come up, because this Dance of Union has to be performed at the bottom of the cauldron.”
The king stood up and strode down the steps to the cauldron. Regardless the heat, he bent forward to watch. (446; 95)

54 Lu Xun, “Zayi,” p. 236.
The Dark Man uses Meijianchi’s head to lure the king. Curiosity for further entertainment facilitates the Dark Man to cut off the king’s head. Furthermore, the Dark Man’s decapitation even entertains the subjects around the cauldron: “From the queen down to the court jester, all who had been petrified with fright before were galvanized into life by this sound. They felt as if the sun had been swallowed up in darkness. But even as they trembled, they felt a mimi de huanxi 秘密的歡喜 (secret pleasure). They waited, round-eyed” (448; 95-96). Although the three heads have different stories in this revenge tale, they all provide entertainment. Throughout Lu Xun’s narrative, violence fails to terrify people; instead, people are indifferent to violence, supplanting terror with amusement.

Lu Xun’s criticism of Chinese mentality benefits from Michel Foucault’s discussion of public executions. Exploring the reasons for their abolition, Foucault points out that the audience’s deviant response was crucial. Unlike the reception and spread of terror, the audience came to challenge the violent power by committing various crimes. In particular, Foucault notes the worries those involved in the legal administration perceived: “And it was the breaking up of this solidarity that was becoming the aim of penal and police repression. Yet out of the ceremony of the public execution, out of that uncertain festival in which violence was instantaneously reversible, it was this solidarity much more than the sovereign power that was likely to emerge with redoubled strength.”⁵⁶ The amused response from the audience can be the first step for revealing the resistant public solidarity; however, Lu Xun perceives only the “deviant” response without the formation of solidarity and resisting spirit. In his “Preface to Call to Arms,”

Lu Xun justifies his career change from medicine to literature; in doing so, Lu Xun introduces the lantern slide incident which inspired his nationalistic sensibilities after witnessing a Chinese audience who gathered to watch a fellow Chinese decapitated by a Japanese soldier. In this famous event, Lu Xun was appalled not by the decapitation but by the indifferent Chinese who were entertained by the spectacle. For Lu Xun, the dwindling terror of public execution was not a concern; instead, the most unbearable and resentful experience was to witness the Chinese audience devoid of sympathy for their countrymen.

Even though the psychology of decapitation may exemplify Lu Xun’s continuing criticism of the Chinese mentality, his usage of it in “Forging the Swords” further complicates his discourse. In his experience of the lantern slide, his object of criticism was the Chinese public. In contrast, the entertained audience comprise the king and other royalty. Lu Xun applies his editorial treatment even to the original Meijianchi tale. Although written long before the modern period, the ancient tale in Record of the Seeking the Spirits reinforces the terrorizing effects of the public execution: “‘But this is the head of a yongshi 勇士 (brave man),’ cautioned the stranger. ‘You had best boil it in a great cauldron.’ The King did as he was told. Yet even after three whole days and three nights the head did not break down, but rather leaped up in the boiling water to zhimu danu 蹣目大怒 (glare angrily) at the King. ‘The boy’s head will never cook away until Your Majesty comes close to inspect it.’” Delighted with the assassin’s head, the king gladly

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58 DeWoskin and Crump, trans., In Search of the Supernatural, p. 125. For the Chinese original, see Gan Bao, Soushen ji, p. 129. Chronicle of Strange Events does not specify the stranger’s suggestion. The king merely goes to look into the cauldron (probably out of curiosity) and the stranger seizes the chance to chop his head off. See Lu Xun, “Zhujian,” p. 451, editor’s footnote.
takes the stranger’s suggestion to carry out a corporal ritual with the dead body. The purpose of the ritual is to restore his challenged authority. Because the head is impervious to cooking (a form of administrative power), the stranger arouses the royal pride and entraps the king who believes that his personal inspection would suppress the rebellious spirit. As the Chinese public found their fellowmen’s decapitation entertaining, the royal audience including the queen felt thrilled by the headless king. Altering this old tale to suit his own cause, Lu Xun uses decapitation as an object of amusement. Changing his object of criticism, Lu Xun capitalizes on his experience of resentment to elaborate his satire of abusive power.

Thanks to Lu Xun’s literary adaptation, his criticism of Chinese mentality appears to be successfully represented along with his satirical overtones. On the other hand, Lu Xun may destabilize his criticism of cultural morality while vicariously carrying out filial revenge. Furthermore, Lu Xun, in his fictional incarnation as the Dark Man, is equally culpable for causing Meijianchi’s self-decapitation. Thus, Lu Xun constructs narrative layers of reflection concerning decapitation. Initially pointed out by Leo Ou-fan Lee, the lantern slide incident became a representative example of Lu Xun’s fabrication. Continuing Lee’s research, Lydia H. Liu discusses scholars’ efforts to identify evidence for the slide. After examining several viewpoints, Liu concludes that the existence of the slide is questionable; moreover, she pays attention to Lu Xun’s “rhetoric of representation”: “Staged as a representation of Chinese national character, the drama of violence in these texts also unfolds at the level of reading where the reader is shocked to discover that she or he is implicated in the violence of representation by being induced to play the role of a witness to the same spectacle of horror enacted over and over again in
Lu Xun’s texts.” Furthermore, Liu points out Lu Xun’s more “explicit” reaction in “Tengye xiansheng” (Professor Fujino, 1926): “Lu Xun drew a sharp distinction between himself and the cheering Japanese viewers in the lecture hall—he cannot join in their cheering and clapping.” According to Liu, Lu Xun’s decapitation scene interacts with the relationships among Lu Xun, the decapitated, and the spectators; in addition, it invites readers to indirectly experience the slide. While reading Lu Xun’s text, readers raise questions to themselves whether they are the indifferent joy-seeking spectators or have sympathized with Lu Xun’s startling horror. In doing so, Lu Xun distinguishes himself from the Chinese viewers as well as from his Japanese classmates.

Lu Xun’s Complicity

According to further examination of the text, however, Lu Xun’s mindset is complicated, resisting the “sharp distinction” between the author, audience in the classroom, and figures in the slides. Lydia Liu’s argument is debatable: Lu Xun did not sever his intimacy with either Japanese classmates or the Chinese public. Close textual analysis indicates that Lu Xun was unclear in describing his recollection of the lantern slide incident. In “Preface to Call to Arms,” Lu Xun confesses that he usually applauded while watching lantern slides on the Russo-Japanese War: “I 须常常 (often had to) 隨喜 (join in the pleasure) of the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students.” “Professor Fujino” records the same event from a

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60 Liu, Translingual Practice, p. 64.

more detached tone: “‘Banzai!’ The students clapped their hands and cheered. They cheered everything we saw; but to me the cheering that day was unusually ci’er 刺耳 (strident).”\(^{62}\) In these two records, Lu Xun equally expresses his discomfort on watching the atrocious slide along with Japanese classmates. The slide reveals a backwards attitude which embarrassed Lu Xun. Nevertheless, the author does not specify whether or not he declined to join (or was forced to join) the clapping and cheering. Lu Xun may have joined the applause, which forced him to feel guilt over his complicity either instantly in the lecture hall or later on when he was writing stories.

Actually, Lu Xun’s sense of complicity had been consistent through his literary career. Without overlooking these textual details, Marston Anderson underscores Lu Xun’s alienation and complicity: “Yet his physical presence . . . involv[es] him in a kind of bad faith perhaps even more reprehensible than the curiosity of the Chinese audience he censures. The scene thus encapsulates a double sense of one observer’s alienation and complicity: while, as a Chinese, he too is targeted as a receptor of the warning the act is meant to convey, for survival’s sake he must share the delight of its authors.”\(^{63}\) While Lu Xun criticizes the Chinese audience who are entertained by the bloody decapitation, he cannot deny that he has been one of the ardent spectators. Furthermore, Anderson points out that Lu Xun’s expression of complicity, which had its inception in his first volume of stories *Call to Arms*, evolved from his technique of “distortions” into the “use of ironical mediating narrators.”\(^{64}\) Lu Xun illustrates the complicit narrators in the following


\(^{63}\) Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, p. 78.

\(^{64}\) Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, p. 88. Here Anderson differs from Patrick Hanan who argues that Lu Xun’s “pleas” are applicable only to his first volume *Call to Arms*. Hanan notes that the “social inequality and class difference”
examples: the answer to Xianglin Sao’s 祥林嫂 question, “I am not sure” (“Zhufu” 祝福 [New Year’s sacrifice, 1924]); the “refreshed” feeling after seeing Wei Lianshu’s 魏連殳 corpse (“Gudu zhe” 孤獨者 [The misanthrope, 1925]); the “escape from the boredom” after his encounter with Lü Weifu 呂緯甫 (“Zai jiulou shang” 在酒楼上 [In the tavern, 1924]).

As a result, Lu Xun’s role in transforming the Chinese attitude starts from his accusation of himself, which breaks down the boundary between Lu Xun and others in the Chinese public he wanted to criticize.

Delving into Lu Xun’s technique for suggesting his complicity, Eva Shan Chou focuses on his original stylistic elaboration, which is only possible with the manipulation of implications. In detail, Chou explores Lu Xun’s obsession with the subject of queues when he came back to China after his education in Japan. As his essays and fictional narratives often deal with this issue, Lu Xun deliberated on how to negotiate his literary career with the Chinese society on the verge of transitioning from the traditional to the modern. Suggesting “Toufa de gushi” 頭髮的故事 (A story about hair, 1920) as the most notable example, Chou defines Lu Xun’s implicit narration prevalent in his writings as a means for disclosing his autobiographical experience: “An important tendency of Lu Xun was delay and disguise through literature. Delay serves to conceal or mislead even as it seems to reveal, for it is self-revelation made at a time and in a way that attracts only appeared as a form of “revelation,” which “is fully articulated in a moving hope for the future.” Hanan’s observation is from his discussion of Lu Xun’s usage of “distortions” along with Lu Xun’s inclusion of “hopeful” vision of China. For Hanan’s argument, see Patrick Hanan, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 243. For Hanan’s original article, which Anderson referred to, see Patrick Hanan, “The Technique of Lu Hsün’s Fiction,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 34 (1974), pp. 53-96.


66 Lu Xun includes this short story in his first collection of short stories *Call to Arms*. For the Chinese original, see Lu Xun, “Toufa de gushi” 頭髮的故事 [A story about hair, 1920], in Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 1, pp. 484-90. For English, see Julia Lovell, trans., “Hair,” in *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China*, trans. Lovell, pp. 56-60.
muted attention. For Lu Xun, such a style of disclosure seemed both a literary and a personal inclination. Disguise and delay are likely the antithesis of the typical critical view, which emphasizes his unflinching directness."67 In revealing his complicity, Lu Xun modulates his style by arranging his works into multiple narrative layers. Only “perceptive” readers are able to comprehend the implied messages of the layers out of hints and clues. Lu Xun’s manner is not explicit but rather implicit, requiring readers’ deliberate engagement by examining previous and following passages to compare and contrast. Lu Xun may have been shameful in disclosing himself as an accomplice to the Chinese mentality; nevertheless, his conscience would not allow him to eliminate his ambiguous feelings. The textual information is there; but the readers often overlook the implied messages because Lu Xun’s lamentation and embarrassment (a form of “highlighting” effect) direct the reader’s attention to the controversial messages of the May Fourth.

In “Forging the Swords,” Lu Xun continues renovating his technique of “camouflaging” his complicity. In particular, his implications of complicity facilitate effectively by engaging with the Meijianchi editions. Lu Xun’s complicity appears representatively in the Dark Man’s request of Meijianchi’s self-decapitation. While preserving the young assassin’s “unbelievable” self-decapitation, Lu Xun makes up the passages before and after the Dark Man’s handover of the revenge mission. In addition to the Dark Man’s cynical comments on justice and sympathy, the vicarious assassin picks up Meijianchi’s head and kisses his lips twice. Then, Lu Xun adds up another passage out of his “deceptive” maneuver:

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[The Dark Man’s] laughter spread through the fir-wood. At once, deep in the forest, flashed blazing eyes like the light of the will-o’-the-wisp which the next instant came so close that you could hear the snuffling of e’lang 饥狼 (famished wolves). With one bite, Meijianchi’s blue coat was torn to shreds; the next disposed of his whole body, while even the xuehen 血痕 (bloodstain) was instantaneously licked clean. The only sound was the soft crunching of gutou 骨頭 (bones). (441; 89)

Along with the songs the Dark Man sings on his way to the palace (as Lu Xun also confessed to its ambiguous meaning), this passage escalates the ambiguity of “Forging the Swords.” The readers would struggle with its meaning. Meanwhile, the passage describing the Dark Man’s trade with Meijianchi’s head digresses from the serious observation. The multiple editions of the Meijianchi legend equally include the “mortal exchange”;68 as a result, the readers, especially those who are curious to know Lu Xun’s messages, tend to neglect Lu Xun’s complicity with Meijianchi’s death while paying attention to his creative elaborations. In addition, Lu Xun is able to defend himself against the accusation for his role in the murder of the miserable youngster as well as the eventual accomplishment of the filial revenge. Lu Xun was merely “faithful” to the original Meijianchi tale; in short, he did not “invent” these details, but he merely “arranged” them.

In the discussion of Lu Xun’s legacy in contemporary Chinese fiction, Anderson notes the writers of the xungen 尋根 (search for roots) movement who dealt with Chinese

68 Cao Pi’s Chronicle of Strange Events is ambiguous as to whether Meijianchi beheaded himself or whether the stranger did so on Meijianchi’s behalf: “遇客, 欲為之報; 乃刎首, 將以奉楚王.” See Lu Xun, “Zhujian,” p. 451. Gan Bao’s Record of the Seeking the Spirits is more specific in describing the trade. No sooner than Meijianchi hears the stranger’s suggestion, does he put his sword to his neck. Furthermore, Meijianchi is an iconic figure of filial revenge because his dead body collapses only after confirming the stranger’s promise: “兒曰:「幸甚!」卽自刎, 兩手捧頭及劍奉之, 立僵. 客曰:「不負子也.」於是屍乃仆.” See Gan Bao, Soushen ji, p. 129. Lu Xun modified Gan Bao’s edition from resolution to hesitation as well as ambiguity by supplanting the stranger’s confirmation with kisses and cold laughter and also by leaving out the section in which the dead body falls to the ground.
folklore as an effort to develop their creativity without falling into cultural essentialism.69

Especially in Lu Xun’s “facetiousness,” Anderson argues, lies a literary strategy that increases his creativity in the midst of reflecting his historical consciousness:

Lu Xun first turned to traditional legends and tales to expand his expressive potential, hoping through them to treat themes not amenable to the kind of representational fiction in which he had already demonstrated such skill. It was never his intention, though, to use the myths as a fount of cultural or artistic authority. Lu Xun never lost his apprehension of the “cannibalistic” nature of traditional culture, and he needed to find a formal means to inhibit any tendency for his writing to encourage too reverent an attitude toward the traditional sources. Lu Xun’s use of anachrony and allegory serves precisely this function in the stories; through them Lu Xun punctures the aura of inviolability that surrounds the legendary heroes whose stories he adapts. In this way, Lu Xun repossesses these fragments of the tradition for his own creative purposes, and earns a new sense of weightlessness in relation to the past.70

Anderson explains the reason for Lu Xun’s reliance on old tales not so much as an asset to identify the Chinese traditional values as a source to develop his ironic narrative. In addition to continuing his criticism of traditional culture, Lu Xun invents his ways for indicating his complicated mentality. Lu Xun had no interest in exploring the Chinese cultural essence because he already knew that it was responsible for the formation of “backward” China. While working on literary strategy, however, Lu Xun finds out that mysterious characterizations and supernatural illustrations can imply his complicity with the problems he had consistently denounced. In this sense, the rewriting of the supernatural tale provides an excellent source to explore Lu Xun’s embedded messages:

69 For example, Wang Anyi 王安憶 (b. 1954), one of the xungen 尋根 (search for roots) writers, composed her personal encounters during the tumultuous political unrest of contemporary China. Wang’s literary works pointed to the “fabrication of history,” which eventually destabilized the construction of collective identity. Lingchei Letty Chen finds out that Wang’s case represents a general tendency among the search for roots writers. They initially strived to locate the cultural roots, but later on “enter[ed] into an imagined/imaginary community.” See Lingchei Letty Chen 陳綾琪, Writing Chinese: Reshaping Chinese Cultural Identity (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p. 47.

This is available only after investigating the implications when he created a “brand-new” meaning from his “compilation” of the Meijianchi legend.

*Heads in the Same Cauldron*

Because Lu Xun implies that he is also to blame for the problematic Chinese mentality, “Forging the Swords” destabilizes the strict division of character roles such as Meijianchi’s revenge, the Dark Man’s intervention, and the king’s brutality. The three major characters interact with one another and are intimately interconnected. The Dark Man, though he meets Meijianchi for the first time, comprehends everything about Meijianchi, including his family affairs:

> “Don’t be afraid that I want to trick you out of your life and your treasure,” continued the implacable voice in the dark. “It’s entirely up to you. If you trust me, I’ll go; if not, I won’t.”
> “But why are you going to take vengeance for me? Did you know my father?”
> “I knew him from the start, just as I’ve always known you. But that’s not the reason. You don’t understand, my clever lad, how I excel at revenge. What’s yours is mine, what concerns him concerns me too. I bear on my soul so many wounds inflicted by others as well as by myself, that now I [憎惡](detest) myself.” (441; 88)

The Dark Man appears omnipotent but his remarks are “masochistic” in that his excellence in carrying out revenge results from the troubles he himself partially caused. Guilt consumes the Dark Man. With his dismissal of justice and sympathy, the Dark Man cannot sympathize with Meijianchi; instead, he can enact Meijianchi’s revenge by identifying himself with the boy. The distance between characters decreases, which in the long run completes the Dark Man’s role as “the mediator.” Based upon Lu Xun’s role as the “mediator of history,” Wang Hui examines how Lu Xun’s self-criticism influenced his writing strategy: The May Fourth critic not only took over his role as a
narrator but also identified himself with the fictional characters who exchange
conversations with the narrator.\footnote{See Wang, \textit{Fankang juewang}, pp. 199-200. In specific, Wang suggests “Toufa de gushi” 頭髪的故事 [A story about hair, 1920] in which the protagonist N xiānshēng N先生 (Mr. N) is Lu Xun’s “daiyánrén” 代言人 (spokesman). This is in contrast with “Yao” 藥 [Medicine, 1919], continues Wang, because Lu Xun is “shèntóu” 渗透 (permeated) into its protagonist.} In “Forging the Swords,” Lu Xun informs readers of his character role by using his pen name “Yan zhi Aozhe”; one step further, he permeates his identity into Meijianchi in a dramatic and supernatural manner, that is, the self-decapitation.\footnote{David Wang finds Foucault’s theory relevant to the analysis of Lu Xun’s representation of “head-less country.” Instead of viewing decapitation as a simple form of corporal punishment, Wang notes how Lu Xun read the problematic Chinese mentality from the execution field. In this vein, “Forging the Swords” is not a simple revenge story but a textual practice for Lu Xun’s cultural criticism: “In ["Forging the Swords"], beheading and self-beheading are depicted in such a way that they suggest not so much a necessary means of revenge as a decadent sport participated in by both the heroes and the villains, in search of sadomasochistic pain and pleasure.” Wang is also aware of Lu Xun’s complicity suggested implicitly in his aesthetics of decapitation. See David Der-wei Wang, \textit{The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 22-23.}

Lu Xun uses Meijianchi’s vacillation between pity and hatred to give a moral example. Lu Xun’s unique argument on revenge influences his literary creation: Revenge should be carried out by oneself according to one’s own criteria. Meijianchi fulfills his filial revenge only after decapitating himself and surrendering the male sword which his father passed on and which also caused his father’s death. Filial piety finds no place in the supernatural pact; instead, the commingling identities even develop into the intimacy between the king and Meijianchi. Despite their incompatible hostility, Meijianchi and the king are in an inseparable affiliation. When the Dark Man invites the king to the Dance of Union, Meijianchi’s smile implores the king to examine his memory: “The head, lying there motionless, looked up and fixed its eyes on the king. When the king’s glance fell on its face, it gave a \textit{yanran yixiao} 嫣然一笑 (charming smile). This smile made the king feel that they had met before. Who could this be? As
he was *jingyi* 惊疑 (wondering), the Dark Man drew the blue sword from his back and swept it forward like lightning toward the nape of the king’s neck. The king’s head fell with a splash into the cauldron” (446-47; 95). Lu Xun, though creating the three characters with different personalities, portrayed the three personalities as mysteriously intertwined, evoking decapitation, memory and even smiling—all destined to be thrown into the same boiling water.

In “Yishu fuchou” 藝術復仇 (Revenge in art, 1999), Can Xue 残雪 (b. 1953) analyzes “Forging the Swords” from Lu Xun’s spiritual disunity. Observing the author’s spiritual exploration, Can Xue notes that Lu Xun’s handling of the revenge theme is similar to a circular structure such as Jorge Luis Borges’s (1899-1986) “The Garden of Forking Paths” (1941). Lu Xun’s revenge against himself should be central: “Revenge against oneself stimulates primeval force, which divides one’s soul into incompatible pieces to carry on a bloody killing spree. In so doing, the split soul tastes love otherwise impossible, which finally results in a dialectic as follows: I am in you and you are in me. . . . To carry out this spiritual revenge, one’s soul should split into three, creating a startling and provocative story involving the three (the Dark Man, Meijianchi and the king).” Can Xue comprehends the “incompatible” relationship among the three characters, but she consolidates the disparate three as they branch out from Lu Xun’s mindset. In particular, the male and female swords circulate through “Forging the Swords.” The king’s concubine gave birth to a pure and transparent piece of iron which the king adored as a *yibao* 異寳 (rare treasure) and ordered Meijianchi’s father to forge

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swords with it (434; 81). Lu Xun skillfully incorporates this passage by referring to
Lieshi zhuan 列士傳 (Chronicle of remarkable figures)\textsuperscript{74} and articulates “Forging the
Swords” in a circular narrative structure. The female sword is for the first time used on
the neck of Meijianchi’s father; then, Meijianchi uses the male sword first to decapitate
himself before the Dark Man takes over the sword to decapitate the king and next himself.
The love for swords forms a circular chain of homicide, which in the long run returns to
characters’ own necks. The king’s violent personality creates a piece of iron; yet,
Meijianchi’s father is an instrument of blame for crafting such a marvelous sword to help
the king to wield his violence. Every character is related and shares the common ground
of complicity.

Towards the denouement, Lu Xun consolidates the antagonistic characters as they
all boil in one cauldron. Lu Xun has no need to change the original plotline because it
wonderfully satisfies his philosophy of self-criticism. In addition, though, he facetiously
elaborates the posthumous process in which the royal family and subjects collect the
decapitated bodies and prepare for the funeral:

That evening a council of princes and ministers was held to determine which
head was the king’s, but with no better result than during the day. In fact,
even the hair and moustaches presented a problem. The white was of course
the king’s, but since he had been \textit{huabai} 花白 (grizzled) it was very hard to
decide about the black. After half a night’s discussion, they had just
eliminated a few red hairs when the ninth concubine protested. She was sure
she had seen a few brown hairs in the king’s moustache; in which case how
could they be sure there was not a single red one? They had to put them all
together again and leave the case unsettled. (450; 99)

\textsuperscript{74} The editorial notes to “Zhujian” identify the source for Lu Xun’s reference as \textit{juan} 34 of Gezhi jingyuan 格致鏡原
[Mirror origins of investigating things and extending knowledge, 1735] compiled by the Qing dynasty scholar Chen
passage from Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (c. 77-6 BC) Lieshi zhuan 列士傳 [Chronicle of remarkable figures], which Lu Xun
To carry out the royal funeral, an indispensable measure is separating the king’s dead body from those of the regicides. However, the cauldron, which initially evoked amusement, now is a horrifying execution tool: it melts down all the flesh (Lu Xun returns to the original text here). In addition, they examine the skulls by remembering the king’s nose, temple, and his protuberant back of the head; but the identification finally fails (449-50; 98-99). In this way, the funeral becomes gruesomely absurd with three heads on one body: “Then, rising and falling with the uneven ground, a yellow canopy drew near. It was possible to make out the hearse with the golden coffin in which lay three heads and one body” (451; 100).75 The burial of the three heads is blasphemous to the royal subjects; at the same time, the burial is also a disgrace to Meijianchi and the Dark Man to share the coffin with their mortal enemy. Without comprehending this complicated revenge tale, the audience (royal subjects and ordinary people) gather to watch the funeral parade, slipping into “luanqi bazao” 亂七八糟 (out of all semblance of order) when the parade provides no more exciting entertainment (451; 100).

As a result, Lu Xun’s revenge attains its double purpose. On the one hand, Lu Xun is able to consistently criticize the Chinese mentality of seeking amusement even before terrifying decapitation. On the other hand, Lu Xun engages implicitly with his confession of complicity as a collection of mutilated bodies. Reflecting on various versions of the Meijianchi legend, Lu Xun endeavors to perform an editorial elaboration of “facetious” stylization that mobilizes mockery, anachrony and irony. Thus, he is able to renew the meaning underlying supernatural and mysterious illustrations without

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75 Here Lu Xun once again “slightly” modifies the original Meijianchi tale. The description, three heads on one body, and hereby sharing one tomb, contradicts the records in all of its editions. Cao Pi’s Chronicle of Strange Events writes each head had its own tomb: “三頭悉爛, 不可分別, 分葬之, 名曰三王墓.” See Lu Xun, “Zhujian,” p. 451. Gan Bao’s Record of Seeking the Spirits also clarifies the creation of three separate tombs: “三首俱爛, 不可識別, 乃分其湯肉葬之, 故通名「三王墓」.” See Gan Bao, Soushen ji, p. 129.
destroying the overall plotline. This critical creativity counters simple political implications; that is, Lu Xun envisions his revenge philosophy while entangling the horrid old tale with a modern perception. In the long run, “Forging the Swords” manifests Lu Xun’s lifetime satire of the failure of Chinese spiritual assets without forgetting to criticize his own problematic involvement with that legacy.

**Conclusion**

With “Forging the Swords” as my primary text, I have discussed complicated issues regarding Lu Xun’s use of the revenge theme. I began with the author’s motive for rewriting the Meijianchi tale. Consulting Lu Xun’s biography and the historical backdrop of the time, I questioned whether “Forging the Swords” carried simple political implications. Lu Xun chose the source from the “accounts of anomalies” to continue and broaden his philosophical horizon as his lifetime mission for establishing the social realism of modern China. Instead of seeking sources from historiography, Lu Xun elaborated the supernatural and mysterious legend taken from the supernatural archive; accordingly, he had no need for making his satirical purpose obvious as he did by “fabricating” the classical sources of moral teachings. Next, I carried out my discussion of Lu Xun’s seemingly incoherent narratives; especially, I explored Lu Xun’s techniques for developing implied messages. As his technique of “distortions” suggests, Lu Xun’s explicit remarks on the Chinese sympathy could be an indirect strategy for reinforcing his pessimism. In a similar vein, Lu Xun’s “facetiousness” had to carry implied messages because the Meijianchi legend was in tension between the discourse of filial piety and the victims of abusive power. Lu Xun’s edition of the Meijianchi tale is imbricated with his
creative development of literary technique, which expressed his overarching statement of criticism.

On the basis of Lu Xun’s role as the “mediator of history,” I focused on the narrative elaborations intended for negotiating his criticism of Chinese mentality and his own complicity. In particular, I discussed Lu Xun’s psychological illustrations embedded in his indirect experience of decapitation. As his lantern slide experience suggests, Lu Xun’s embarrassment did not result from the terrifying punishment; instead, the entertained Chinese audience inspired the May Fourth critic to lament their spiritual problems. More importantly, Lu Xun also implicated himself as being complicit with the problems of China. Instead of taking an explicit style, Lu Xun’s writing strategy “camouflaged” his complicity, however ambiguously, between the lines. In “Forging the Swords,” I examined Lu Xun’s development of this technique while compiling multiple editions and sources of the Meijianchi legend. In detail, the decapitated heads and their coexistence in the same cauldron did the job in a dramatic fashion: the criticism of the Chinese mentality as well as his self-criticism. Furthermore, Lu Xun developed the meanings of decapitation according to his own manner and purpose; thus, he articulated the gruesome absurdity by detailing the funeral process with three heads on one body. As a result, Lu Xun was able to take revenge on all of his critical issues. While rewriting the Meijianchi legend, the May Fourth critic renewed the concepts of revenge and developed his unique idea. By compiling the supernatural tale, Lu Xun successfully envisioned a philosophical narrative of decapitation without running the risk of “announcing” his self-criticism.
Chapter Four

The Anarchist Assassin: Ba Jin’s Destruction and Moral Responsibility

Introduction: Writing Terrorism

The political events of modern China reveal repeated cycles of violence, especially terrorism. Causing bloody reprisals, terrorism began to attract public attention even before the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911 and marked major political activism throughout the tumultuous Republican period. For example, the members of Tongmenghui (the Revolutionary Alliance) put their political aim on assassinating high officials of the Qing government.¹ In concert with Chiang Kai-shek’s followers, members of the Shanghai Qingbang (Green Gang) benefited from political tensions by escalating assassination, suppression and execution of the Communists, which was called later as baise kongbu (the White Terror).² From the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), the KMT formed Lanyishe (the Blue Shirts Society) and carried out the punishment of the hanjian

¹ See Edward S. Krebs, Shifu, Soul of Chinese Anarchism (Lanham, MD: Rowman, 1998), chs. 1-5, for Tongmenghui’s ansha zhuyi (assassinationism) with the focus on Liu Sifu (刘思復, the renowned anarchist of the time). Krebs notes anarchism as the central political principle for Tongmenghui. Influenced by Russian nihilists, the members carried out consecutive assassination plans: Wu Yue (吳樾, 1878-1905) failed attempt on the five imperial commissioners at the Beijing railway station in September 1905; Liu Sifu’s other action for bombing the Qing naval commander Li Zhun (李準, 1871-1936) in May 1907; Wen Shengcai’s (溫生才, 1870-1911) successful assassination on the Manchu general Fuqi (孚琦, d. 1911) in Guangzhou in March 1911, Li Yingsheng (李應生) and Li Peiji’s (李沛基) successful train bombing on Fengshan (鳳山) in October 111, among numerous other examples.

漢奸 (collaborators) and other political rivals. Contemporary interpretations of this series of terrorist acts ranged from blind and irrational bloodlust to heroism as justice done. Meanwhile, however the terrorists, from their differing ideologies, would have justified their violent methods, their victims would have blamed them and sought reprisal. Even so, the general public, including those assassins, would have envisioned a society free of the perennial chains of terrorist acts. At least, critics debated whether the killing of individuals was an effective strategy to renovate modern China.

Fictional narratives, on the other hand, complicate the meanings of terrorism by introducing intellectual concerns about contemporary problems. With this age of terrorism as background, Ba Jin 巴金 (1904-2005) published his first novel Miewang 滅亡 (Destruction, 1929) in which a young anarchist fails in assassinating a Shanghai warlord and kills himself on the spot. At first sight, this storyline sounds hackneyed; moreover, Ba Jin had been well known for his belief in anarchism (even towards his later life), which gives readers the false impression that the author wanted to justify the cause of anarchism in the name of righteous revenge. Nevertheless, this political reading of Ba Jin runs the risk of ignoring the author’s comprehension of anarchism, not to mention the implications of revenge, and of depreciating his writing as merely a defense of terrorism. In fact, the novel introduces the anarchist’s attempted assassination only at the last chapter, briefly as if it were a newspaper article. In contrast, the text is full of detailed internal monologues, often lengthy without advancing the plot. The revenge theme

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4 The Chinese edition I use is Ba Jin 巴金 (Li Yaotang 李堯棠), Miewang 滅亡 [Destruction, 1929], in Ba Jin, Ba Jin quanjji 巴金全集 [Complete works of Ba Jin], vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1987), pp. 1-161. The English translation is mine unless otherwise specified.
explains the intellectual mentality. The theme reveals the protagonist’s motive and reinforces the issues Ba Jin wanted to envision through the anarchist’s act of terrorism. Furthermore, the analysis of the revenge theme would delineate the implied messages regarding how the modern Chinese intellectuals coped with the tumultuous periods; in detail, the intellectuals, especially Ba Jin, were bound to claim their moral responsibility despite (or even motivated by) their feelings of impotence: in their pessimism they questioned whether they could deliver people out of misery and also how to put an end to the ever deepening violence of modern China. In doing so, this study will explain why the readers of modern China sympathized with Ba Jin’s creation of the anarchist assassin.5

In this chapter, I discuss the revenge theme in Ba Jin’s Destruction in the following manner. To begin with, I will define critical concepts relevant to comprehend the whole piece. Pessimism, for example, characterizes the gloomy undercurrents found in the male protagonist Du Daxin 杜大心. Unlike the mere symptoms of tuberculosis, the pessimism prompts the young revolutionary to examine the events from a critical perspective, in the end developing into a resolve to seek vengeance. Moreover, I will argue that Ba Jin’s anarchism, though it has close ties with concepts imported from Russia, is original, countering the political principles of anarchism, but carrying even stronger political implications. Next, I want to delve into how Ba Jin politicizes sentimentality in relation to the political concerns of Shanghai under warlord rule. In particular, the illustrations of sympathy are my critical point, but I want to question whether the anarchist (as a representative of Chinese intellectuals) had the capacity to

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improve the situation. As a narrative technique to illustrate the images of incompetent intellectuals, Ba Jin’s handling of the embedded messages would be significant for revolutionary romanticism. Finally, I examine the revenge theme in relation to the intellectuals’ moral responsibilities. In particular, I will discuss how the political impotence of intellectuals could motivate critical writings. By consulting parallel examples from the debates on justice, I explain that Ba Jin illustrates public execution and assassination in order to overcome his political incapacity.

**Pessimism, Anarchism and Revenge**

From February 1927 to the beginning of 1929, Ba Jin lived in France, where he wrote his first novel *Destruction*. *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報 (Fiction monthly) began to serialize *Destruction* in January 1929, and later in the October of the year, Shanghai Kaiming shudian 開明書店 (Kaiming Book Company) published the novel as a separate volume. In *Destruction*, the young author represented his revenge theme by unfolding 22 chapter-long events in the life of the “anarchistic” revolutionary Du Daxin. Against the historical backdrop of Shanghai under the warlords’ military rule (such as Sun Chuanfang 孫傳芳 [1885-1935]),

6 Du is a member of Gemingdang 革命黨 (Revolutionary Party) as well as a central character throughout the whole story. Following Du’s psychological and behavioral patterns, the underground revolutionary circle maintains tense relations not only with the rule by warlords but also with the revolutionaries. In addition, Du makes friends with Li Leng 李冷 (who becomes a leading character in Ba Jin’s third novel

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6 See Wang Yingguo 汪應果, *Ba Jin lun* 巴金論 [A study of Ba Jin], new ed. (1985; Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2009), p. 62. Wang specifies the historical timeline as somewhere around 1926 before the Northern Expedition started. Olga Lang is more specific in indicating the period between 1923 and 1926, which she thinks the situation described in *Destruction* still persisted at the time of its publication. See Lang, *Pa Chin and His Writings*, p. 138.
Xinsheng 新生 [New life, 1931]); more importantly, Li’s younger sister Li Jingshu 李靜淑 plays an essential role through her romantic and sentimental relationship with Du.

In the midst of expressing revolutionary fervor and romantic sentiments, Ba Jin justifies the need for revenge by sympathizing with the cause of a tragic assassin, which identified him as an anarchist novelist in his debut.

*From Pessimism to Revenge*

Ba Jin’s essays regarding writing *Destruction* indicate how the representation of personal feelings came into being while he reconstructed his indirect experience of events, characters and places. For example, in its “Xu” 序 (Preface), Ba Jin’s emotional formulation is noteworthy: “There is not a single event taken from my own experience (though a number of events are from what I heard of as well as witnessed). However, the overall beiai 悲哀 (sorrow) derives from myself” (4). Though the author reminds readers that *Destruction* is not autobiographical, he emphasizes his use of pathos. In “Tan 《Miewang》” 談《滅亡》 (On *Destruction*, 1958), written almost 30 years after *Destruction*, Ba Jin once again points out the youyuxing 憂鬱性 (gloomy atmosphere) as an overall undercurrent by identifying its cause as his internal maodun 矛盾 (contradictions). In this sense, the analysis of these pessimistic elements (sorrows, depression, and contradictions) would delineate the significance of Ba Jin’s revenge theme; that is, the internal turmoil and emotional vulnerability provided the author useful

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7 Through this chapter, the numbers in parentheses indicate the page numbers in Ba Jin’s original Chinese text.

resources to represent his worries about China under the bloody competition among warlords.

Ba Jin’s formulation of pessimism is most conspicuous in the protagonist Du Daxin. Through the conversations, events and internal monologues, Ba Jin portrays Du as a figure suffering from doubt and torment, which exacerbates with the plot development. For example, Du becomes more and more overwhelmed by his contradictory feelings as his romantic spirit with Li Jingshu grows: “A day would be unhappy if he didn’t see her; this drove him anxious and unbearable, making his life a *kuxing* 苦刑 (severe punishment). Once he met her, his love grew even faster; but his *lizhi* 理智 (reason) tormented him with the *liangxin* 良心 (conscience) in *tonghui* 痛悔 (bitter grief)” (91). As a member of the Revolutionary Party, Du cannot ignore the obligations because he believes that his pursuit of romance may inhibit his determination to sacrifice himself to further the happiness of mankind (76). This indecisive personality testifies to Ba Jin’s characterization of pessimism. In Chapter One, Li Leng meets Du by chance where a traffic accident has occurred. Invited to Du’s place to sit down for a while, Li (as well as the readers) for the first time perceives Du’s uncontrollable sorrows:

Suddenly, a sob arose in the room; the weeping sounds were like a lost dog’s *aihao* 哀號 (howling) when somebody whipped it. *Tongku* 痛苦 (pain) out of endless *juewang* 絕望 (despair) pervaded the wails. As if his heart had been cut with a sharp knife, Li started to tremble. He knew that the *qingnian* 青年 (youth) was crying but he couldn’t believe that the youth cried out such sounds. Before him, there appeared a *shouxue* 瘦削 (angular) face, a sharp nose, and gleaming eyes. He couldn’t believe that the youth who had once talked to him in such an arrogant manner was crying as if he had been an injured wild dog. The youth, leaning against on the bed, covering his face with hands, was weeping in pain. (14)
Without giving any clue for the cause of his outburst, Ba Jin portrays the main protagonist through the eyes of another youth who has just met him. By arranging this, the author displays Du’s personality in a startling effect: dying appearance, tears and weeping out of despair and sorrow. This portrayal foreshadows the subsequent narrative development. In the room, Li catches sight of an unfinished poem written in Du Daxin’s name: “Wubian de hei’an zhong yi ge linghun de shenyin” 無邊的黑暗中一個靈魂底呻吟 (A soul’s groaning in the unfathomable darkness). In Chapter Seven, Du’s sentimental poems are shared and discussed at Li Leng’s 25th birthday party. Through the form of the poem, the pathetic emotion Du harbors is expressed and spreads to others. In particular, Li Jingshu is startled to know that her song is based on Du’s lyrics “Yi ge yingxiong de si” 一個英雄的死 (The death of a hero) (62). As a poet of sentimentalism, the youth grapples with his sensitive personality; at the same time, the pessimism plays a critical role, especially in mobilizing the romantic relationship of the young couple.

This pessimism pervasive in *Destruction* is central to discussing the textual ambiguity concerning its political message. Since its publication, various groups of scholars and critics have engaged Ba Jin’s portrayal of “masochistic” images of youth. Soon after its publication, *Destruction* received critical reviews concerning Ba Jin’s motive and his narrative formulation. For instance, the leftist critic Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨 criticized the author’s nihilistic mindset: “[*Destruction*] is a work about a *xuwu zhuyi de geren zhuyizhe* 虛無主義的個人主義者 (nihilistic individualist). All over the text, the protagonist is mired in his nihilism. Why he participated in the revolution is not clear; he just suppresses his *kumen* 苦悶 (agony) by working on the business. . . . He is a
romantic revolutionary.”9 In addition, C. T. Hsia, unconvinced by Ba Jin’s emotional extravagance, sums up his pessimism in his outright fashion: “Ba Jin himself never outgrew his own adolescence.”10 With the reference to Ba Jin’s “Wo de zipou” 我的自剖 (My self-dissection) in Sheng zhi chanhui 生之懺悔 (Life’s penitence, 1936), Hsia criticizes the anarchist writer’s lack of artistic maturity: “Ba Jin’s anger occasionally animates his flat and wooden style, and his reasoned anarchistic position is more philosophically interesting than the stereotyped Communist approach. Yet until toward the latter end of his career, Ba Jin differs from the average leftist writer only in degree rather than in kind because of his undeniable inability to give the illusion of life to his characters and scenes. . . . All these stereotypes have appeared elsewhere and are to recur in Ba Jin’s later works.”11 Because of his preference for anarchistic fervor to socialist principles, Ba Jin enjoyed relative artistic freedom; however, Ba Jin’s moral responsibility for miserable Chinese prevented him from accomplishing aesthetic perfection. Both Qian and Hsia problematize Ba Jin’s “uncontrollable” emotion; however, they differ in their explanations for it. While Qian believed that nihilistic individualism weakened the cause of revolution, Hsia argued that Ba Jin’s nihilistic position prevented the author from artistically elaborating his fictional narratives.

In particular, when it comes to the protagonist Du Daxin’s choice of vengeful assassination, the nihilistic individualism is “problematic” because of its destabilization

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11 Hsia, History of Modern Chinese Fiction, pp. 244-45.
of the revolutionary cause. The premature death of his friend accelerates Du’s chronic pessimism, which may depreciate his action as mere private revenge. In Chapter 19, Du informs his wife of Zhang Weiqun’s death after witnessing Zhang’s decapitation. His friend’s death as well as the widow’s misery torment Du. In this context, Du’s decision to avenge Zhang is motivated not only by clearing his guilty feeling but also by driving away his spiritual agony:

He should avenge “his friend” by ending his life. He thought that this would be the only option left for him in order to assuage his conscience. This time he finally realized that he should put an end to his chronic kudou (struggle). He wanted to take a break that would last forever. Only after death, his spirit could be at peace: this is the only method to enjoy quiet happiness.

Now, he had decided his destiny. He had to go to the Jieyan siling (Director of Martial Law) and kill him; in this way, he could avenge Zhang Weiqun, which means he should give up his own life.

Those who are always eager to live are surely to be frightened, aggrieved and regretful about even a passing thought of death. But Du was different. He considered death as his obligation, a means to eliminate his lifetime of agony. Therefore, he felt relieved to obtain his eternal comfort with his death at hand. He even felt refreshed because he already found a route to put an end to his lifelong pain. (142-43)

Appearing between the public execution and the assassination attempt, this passage discloses how his emotional vascillation takes a dramatic turn. Du has no interest in establishing a socialist society; instead, he wants to avenge his friend’s premature death. In addition, he utilizes his revenge to put an end to his existing agony which has been intensified with his revolutionary comrade Zhang’s decapitation. The sacrifice Du is eager to embrace simultaneously accompanies a spiritual peace. As a result, Ba Jin’s

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12 See Gang, “Yiji uerji nian Zhongguo wentan de huigu,” p. 1202. Gang is straightforward in pointing out this problem: “Sacrificing oneself with revenge merely because of a deceased friend should not be the position of the Revolutionary Party.” Gang’s criticism instigated Ba Jin to write a defensive article only after several months in 1930. See Ba Jin, “《Miewang》 zuozhe de zibai” 《滅亡》作家底自白 [A confession of the author of Destruction], in Ba Jin yanjiu ziliao, ed. Li Cunguang, vol. 1, pp. 189-92.
formulation of revenge may carry a private cause, trivializing the revolutionary ideal of sacrificing personal interest to consolidate the public happiness.

Ba Jin was aware of the risks his portrayal of pessimism would bring forth; however, he was steadfast in highlighting his self-expression as inevitable and essential. As a defense for his writing, Ba Jin distinguishes himself from the characters and events in the name of fictional creation. For example, Ba Jin makes it clear to counter *kongbu zhuyi* 恐怖主義 (terrorism): “What anarchists oppose is the *zhidu* 制度 (system), not an individual; insofar as the system is formidable, it is useless to kill an individual.” 13 In addition, he reminded readers that the protagonist was “irrational” because he was suffering from tuberculosis. 14 Nevertheless, Ba Jin complicates the relationship between self-expression and fictional creation by underlining that the sources have been taken from his personal experience. Du’s suffering from tuberculosis is paralleled to Ba Jin’s own illness, which caused the author to relocate from Paris to the countryside in summer of 1927: “Du’s *feibing* 肺病 (tuberculosis) may have been taken from my own suffering from tuberculosis; at the same time, I was unhappy with my physical weakness so I was easily *jidong* 激動 (agitated) and *fennu* 憤怒 (enraged).” 15 Ba Jin disagrees with the means of terrorism and understands that his fictional character does not represent the Revolutionary Party; nevertheless, he confesses that he loves the young assassin and

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14 See Ba Jin, “《Miewang》 zuozhe de zibai,” p. 190.

there is no way to regret his choice other than crying over his death.¹⁶ Ba Jin has a reason to portray the pessimistic character with affection and intimacy. Along with Ba Jin’s understanding of anarchism, the pessimism prevalent in *Destruction* makes its political interpretation intriguing.

*Ba Jin’s Own Anarchism*

Regarding the inception of Chinese anarchism, Arif Dirlik notes its influence on literary production. This new political trend became domesticated by importing Japanese discussions and translations, which subsequently accompanied a skeptical worldview. Dirlik sums up this as the following: “[A]s a critique of despotism, anarchism was conflated with Russian nihilism, since the struggle against despotism appeared to Chinese radicals to be the distinguishing feature of both anarchism and nihilism. . . . [A]narchism appears as the expression of a mystical vision, a philosophical nihilism, as it were, that promised a cosmic unity by abolishing the very consciousness of sentient existence.”¹⁷

Carrying out seemingly hopeless resistance against despotism, Chinese anarchism conveyed fatalistic and pessimistic overtones, which were most often represented as a nihilistic literary tendency. Actually, this nihilistic fashion persisted even after the inception period to include Ba Jin’s literature in the 1920s.¹⁸ Dirlik’s scholarship of Chinese anarchism surveys its opposition to monarchism, nationalism and even to Marxism. Furthermore, Dirlik understands that Chinese anarchism played a role in nihilistic fictions. However, there always is a danger in judging fictional narratives from

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¹⁶ See Ba Jin, “《Miewang》zuozhe de zibai,” p. 190.


the perspective of fashionable ideologies of the time. Because individual writers had to engage with the prevalent political trend of the time, they each understood anarchism and nihilism in their own way. Through craftsmanship, they developed their own creative elements; as a result, Ba Jin’s originality lies in his engagement—which is often combative—with the dominant ideological principles.

The critical perspective focusing on the Western impact tends to exclude the domestic environment and individual creativity. For example, in Mau-sang Ng’s research on the May Fourth literature concerning the Western influence: “It is the central argument of the present study that the divided intellectual hero, who is markedly different from his intellectual predecessors in classical Chinese fiction—the ‘profligate litterateur’ (caizi) and the scholar official, owes much of his make-up to the celebrated nineteenth-century Russian superfluous hero and revolutionary Hamlet tradition.”\(^{19}\) Because Ng approaches the May Fourth tradition by breaking it from the traditional legacy (as is shown in the famous slogan of the Wholesale Westernization), Ba Jin’s works are mere products of the imported literature. Furthermore, Ng analyzes Ba Jin’s respective works according to the prototypes found in Russian literature. The protagonist in *Destruction*, for example, is modeled after Mikhail Artzybashev’s (1878-1927) Shevyrev because “[h]ate, revenge and destruction crowned the existence of Du.”\(^{20}\) Ba Jin admitted his reference to the Western literature; however, he protests at the accusation of simple

\(^{19}\) Mau-sang Ng, *The Russian Hero in Modern Chinese Fiction* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press; New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 4-5.

\(^{20}\) Ng, *Russian Hero*, p. 198. Shevyrev is the main character in “The Worker Shevyrev” (1909). Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) translated this medium length novel into Chinese from the German edition and serialized it in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報 [Fiction monthly] from July to December in 1921. The separate volume first came out from Shanghai Shangwu yinshuguan 上海商務印書館 in 1922. For Lu Xun’s essay about his translation, see Lu Xun, “Yile Gongren Suihuilüefu zhì hou” 譯了《工人綏惠略夫》之後 [After completing the translation of “The Worker Shevyrev,” 1921], in Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanjí* 魯迅全集 [Complete works of Lu Xun], vol. 10 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), pp. 180-86, esp. the editor’s footnote at p. 185.
reproduction: “In fact, the answer is really simple. The protagonist in the novel is not the personification of one of the ideologies [such as Kropotkin’s anarchism, Tolstoy’s humanitarianism, and Artzybashev’s nihilism]. This point has never been unclear: Du’s ideology is close to anarchism, but strictly speaking, he is not an anarchist; his ideology is close to nihilism, but he is not a nihilist because he is neither a materialist nor a realist; his ideology is close to individualism, but he is not an individualist.”21 Ba Jin is against the generalization of a certain ideology; in doing so, he argues that his fiction is original despite all the similarities to its Russian counterparts.

Ba Jin’s works differ from the conventional and pervasive political discussion of his time because he created his own definition of anarchism. In terms of ideological commitment, Ba Jin points out an affinity between himself and Du Daxin as he writes, “the two of us could not find the right route for revolution.”22 Without denying his ideologies projected through the fictional characters, Ba Jin proclaims that he has uniquely developed anarchism:

Before and after I wrote *Destruction*, I often called myself an “anarchist.” Sometimes, I called myself as a follower of Kropotkin (1842-1921) since he proposed anarchist communism, not individualistic anarchism. But I prefer to say that I had my own “anarchism.” In the past, there was no fixed and precise organization for “anarchists.” Anarchists varied in a number of parties as if everybody had their own “anarchism.” Even though they were identical in doing their best to ultimately establish a harmonious world of communism, they could not collaborate. In fact, not a single one among the “anarchists” has detailed methods to transform the contemporary society into communism.23

21 Ba Jin, “《Miewang》 zuozhe de zibai,” p. 189.


Ba Jin uses quotation marks to emphasize that his anarchism differed from any existing anarchist parties. In addition, Ba Jin admits that his anarchism was not built on an explicit ground of realizable objectives not to mention comprehensive methods. As a result, Ba Jin’s “own” anarchism suggests an important angle necessary for comprehending *Destruction*. Only when Ba Jin’s own understanding is incorporated, can political critiques provide a convincing analytical approach. Moreover, a critique considering Ba Jin’s artistic value simply as a reflection of adolescence would undermine the author’s serious engagement consistent through his creative authorship. Ba Jin was seriously involved in his novelist career as he has represented the sentimental and pessimistic mindset of Chinese youth with his distinct anarchistic conviction. Later on in 1968, when China was at the height of the Cultural Revolution, Ba Jin was severely criticized because of his political “ambiguity”; but his belief was firm: “You have your thoughts and I have mine. This is the fact and you can’t change it even if you kill me.”\(^{24}\)

Even at the risk of his life, Ba Jin, at the age over 60, was inflexible in putting forward his enthusiasm which he represented as “political pessimism.”

In fact, Ba Jin’s nihilistic individualism distinguishes itself from existing political ideologies; as a result, his fictional narrative multiplies critical sensitivity in the face of the concurrent historical events. Despite the “ambiguous” political ideologies, the protagonist is conscious of the miserable people around him. In Chapter Five, Du Daxin goes outside his apartment and walks along the streets without destination. The streets appear at peace; but Du catches sight of a series of heartbreaking images the modern

\(^{24}\) Olga Lang, “Introduction,” in Pa Chin, *Family*, trans. Sidney Shapiro, new ed. (1958; Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1972), p. xxx. Additionally, Lang provides specific details about Ba Jin’s public humiliation: “[O]n June 20, 1968, Pa Chin was dragged to the People’s Stadium of Shanghai. Those present and those who watched the scene on television saw him kneeling on broken glass and heard the shouts accusing him of being a traitor and enemy of Mao. They also heard him break his silence at the end and shout at the top of his voice.”
Shanghai presents. For example, a hungry kid is beaten up and taken to the police station for stealing a raddish. Moreover, Du develops the street scenes to be associated with ceaseless historical turmoil: “Perennial zhanzheng 戰爭 (wars) are everywhere; junfa 軍閥 (warlords) brutalize people; liumang 流氓 (rascals) and tufei 土匪 (bandits) are rampant; waiguoren 外國人 (foreigners) are in commanding presence on Chinese soil; and members of the Revolutionary Party are being slaughtered” (43). In particular, a little girl and her grandfather pull and push a dung-cart, which overwhelms the protagonist with despair:

A fenche 糞車 (dung-cart) slowly came by. The one pulling the rope in the front was about ten-year-old girl in a thin worn-out mian’ao 棉襖 (cotton-padded jacket) with its grey cotton stuffing popped out. She had hair loosened and wore no shoes. Her face was frozen to red with steam coming out from her mouth; she was pulling the cart with all her might. The old man pushing the cart behind appeared to be the girl’s grandfather considering his age. With woolly cap on his half-baldy head, he was one-eyed and had wrinkles all over his face; only a few strands of grey huxu 胡須 (beards) were around his kushou 枯瘦 (dry and pale) lips. His clothes were as ragged as his granddaughter’s and he was in bare feet as well. He was struggling with pushing the cart and looked as if an old horse with heavy load on its back were forced to move on by floggings. (43)

On the same street where a car had struck a man and killed him, Du Daxin realizes that the misery of today was akin to the misery of yesterday. The pain and suffering are exclusive to Chinese people who are politically powerless and financially impoverished. In the middle of winter, the poor little girl and old man have to do manual work in tatters and without wearing shoes. The desperate and miserable street scene disheartens Du, signifying that the misery does not merely happen to one generation; instead, the hardship would surely be handed down to subsequent generations. As a result, the descriptions of
everyday life, coupled with the character’s sensitivity, denote major political concerns of modern China.

In this way, *Destruction* exemplifies how Ba Jin’s struggle with existing political ideologies could produce a stance that was critical of the time. Likewise, the prevalent pessimism, as its association with the sensitive personality, is necessary for further deliberation. Criticizing previous scholarship for discussing Ba Jin’s works simply from his anarchist motive, Chen Sihe 陳思和 demands a critical angle taken from the novel’s artistic significance: “All of these critiques focus on ideological registers and the protagonist Du Daxin, hereby neglecting the artistic significance inherent in *Destruction*. As a result, this critical angle enraged Ba Jin . . .”25 According to Chen, the criticism of Ba Jin simply by referring to political ideologies cannot be a sufficient or convincing approach for interpreting *Destruction*. Chen continues, “Even though Ba Jin’s characterization carries strong political implications, political yuanze 原則 (principles) cannot explain this illustration. Ba Jin opposed ideological analyses of the protagonist Du because they would not consider him as an individual.”26 By opposing the criticism the anarchist writer received from existing politics, Chen suggests a compelling answer for how Ba Jin developed his political implications. Ba Jin’s pessimism has more significance than a narrow political perspective can explain. For this reason, Ba Jin’s nihilistic individualism requires serious exploration regarding how the author negotiated his pessimism with the historical exigencies of modern China.

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Politicizing Sentimentality

According to Ba Jin’s autobiography, a political incident in America motivated him to continue writing *Destruction*. On August 23, 1927, Ba Jin read a newspaper article informing the world of the electrocution of the Italian American anarchist Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1888-1927) along with his friend Niccolo Sacco (1891-1927) at Charlestown State Prison in Boston. Rereading his letter with Vanzetti and hearing the “crying of numerous hidden people,” Ba Jin “dug out that notebook from the pile of worn books and proceeded to write *Destruction*’s chapters.”27 This record shows how the execution of the anarchists electrified the author to resume his writing; that is, Ba Jin responded to the historical controversy by expressing his indignation and despair through fiction. The autobiographical records correspond to his “Preface” to *Destruction*:

I have a “teacher” who taught me *ai* 愛 (love) and *kuanshu* 寬恕 (forgiveness). However, people’s *zenghen* 憎恨 (hatred) forced this innocent man [Vanzetti] to be burnt to death on an electric chair in a prison of Charlestown, Boston. On the chair he still wanted to forgive those who were killing him. I have never met him; but I loved him and he loved me as well. “I have always sinned!” This is because I could not love and forgive people. I love my older brother so I caused him pain; I love my “teacher” so I instead abandoned his teachings of love and forgiveness, advocating and further promoting hatred and revenge. I have always sinned. (3)

The execution of the anarchists traumatized Ba Jin to recall his justifiable beliefs of hatred and revenge: “I could not agree with his [Vanzetti’s] ‘*daliang*’ 大量 (magnanimity).”28 Vanzetti’s last words sound religious, echoing Jesus Christ’s appeal to God, praying for forgiveness on his last day of the Crucifixion. In particular, Ba Jin associates the anarchist’s teachings with those of his elder brother whom he adored and

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respected most (3-4). As a result, Vanzetti’s martyrdom reminds Ba Jin of his brother’s untimely death. His grief and anger intensify his resolve for revenge as if filial revenge mandated its necessity. Furthermore, the sympathy for the deceased is not restricted to the anarchists but it encompasses the victims (the living and the dead) of Ba Jin’s fellow citizens.

Sympathy for Victims of Social Injustice

Ba Jin’s autobiography further records how he was sympathetic with Chinese who were struggling with the political chaos. In the midst of detailing in what order he developed the chapters for Destruction, Ba Jin confesses his loneliness and isolation (at least in the beginning) in Paris, which his foreign exile aggravated. Especially, the author clarifies that his novelist career began with an unforgettable memory of Shanghai: “Notre Dame’s sad bells rang out, beating heavily on my heart. In this environment, my memories continued to trouble me. I thought of that active life in Shanghai. I thought of my struggling friends. I thought of my past love and hatred, sadness and happiness, sufferings and sympathies, hopes and despair. Thinking of all this was like a knife painfully stabbing my heart.”29 The author was aware of the terror and misery erupting relentlessly in the metropolis where he once joined revolutionary activities and where his friends were still fighting against the warlord regime. In particular, Ba Jin’s memory carries an entanglement of emotions; that is, his sympathy is an expression of conflicting emotions impossible to exist as a sole entity. Despite the different time and place, Ba Jin consistently sympathized with various sufferers. In this respect, Ba Jin’s sympathy can

29 Ba Jin, Autobiography, p. 76. For the Chinese original, see Ba Jin, Ba Jin zizhuan, pp. 118-19.
be “generalized,” and thus it embraces anarchists, revolutionaries, and the suffering Chinese in the name of victims of society.

Ba Jin illustrates how the sympathetic mindset takes shape through conversations among characters. Moreover, his sympathy is not contingent upon what he learned only from political principles (such as anarchism and Marxism); instead, it is based upon empathy for other people’s misery and how the fiction characters understand the misery as being unjust. In Chapter 13, Zhang Weiqun, who has no idea of his imminent decapitation, is sympathetic to the cause of revolution, but he has doubts about its success: “When is the day for our revolution?” / “I cannot wait for it anymore” (101). Zhang is impatient and suspicious because people’s misery appears to last forever. To clarify that this concern is not necessarily based on self-interest, Zhang tells a story about how a stingy landlord drove out a miserable family:

“. . . The woman was suffering from tuberculosis with three kids to raise. . . . In the beginning, she did laundry and mended clothes for others, making little money to feed her family. Afterwards, her illness became serious, which prevented her from working; so she had no other way than to borrow money from others. She either pawned or sold off all her belongings. We helped her occasionally but we could not afford more due to our own desperate conditions. She could not pay the rent for four months. Though we helped her pay off one month, how could the landlord, who only cared for money as precious as his life, be satisfied with this? The landlord often sought a quarrel with her; because she had no way to pay him off, she always begged him to wait until her husband came back. . . .” (102)

The female ex-tenant’s husband was put into jail for stealing goods. Without harboring any sympathy for the impoverished woman, the landlord finally called the police and forced the woman and three kids to move out. Zhang has to be sympathetic because this incident implicates both himself and his comrade Du: “You moved into this place with my introduction. At that time, I had no idea about the situation. I just thought that the
woman intended to move out because otherwise the landlord would have found a way out for her. I just wanted you to stay with us. Only after you moved in, my wife told me about the woman’s miserable situation” (102). Although they were not aware of the woman’s misery, the members of the Revolutionary Party are still responsible for the expulsion of the woman. Ba Jin’s strategy lies in minimizing the political principles in order to evoke sympathy; that is, the author shows how people are disheartened and cannot bear to witness other people’s misery. In particular, as a victim of tuberculosis and pessimism, Du is one of those who perceive an increased level of sympathetic sorrow.

Thus, Ba Jin’s revenge originates from sympathy, which further mandates a task for identifying and accusing the victimizers. With this plan in his mind, Ba Jin provides textual clues as a means to indict the warlord group in Shanghai for provoking the atrocities and calamities. As a preliminary measure to put down the labor strike, Shanghai policemen arrest Zhang and others for carrying flyers with “rebellious” slogans such as: “Down with the warlord Sun Chuanfang who ravages people!” / “The evil Sun’s last day has come!” / “Shanghai workers rise up in arms!” (117). Moreover, the novel concludes with Du’s failed assassination: “In the evening, startling news spread to Shanghai. In Zongshanghui’s 總商會 (the General Chamber of Commerce) welcoming reception for the Director of Martial Law, a youth disguised as a journalist, fired four shots at the Director. The Director was injured in the shoulder, and one of his guards was killed; but the assassin also killed himself by putting his final bullet into his head” (160). Including the lines from the fliers, Ba Jin identifies at that time Shanghai warlord Sun Chuanfang as the archenemy. From 1925 to 1927, Sun had served as a military ruler in
Shanghai where he mercilessly suppressed labor strikes. According to historical accounts, Sun shut down all the labor unions and student organizations and ordered his lieutenant Li Baozhang 李寶章 to quell the protests, which has been so called the “White Terror.” By contextualizing his fiction with history, Ba Jin pinpoints the warlord Sun as the target for his vengeful anger. As sympathy for victims of society intensifies, resentment towards the Shanghai warlord magnifies. As a result, Sun is the one who must pay for the sacrifices made during the tumultuous periods of warlord rule in Shanghai.

However, determining who are the primary villains is a demanding task considering that the Chinese upheaval resulted from multiple factors. To begin with, to say that the warlord Sun is the conclusive instigator of all the troubles can be an exaggeration. On November 13, 1935, six years after Ba Jin published Destruction, the female assassin Shi Jianqiao 施劍翹 (1906-79) successfully assassinated Sun Chuanfang. Though he had already retreated to Buddhism since 1928, Sun was shot to death during a sutra-recitation session in Tianjin 天津. The “poetic justice” Ba Jin envisioned in Destruction was finally accomplished by the daughter of the late Fengtian 奉天 general Shi Congbin 施從濱 (1867-1925). According to Eugenia Lean, however, the evaluation of Sun is controversial because newspaper articles and editorials praised his administration not only in Shanghai but also in Jiangsu 江蘇 and Zhejiang 浙江.


31 See David Bonavia, China’s Warlords (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 162-63. Bonavia categorizes the warlords in light of their “styles.” Under the chapter titled “The Eastern Warlords,” he details Sun’s suppression of the popular protest: “Sun Chuanfang declared all the new political bodies illegal, closed down the Shanghai General Trade Union, and proscribed the city’s United Congress of Workers and Students. Li Baozhang, the notoriously brutal commander of the Shanghai garrison, began savage retaliatory measures against workers, students, party members, and those whom the leftists liked to call ‘democratic and progressive figures.’ The Chinese-ruled parts of Shanghai were subjected to a wave of ‘white terror.’”
provinces. The court found Shi Jianqiao not guilty; nevertheless, this was not because of Sun’s bad reputation as a brutal warlord but because the revenge case became an arena where the various political groups mobilized and even engineered the public sympathy for the filial woman. Actually, the removal of Sun further raises questions in light of his importance among the warlords in modern China. Though Sun was an influential figure in the broad regions including Shanghai, his assassination alone could not put an end to the wide reach of warlordism. The general public did not count on warlords for their role in restoring Chinese order: “Each warlord’s primary goals were individual and personal, the maximization of his power. Each man was a member of a clique not in order to contribute to goals of the group, but rather to contribute to a situation which would be to his personal advantage.” The disbelief in the rule of warlords was prevalent; for this reason, the perennial disorder resulting from the countless warlords (they claimed their own legitimacy though) would depreciate the significance of one single warlord’s assassination.

Furthermore, the battling political groups may have disillusioned Ba Jin (as a representative of the victims of society) who had looked forward to their role for change.

32 SeeLean, Public Passions, p. 30. Lean refers to the articles in the North China Herald and Dagongbao 大公報 [L’Impartial] written right after Sun’s assassination in 1935. Lean does not look into whether the editorials were “unusually” sympathetic considering they were written in remembrance of the deceased warlord.

33 See Lean, Public Passions, pp. 165-66.

34 James E. Sheridan, “The Warlord Era: Politics and Militarism under the Peking Government, 1916-28,” in The Cambridge History of China, Republican China 1912-1949, Part 1, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 303. The warlords were also notorious for their luxurious lifestyle. They were addicted to extravagant consumption; for example, Zhang Zuolin 張作霖 (1875-1928) owned the biggest pearl in the world and Wu Peifu 吳佩孚 (1874-1939) kept one of the largest diamonds. One American visitor was surprised by “sinful quantities of costly foods” when a warlord in Shandong held a dinner party. They gambled as well so Zhang Zuolin lost one million dollars and the “Dogmeat General” Zhang Zongchang 張宗昌 (1881-1932) lost all of the payment he received for his army in a single night. See Jonathan Fenby, Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power, 1850 to the Present (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 146. Fenby refers to Hsi-sheng Chi’s research on the Chinese warlordism. Chi presents these examples when he discusses the lack of discipline among the warlord army. See Hsi-sheng Chi’s, Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 91-95, and also his notes at pp. 254-55.
In February 1927, the labor unions launched the Shanghai Uprising in concert with the student organizations. The uprising had two purposes: 1) disrupt the warlord Sun’s defense formation before the Northern Expedition Army arrived; 2) construct a politically advantageous status for the Communist Party and the KMT Left. 35 After taking over Shanghai, however, Chiang Kai-shek responded by purging the left-wing members in his new territories with the purpose of “consolidating the rear front”: “On April 12, Chiang began to eliminate Communists in areas under his control in Shanghai, Canton, and Nanking. As Chiang’s intention to purge the Communists became clear, the KMT Left at Wuhan, now led by Wang Jingwei, formally expelled Chiang Kai-shek and his supporters from the party.”36 A significant number of revolutionaries were executed (even by means of public decapitation) and a series of retaliations ensued. In Chapter 16, Ba Jin illustrates this disillusionment by portraying an arrogant and hypocritical KMT Right.37

The leader of the underground revolutionary group Wang Bingjun 王秉鈞, without making any efforts for his rescue, uses Zhang Weiqun’s death as an opportunity to show off his own political authority: “The Zongli 總理 (Prime Minister) knew that I was working hard so he tapped on my shoulder with smiles saying I am a committed revolutionary comrade. [. . .] Zhang was not a youth who understood our mission as well as Zongli zhuyi 總理主義 (the Prime Minister’s teachings). He has courageously xisheng 犧牲 (sacrificed) himself for the ideology so our late Prime Minister’s spirit will

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37 Though the text itself does not specify to which political group Wang belongs, Ba Jin in his essay of recollection clarifies that the character was modeled after those in the KMT Right. Ba Jin detested and despised those who claimed themselves as anarchists and later on turned into the officials serving for the “reactionary” governments. See Ba Jin, “Tan 《Miewang》,” p. 392.
protect him in Heaven” (122). The warlords were to blame for victimizing people; nevertheless, the revolutionary group could not suggest any alternatives to bring peace back to China.

Without implicating the Communists and the KMT Left, Ba Jin may yet have had reservations about their role in improving the situation. However, the author, at least in his writing practice, does not explicitly suggest any optimism. Instead, he, with a critical tone, creates a confrontational revolutionary figure. For example, hearing Wang’s politicization of Zhang’s sacrifice, Du Daxin expresses his sarcasm through “impolite laughter”: “Du could not help but laugh. His laughter embarrassed Wang. Impolite laughter at this situation humiliated both Wang and the Prime Minister, which should be repaid by a thousand deaths. Wang couldn’t believe that there was such a courageous person in this world!” (123). Though he appears to be courageous in questioning the leadership, Du restrains himself by only showing his disapproval of the political rhetoric. Thus the mockery aimed at political groups betrays that the anarchistic revolutionary is unable to improve the desperate conditions of contemporary China. Actually, Ba Jin’s creation of this character of “passive” resistance is prevalent throughout the text. From the beginning of the novel, this incapacity to act is the fundamental source for provoking the pessimistic internal monologue. Compared with other passers-by such as Li Leng, who lowers his head and glances sidewise out of fear, Du has the courage to swear at the villain with anger and hatred: “The Chief of Staff—that damn bastard, that son of bitch” (11). Du is protesting; nevertheless, Du is unable to do anything more than swear, cry, and lament. The sympathy for victims of China demanded a method to punish the villains; but, Ba Jin could not come up with any compelling answer other than portraying
the incapable revolutionary who eventually ends with the unsuccessful assassination of
the Shanghai warlord: the political nihilism the author himself was reluctant to concede.

**Implying Political Incapacity**

As a representation of their historical pessimism, a group of writers were
interested in illustrating the intellectuals’ inability to commit. In particular, revolutionary
romanticism became a popular topic when the Communist Revolution turned out to be a
failure in 1927. Critics such as David Wang note that the fictional narrative at this period
invented an unconventional representation of the contemporary events. Proposing the
fictional narratives as reflections of writers’ experiences, Wang argues that the “literature
of revolution and romance” showcases how the left-wing intellectuals negotiated their
utopian dream and private love stories.38 Jianmei Liu, with her focus on their mentality,
deliberates on a “split personality” or a “schizophrenic syndrome” peculiar in the
literature of the late 1920s and early 1930s: “Driven by the utopian dream of a strong
China, those leftist writers came to embrace revolution and love enthusiastically both in
fiction and in real life but found themselves confronted with dilemmas between the ideal
and reality, self and nation, progress and tradition, revolutionary masculinity and
sentimental femininity.”39 Liu continues, “they were fascinated with this formulaic writing

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38 David Wang notes the blossoming of revolutionary romanticism in the aftermath of the failure of the Communist
[Ni Huanzhi, 1929], Jiang Guangci’s 蔣光慈 (1901-31) Duanku dang 短袴黨 [Des Sans-culottes, 1927], and Bai
Wei’s 白薇 (1893-1987) Zhadan yu zhengniao 炸彈與征鳥 [The bomb and the expeditionary bird, 1928], and also my
primary text in this chapter, Ba Jin’s Destruction. See David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History: History,
Wang quotes Lu Xun who already anticipated this literary fashion in his essay “Geming shidai de wenxue” 革命時代的
文學 [Literature of the revolutionary period, 1927]: “For revolution, we need revolutionaries, but revolutionary
literature can wait, for only when revolutionaries start writing can there be revolutionary literature.” See p. 85 in

39 Jianmei Liu 劉劍梅, *Revolution Plus Love: Literary History, Women’s Bodies, and Thematic Repetition in*
because it provided a perfect site to linger on the dilemmas and contradictions that epitomized their tormented experience. According to Liu, the works of revolutionary romanticism reflect the intellectual mentality in modern China. The intellectuals were suspicious whether the revolution would finally become a reality. In doing so, the writers, often narrating their own tales, expressed their historical nihilism by placing the characters into dilemmas where public responsibilities were in tension with individual freedom.

In writing practice, revolutionary romanticism had to count on a narrative formulation to effectuate the intellectual mentality. As is often the case, the vacillating mindset generates two different streams of consciousness which diverge and converge. Swinging between revolution and romance, this new literary fashion provided the writers a useful structure to demonstrate their frustration. In Ba Jin’s text, the revolutionary romanticism gives birth to cacophonous illustrations that grow more with the couple’s growing intimacy. In Chapter Nine, for example, Du Daxin, on his way back home, witnesses the victims of society: A man from Shandong 叫出 “Selling kids!” with his wife, her hair loosened, and their five kids being carried in two bamboo baskets (76-77). On the very next page, his romanticism furthers even with the descriptions of people’s intensifying misery: “While Du was looking up at the moon from a pavilion located at Kangyi li 康益里 (Kangyi district) on Kangti lu 康悌路 (Rue Conty), a girl was also looking up the moonlight against the balcony in the right building of a Western mansion on Haige lu 海格路 (Avenue Haig). This was Li Jingshu. She adored the

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40 Liu, Revolution Plus Love, p. 18.
moonlight; every time there was moonlight, she went to bed late. Tonight was not an exception, but her xinjing 心境 (feelings) were different” (78). The male protagonist cannot ignore the miserable people who comprise the everyday Shanghai landscape; at the same time, the romantic sentimentality multiplies even with other people’s pain.

Most of the Ba Jin’s text is committed to this kind of contrasting scenes, which correspond to Mao Dun’s 茅盾 (1896-1981) first category of the “revolution plus love” theme: “[T]he protagonist engages in both revolution and love, experiences the conflict between the two pursuits, and finally relinquishes love for the sake of revolution.”41 The choice of revolution does not prioritize the revolution; rather, this strategy has the purpose of highlighting love while considering revolution merely as a backdrop.42

Romantic sentimentality is important to the development of individual freedom in modern China. On the surface, Ba Jin’s work appears to recognize the individual pursuit of romantic sentimentality which the revolutionary agenda had long overshadowed in the name of the May Fourth realism. However, this approach may underestimate Ba Jin’s creation of the vengeful character who bids a farewell to his lover and relinquishes his own life. To investigate Ba Jin’s resolution through revolution, the metaphorical use of tuberculosis challenges the argument centering on individual freedom. For example, Mingwei Song discusses the youth theme prevalent in Ba Jin’s Destruction, arguing that modern Chinese writers frequently used tuberculosis as a means to suggest the anxious mentality the romantic generation perceived: “[T]he TB patient is always portrayed as a


42 See Lee, Revolution of the Heart, p. 278.
youth whose disease strongly radicalizes his/her sense of alienation, intensifies the inner restlessness, and thus presents him/her as an ideal candidate for the romantic hero who stands against the established order.”\textsuperscript{43} Xiaobing Tang also delves into its meaning and defines tuberculosis as “a metaphor for an enfeebled nation, a benighted populace, an individual’s existential angst, or a continually thwarted sensitive mind.”\textsuperscript{44} In specific, Tang interprets the literary use of tuberculosis as the “desire for social etiology and transformation.”\textsuperscript{45} Likewise, Song and Tang equally understand that the outbreak of tuberculosis coincides with the time when individuals desperately needed renovations in modern China. Taking the pervasive pessimism into account, the desire for a better China inevitably encounters frustration and disappointment, which eventually reinforces the fictional representation of the political impotence of intellectuals.

Further examination of Ba Jin’s text corroborates that the author made efforts to illustrate intellectuals who are inadequate in performing his commitment. More importantly, the narrative formulation is rather implicit, often depending on metaphorical elaboration; in detail, the dwindling masculinity signifies the political impotence that is felt by intellectuals. Du Daxin’s illness originates from his aborted romance with his cousin; at the marriage ceremony, he planned to run away with her, but he could not:

\begin{quote}
When the aunt’s family forced the bride to put on makeup and sit in the \textit{huajiao} 花轎 (flower palanquin), he saw she was desperately struggling and crying. The aunt’s family all thought that this was just how a daughter usually behaves when she is married off. But, this cry and this struggle were
\end{quote}


unusual. He was the only person who could comprehend the reason: He knew that these were all because of him. Being jidong 激動 (excited), he suddenly thought out one strange idea. He wanted to push his way through the crowd and bring her back; but he lacked the yongqi 勇氣 (courage) to do that and there were too many men. He was in total despair. (31)

In addition, Du’s illness becomes severe, destroying both his mind and his body, which is obvious in Li Jingshu’s worries: “Why do you shuairuo 衰弱 (grow weak) day by day as if you would be like that forever? If you are not happy, how could I be happy?” (111).

As these quoted passages indicate, the anxiety and impotence result from a hopeless love; at the same time, the impotence is paralleled with the incompetent revolutionaries, who look forward to the social and cultural renovations, but are not convinced that they will succeed. The sense of political impotence furthers with romanticism. As a result, the countering relationship between revolution and romance becomes debatable; instead, the romantic elements are strategically used to delineate the incompetent intellectuals. Ba Jin conveyed the intellectual frustration and nihilism through the vehicle of sentimental romance; in doing so, the seemingly dramatic tension between revolution and love rather effectively represents the young revolutionaries suffering from their unattainable responsibilities.

Regarding this parallelism of masculine incapacity, the writings of premodern China provide numerous examples in which Confucian literati used the technique to reflect their unsuccessful careers. Suggesting that “fragile scholars” are examples of metaphorical illustrations, Geng Song applies Foucault’s methodology to carry out “cultural readings”: “Instead of viewing the literary texts as expressions of the mentality of individual writers, the study focuses more on power, ideology and the possibilities and
limits of resistance in premodern China.”⁴⁶ According to Song, intellectuals were often caricatured as “feminine,” which reflects their dwindling political power or the declining social status. For instance, the images of feeble literati in *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (*The Western Wing*) correspond to the historical backdrop in which the Yuan 元 dynasty (1271-1368) built up its discriminatory policies, and hereby forced the Han Chinese literati to be suppressed and marginalized.⁴⁷ Examining the scholar-beauty genre of the late Ming and Qing, Maram Epstein also finds out that the literati resorted to the parallelism in order to incorporate their historical consciousness: “By the late imperial period, the rewards for participating in the examination system were widely perceived as incommensurate with the sacrifices demanded. Even if a man were talented and lucky enough to win a degree, the breakdown of the official bureaucracy stymied his chances for meaningful service to the state.”⁴⁸ Epstein continues, “Yet the use of the trope exploded during the late Ming and Qing, and even courtesans and prostitutes were held up as emblems of integrity, whereas scholars, in contrast, were depicted as increasingly weak or corrupt.”⁴⁹ Epstein understands that the masculine images became “feminine” as the literati wished to express the failure of their careers. Furthermore, Epstein pays attention to feminine figures became more remarkable and accelerated the diminishing masculine power.

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⁴⁹ Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, pp. 88-89.
In this respect, the escalation of romantic sentimentality, especially the moral integrity of the female counterpart, dramatically intensifies the male literati’s political failure. Keith McMahon argues that the remarkable woman plays a role in maximizing the male’s innate impotence: “Female agency [as in the remarkable woman] is especially clear in an age-old motif that emerges in the late Ming and again in the late Qing: female heroism in times of male failure, weakness, and despair. In dire times like these the man depends on the heroic woman for direction and self-definition, and they become involved in a love affair between just the two of them, which I label with the term ‘sublime passion.’”

Ba Jin portrays Li Jingshu as a “modern” remarkable woman, whose passionate love for the suffering Du Daxin destabilizes his resolution for violent revenge. In Chapter 20, Du visits Li’s mansion to have a final meeting; at that time, he explains why he should carry out the revenge though he knows that it will be suicidal. As a desperate effort to save Du’s life, Li prioritizes humanitarianism based upon the Christian benevolence: “Daxin, we should not repeat the canju 慘劇 (atrocities) asking for yiyan huanyan 以眼還眼 (an eye for an eye) and yiya huanya 以牙還牙 (a tooth for a tooth). Aren’t these atrocities more than enough? . . . We should ganhua 感化 (influence) them with the great love. Moreover, we should bring those heartless into submission with the power of love and hold hands to work for love!” (151).

50 Keith McMahon, Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), p. 2. In his earlier book, McMahon states that there are two female types which are superior to the man: first, the shrew (belligerent); second, the self-sacrificing woman or the talented beauty (virtuous). Accordingly, he presents two examples for the male inferiority: Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 in Honglou meng 紅樓夢 [Dream of the red mansion] (effeminate and vaguely desexualized); and Ximen Qing 西門慶 in Jin Ping Mei 金瓶梅 [The golden lotus] (the wastrel). See Keith McMahon, Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 10-11.

51 This passage is based on Christian teachings in the Holy Bible. See Matthew 5:38-39: “You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” “But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” See also Matthew 5:44: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those
will generate a chain of violence in the false excuse of carrying out justice. Instead of
violent retribution, Li proposes the great power of love and forgiveness as they are not
only the best solutions but also obligations to establish a free and equal society. Along
with the remarkable woman’s passionate and eloquent speech, the romantic
sentimentality reaches its climax; at the same time, this is the point where the
intellectual’s impotence culminates in the anarchistic assassin.

Revenge and Moral Responsibility

The intellectuals of Republican China were worried about the problematic
Chinese situation; accordingly, they all agreed in putting forward solutions to improve
the spreading military violence. In his essay about Chinese warlordism, Arthur Waldron
explores the early 20th-century inceptions of the term *junfa*; furthermore, he introduces
the intellectual debates regarding how the warlords were responsible for provoking
catastrophic political instability. In 1922, for example, Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879-1942)
looked forward to “the creation of a strong and centralized party that could defeat the
warlords and forge a strong and unified state.”52 In 1930, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893-
1988), in a similar vein, blamed both warlordism and imperialism as the two sources for
intensifying people’s poverty and internal strife.53 A series of satirical cartoons display
the cozy relationship built up between the warlords and imperialism: The West and Japan

who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

52 Arthur Waldron, “The Warlord: Twentieth-Century Chinese Understandings of Violence, Militarism, and

manipulated Chinese warlords for the purpose of maximizing their influences.\textsuperscript{54} As historians such as Hsi-sheng Ch’i point out, warlordism decentralized the political power: “[P]olitical disintegration and fragmentation in China had gone so far as to make it inadmissible to treat the country as having a single political regime.”\textsuperscript{55} Likewise, warlordism has been regarded as provoking the political instability during the Republican China. Thus, intellectuals such as Chen and Liang envisioned an optimistic future, the consolidation of political factions, which was possible only after the elimination of warlords.

\textit{Responsible Intellectuals}

By contrast, Hu Shi’s 胡適 (1891-1962) analysis, differing from the unequivocal criticisms of warlordism, is significant in underlining the literati’s responsibilities for the deteriorating conditions in China. Countering the central government’s attempt for military unification, the famous May Fourth critic proposed provincial autonomy as a means to eliminate warlordism.\textsuperscript{56} The reunification of the country, Hu Shi believed, would not necessarily produce the peace and stability because warlordism is merely a type of disorder when irresponsible intellectuals failed to build an ideal civil society.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} For Waldron’s source of the Chinese cartoons, see Bi Keguan 畢克官 and Huang Yuanlin 黃遠林, \textit{Zhongguo manhua shi} [A history of Chinese cartoon], new ed. (1982; Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006). Bi and Huang collected various kinds of cartoons and arranged them in chronological order ranging from the Han dynasty stone inscriptions to the Communist propaganda before 1949.

\textsuperscript{55} Ch’i, \textit{Warlord Politics in China}, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{56} See Waldron, “The Warlord,” p. 1095.

\textsuperscript{57} See Waldron, “The Warlord,” p. 1096. In his discussion of Hu Shi’s 胡適 (1891-1962) view of warlordism, Waldron directly quotes a passage taken from Hu Shi’s letter sent to Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893-1988) on July 19, 1930. Hu Shi, with reference to historical fact, presents a series of disorders intellectuals instigated: revolutions (wenren 文人) and warlord struggles (zhengke 政客) in the wake of the fall of the Qing. Hu Shi also includes the local violence the Communists (tongzhi 同志) caused, especially the terrorism in 1927. For the Chinese original, see Hu Shi,
According to him, the most urgent and fundamental task is to establish *wenzhi zhidu* (civilian government) in which the intellectuals should lead the government with moral responsibility.\(^{58}\) Hu Shi might have agreed on the general repetition of the historical pattern which historians of China and the West observed: “dynastic disintegration, warlordism, and re-unification.”\(^{59}\) However, he raises an important question regarding what would be the next stage after the termination of warlords: If the strong central government successfully unifies the countless warlords, will order come around and people live in peace? Regardless of warlordism and imperialism, people would remain in distress as long as intellectuals did not carry out their responsibilities. For the competition among warlords, Hu Shi argues, the intellectuals were to blame because they agitated the military leaders; in addition, he even includes the revolutionary groups (without distinction of the KMT and the Communists) as those who have instigated terrorism.\(^{60}\)

Ba Jin must have considered the warlords and imperialists as the primary suspects for arousing the problems in modern China. Nevertheless, Hu Shi’s criticism of the literati, regardless of their ideology, strikes home with the impotent intellectual. As the protagonist Du Daxin admits, he has no capacity to eliminate the social problems existing in every corner of Shanghai. The victims of society have no hope for looking forward to a better tomorrow. Meanwhile, the romantic sentimentality is unstoppable, which is

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\(^{60}\) Hu Shi, “Da Liang Shuming,” p. 49.
growing even with the realization of impotence. In the end, the feeble revolutionary fearfully realizes that he is as guilty of the current fiasco as the villainous warlords. In Chapter Five, the protagonist’s agony disrupts his consciousness because his underground resistance, instead of mitigating people’s sufferings, might have promoted their distress:

[Du] sensed a kind of yapo 壓迫 (pressure); first it was a huaiyi 懷疑 (doubt) and then it was a kongbu 恐怖 (terror). “Ah! This is not possible! I don’t believe it!” He tried to open his eyes wide; then he could see nothing. Everything was the same in silence and peace. He was somewhat moming qimiao 莫名其妙 (at a loss). Suddenly he heard a person crying out:

“We were born poor, now suffering from poverty, and will die in poverty. This is all because of you.”

This is not a voice of one person, but from ten thousands and even one million; after all, this is the voice of one entire jieji 階級 (class). With the thought of “we” and “you,” he felt he was violently trembling. (44)

Du Daxin is committed to revolution because he believes in fighting for people’s benefit. Despite his contributions, however, the situation grows worse and offers no hope of advancing society. In auditory hallucinations, he even hears a shouting voice criticizing him as a promoter of class discrimination. Ba Jin may raise this question: Do the intellectuals (including the author himself) vocalize the revolution to deliver people out of poverty or to show off their pompous education?61 The sympathetic revolutionary cannot ignore the pain of the victims of China; more importantly, his incapacity drives him to suffer from the bad name of political hypocrisy.

As a result, the political impotence persists until the intellectuals find a way to clear their own guilt. The accomplishment of revolution is not an option, which is the

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61 Ba Jin’s recollection is significant in this regard. His relocation to Paris may have troubled Ba Jin’s conscience for “escaping” from the underground revolutionary work. Ba Jin’s memory of Shanghai and his guilt may have motivated and kept him to continue writing *Destruction*. Whether the writing process eliminated his inner troubles is questionable though; rather, it is most likely that his sense of impotence may have intensified, being reminded of his presence away from his fellow revolutionaries. See Ba Jin, *Autobiography*, p. 76. For the Chinese original, see Ba Jin, *Ba Jin zizhuan*, pp. 118-19.
origin of his sense of helplessness. Moreover, the outcome of revenge, the assassination of Shanghai warlord, would not guarantee the people’s happiness; instead, this is most likely to invite bloody retaliation. Du Daxin’s reply to Li Jingshu, at the highest point of his sense of political frustration, suggests that revenge (though it may fail) will prove that he is a sympathetic intellectual. The focus does not lie in glorifying the vengeful violence; rather, Du justifies his choice of revenge by pointing out that his sympathy for victims is obligatory and mandatory:

“. . . You know I love you much, but because of your love, I should accept my fate and become a man of courage to match your love. This is what I think: I witnessed Zhang Weiquan’s cansi 惨死 (terrible death) and he made his wife gu’er guafu 孤兒寡婦 (a widow with a baby). If I gouqie tousheng 苟且偷生 (pathetically and cowardly) drift along with you, could you love a man like me? From then on, I will be agonized and tormented by the memory of having betrayed my comrade whenever I wake up in the morning and go to bed in the night. Then, I will have no enthusiasm for your love. How can I talk about happiness, brilliant sun, freedom, beautiful world, glorious youth, and vigorous life? . . .” (152)

The future assassin distances himself from ideological principles such as anarchism, Marxism and Confucianism. Revenge is meaningful, not because it would eliminate the villains of society, but because he would be remembered as a compassionate man. In doing so, he can claim that, even though he cannot be a successful revolutionary, he is a respectable intellectual who remembers the sympathy, one of the fundamental qualifications for carrying on moral responsibilities.

This quest for individual recognition represents how the literati community established itself through successive dynasties. In traditional China, the Confucian literati committed themselves to writings when their sense of impotence flourished. Though unable to actualize a “better future,” the literati have passed down their critical writings as a means of claiming moral superiority. In his argument as to the struggles for
reinventing their “masculinities,” Martin W. Huang focuses on Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (c. 145-c. 86 BC) sense of chi 耻 (shame) and ru 耻 (humiliation) as the central motive for writing Shiji 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian, 91 BC). In addition, though paradoxical, Huang points out that the literati believed in the writings of moral justice because it was the most convincing method to overcome their “marginalized status”: “Now [the literati] could claim their lost manhood by producing ‘empty writings,’ even though these writings might be regarded by their contemporaries as completely trivial or feminine, because these writings were meant for posterity. Posthumous fame—or rather the prospect of such fame—could effectively help an emasculated man to regain his lost manhood.”62 As Sima Qian suffered from his castration, exemplary writers were all physically disabled as in Zuoqiu Ming’s 左丘明 (c. 502-c. 422 BC) blind eyes and Sun Bin’s 孫臏 (c. 378-301 BC) amputated feet; Confucius himself, though he had a sound body, was politically unsuccessful and his life ended in wandering.63 In this sense, the inferior and impaired mentality could be a constructive and even essential element necessary for literary production. To be successful in writing practice, as a result, the literati should “positively” utilize their sense of frustration and claim the right to “criticize and praise” the historical events.

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62 Martin W. Huang 黃衛總, Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 24. Though translated literally as “empty writings,” kongwen 空文 carries Sima Qian’s belief in that his writings would later be recognized despite the negligence in his lifetime. Hanyu da cidian 漢語大詞典 [A grand dictionary of Chinese] defines kongwen as the writings that cannot be recognized in the contemporary. Kongyan 空言 (empty words) adds up to baobian shifei 褒貶是非 (praise the right and disparage the wrong). See Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風 et al., eds., Hanyu da cidian, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe, 2003), pp. 411, 413.

63 See Huang, Negotiating Masculinities, pp. 22-23. Huang explores Sima Qian’s “obsession” with kongwen or kongyan found in “Bao Ren Shaoqing shu” 報任少卿書 [A letter in reply to Ren Shaoqing] and “Taishigong zixu” 太史公自序 [The Grand Historian’s postscript].
The writings of moral responsibility, as a strategy for overcoming political frustration, persisted through the modern period. The meaning and representation of moral responsibilities, however, were open to the authorial engagement according to the changing historical context. In *The Heart of Time* (2006), Sabina Knight discusses the modern literati’s fatalism and their subsequent commitment to moral responsibility: “[A]lthough [modern Chinese] writers embrace Western Enlightenment notions, traditional Chinese teachings, the bases of their earlier educations, continue to influence and shape their fictional worlds. . . . I contend that the integrity of this tradition persisted in narrative structures but became less obvious as modern writers made a fetish of inner experience in ways that may seem to flatten out the world portrayed into a fixed, block universe.”

According to Knight, modern Chinese writers inherited the fatalism with which Confucian literati such as Sima Qian had struggled; furthermore, they “sublimated” it in the writing about their moral responsibilities. On the other hand, Knight understands that modern fiction adjusted the narratives to the exploration of characters’ psychology; in doing so, the message became “less obvious” because the authors refrained from straightforward intervention (such as narratorial comments), and instead, expressed their morality through emotional portrayal. Knight’s study is relevant to the analysis of Ba Jin’s work because the sense of failure itself, however effectively it may represent the literati’s mentality, remains in tension with their moral responsibilities. As a result, Ba Jin had a desperate reason to “criticize and praise” the current events; thus, Ba Jin was required to develop illustrations of violence in order to elicit sympathy (the very basis of the traditional teachings) among modern Chinese readers.

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Watching/Writing Decapitation

In Chapter 17, the Shanghai police arrest Zhang Weiqun the member of the Revolutionary Party and decapitate him in public. The execution field at the square before the North Railway Station comprises the condemned, the executioners, and the crowds (including Zhang’s friend Du Daxin) who gather to view the public execution. In the historical context of Shanghai in the 1920s under the warlord rule, Ba Jin narrates the public execution of a revolutionary comrade.\(^{65}\) Considering Ba Jin’s moral responsibilities, the writing of violence is intended to facilitate the function of criticism while detailing the graphic accounts happening between the executioner (the victimizer) and the condemned (the victim). At a glance, Ba Jin’s purpose is clear: the criticism of the merciless warlord for killing the revolutionary martyr, and consequently, the formation of sympathy among Chinese readers:

The *guizishou* 劊子手 (executioner) behind and to the right of the condemned suddenly changed his facial expression. With a sword in his right hand, he stepped on the kneeling thigh. The soldier in the front left smashed the condemned’s face with a big sword, but it went past his face when it closed by. The condemned unconsciously raised his face and looked around. The executioner who was waiting with the sword in hands instantly swung his sword down with all his might. With a “crack,” the face skin on the right side was peeled off along with the ear, but the beheading was not complete, without severing the head from the neck. In a moment, fresh blood poured out, spreading all around his hands and body. The executioner stepped back. With a scream, the criminal’s body fell to the front. (128-29)

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\(^{65}\) Regarding the execution of Gemingdang, readers are reminded of the public execution applied to late Qing revolutionaries such as Xu Xilin 徐錫麟 (1873-1907) and Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907). Paris anarchists glorified their selfishness. See Dirlik, *Anarchism*, p. 74. For Qiu Jin’s life and her writings, and especially for the accounts of her final days, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 767-808. The public execution must have played a role for developing martyrdom: “Qiu Jin’s speedy execution by the authorities turned her into a martyr for the revolution and a national celebrity. From the moment of her death her life immediately became the subject of an endless stream of plays and novels, by male and female writers.” See Idema and Grant, *Red Brush*, p. 806.
The execution is carried out according to the typical beheading procedure. Right after the government official’s announcement, the executioner uses a trick to facilitate his job. The description of beheading is even more realistic because Ba Jin details how difficult it is to take a life with a single blow; in doing so, the execution may bring shame to the condemned, but it may also bring pity or even glory. In addition, the condemned man suffers as any individual would (the author excludes any emotion as if it were an official report) and the inexpert blow creates even more pain. Meanwhile, the condemned’s plain and feeble appearance dissatisfies the audience: “The crowds all felt somewhat disappointed. Originally, they imagined a man from ‘chidang’ (the Communist Party) as a ferocious figure; but they have never thought that the condemned would be a mere patient who was about to go into a coffin” (127). Being informed of the news about decapitating the “outlaw” revolutionary, the crowds were initially excited to view the spectacle; however, their anticipation changed into disappointment because the decapitation would have been a perfect example of spectacle if a wicked, monstrous villain had received the merciless blow.

Witnessing gruesome spectacles, people can be either apathetic or entertained. The public’s indifference may disclose the problematic Chinese mentality, which, in the minds of its new intellectuals, was rampant in modern China. In her seminal study of how emotion played a role in the revolutionary periods, Haiyan Lee delves into the May Fourth intellectuals’ “obsession” with the lack of national sympathy among the Chinese

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66 Concerning the disappearance of the punishment as a spectacle, Foucault points out the administration’s difficulty in manifesting the terror with violence. If the method is too violent, the audience are likely to feel for the condemned, rather than recognize the execution as justice, which may slip into the glorification of the criminal. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1978; New York: Vintage, 1995), pp. 48-49. This was also the “humane” reason for the invention of the guillotine since its first use in 1792. Unlike beheading, the guillotine could be carried out in a “single moment and with a single blow.” See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 13.
people. Presenting examples such as short stories by Lu Xun and Yu Dafu (1896-1945), Lee argues that these intellectuals devoted themselves to generate national sympathy with an indifferent public: “I argue that modern Chinese literature was born as a discourse of lack that portrayed grassroots society as unfeeling and that envisioned the mission of literature as a sentimental project—to make Chinese feel for and identify with one another as conationalists by replacing kinship and locality-based identities with universal, sentiment-based identities.” As Arthur H. Smith (1845-1932) pointed out in *Chinese Characteristics* (1894), “the failure of sympathy signifies nothing less than the failure of the nation.” Portraying modern China as unsympathetic, the May Fourth writers explored provocation as a means to elicit national sympathy. The absence of national sympathy is the primary concern; thus, the warlords are less critical because the unsympathetic public looked on as they employed corporal discipline. Ba Jin inherits this intellectual concern; in his fictional narrative, Du Daxin is enraged at this “failure of sympathy” and feels frustrated by his unsympathetic countrymen who responded gladly to the warlord’s invitation to the sanguinary spectacle.

Compared with the Western counterpart, the Chinese audience appear even more problematic. In light of the communication exchanged in the execution field, the art historian Mitchell B. Merback understands the meaning of the public execution from the Christian perspective. In mediaeval Europe, the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which had been conducted at Calvary, became associated with the images of the condemned: “Having accepted communion and the prayers of the living, the suffering convict could play the role of the penitent martyr, eliciting strong feelings of sympathy, identification

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and especially compassion from the onlookers.” Merback continues, compassion derived from this religious belief was the “pursuit of pain as a positive force in spiritual, and thus human, affairs.” Still, the Christian compassion must have been a menace for those who wanted to establish the administrative power. The authorities deliberated on this issue and took measures to suppress these “religious” elements. For one of the most striking examples, the infamous “Jewish Execution” humiliated and degraded the victim by hanging the body inverted with two dogs (also inverted) by the side. In addition to this Christian sympathy, Philip Smith notes the audience’s admiration of the condemned who behaved “with the greatest intrepidity”: “He is a secular hero and political martyr. The awe and terror of death are denied, with his end being managed by him as a trifling social engagement. Death is no longer a punishment. The axe-man is Balmerino’s accomplice, the axe itself his ally, the gathered crowd his sympathetic audience.” According to these Western accounts, the audience who attended the public execution sympathized with the condemned. Because of this “negative” influence, various administrations

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70 Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, p. 20.

71 Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, pp. 187-88. Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand III’s (1608-57) *Landesordnung* reads as follows: “In order to distinguish him from the Christian, the Jew is to be hanged on a special beam extending from the gallows.” See Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, p. 188. For more information about the “Jewish Execution,” as Merback also referred to, see Rudolf Glanz, “The ‘Jewish Execution’ in Medieval Germany,” *Jewish Social Studies* 5 (1943), pp. 3-26.

72 Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, pp. 127-28. For example, they were concerned about the religious rituals on the scaffold for provoking “negative” images. Frederick II of Prussia (r. 1740-72) wished to purge all the medieval provenance from the ceremonies of death. See Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, pp. 127-28.

became suspicious of the effect of public execution for consolidating their administrative power.

As a result, the inclusion of the response from the public has a double purpose. By illustrating the unsympathetic public, Ba Jin is able to criticize contemporary Chinese society for going against humanitarian values. On the other hand, the author creates a sharp contrast between the protagonist and the public; thus, the anarchistic assassin is entitled to claim his moral superiority. In Chapter 18, Du Daxin’s emotional vacillation terminates when he gives up all hope. After viewing the unsympathetic public response to the corporal execution, Du feels betrayed by them and becomes furious. His vengeful resolve grows as people’s ignorance of public sympathy adds up to disappointment and fury:

“People are devoid of tongqing 同情 (sympathy) and they build up their kuaile 快樂 (pleasure) on top of other people’s tongku 痛苦 (suffering).” This idea tore his heart apart. In the middle of perceiving indescribable pain, he felt uncontrollable fennu 憤怒 (outrage) as well. He thought he could not be destroyed; at least, he could not provide them pleasure with his own miewang 滅亡 (destruction). Now he did not perceive pain again. Anger overwhelmed him and his every painful feeling had disappeared. He firmly believed that all of them had to be destroyed before him. He should die along with at least a few of them. A stroke of jiqing 激情 (passion) for destruction welled up inside him; he wanted to eliminate all of them and all of the constructions! (135)

Du’s anger and hatred do not create a simple revenge against the warlords such as Sun Chuanfang. Instead, his revenge collectively targets those who are unable to and do not intend to perceive public sympathy. To Du (as well as Ba Jin), public sympathy is an elusive emotional register. As a result, Du’s sympathy contrasts sharply with the sentiment of the crowd before the cruel decapitation. While the public regards the execution either as a form of justice or as a subject for idle talk about swordsmanship, Du
evokes sadness and rage from those conducting decapitation as well as from the casual audience. Everybody is viewing the same capital punishment; but people respond and comprehend it in distinct ways.

Assassination as a Measure

Ba Jin creates a morally superior intellectual whose sympathy for victims of abusive power enables him to criticize the Chinese public who are feeling entertained by the execution. When the perspective moves to people’s bloodlust, however, the execution ground discloses the political impotence of intellectuals Ba Jin was obliged to admit. The public in Ba Jin’s illustrations behaves deplorably. And Ba Jin asks intellectuals to take responsibility. The pursuit of insatiable bloodlust is how the general public (both in China and Europe) responded to the corporal punishment. In this respect, the crowd’s idle gossip about the executioner’s beheading skills would comprise a common sight: “When the family collected the bodies and heads, they wanted to sew them up. The neck remaining on the decapitated body tended to shrink; therefore, the sewing needed some extra skin hanging from the head” (132). Discussing the ongoing intellectual anxieties, Philip Smith interprets the popular disorder in the execution ground from the commoners’ bloodlust.74 For example, the Parliamentary debate in England in 1840 expressed concerns about the multitude’s “Jekyll and Hyde transformation”; Charles Dickens (1812-70) regretted having observed the execution of the Mannings in 1849; French authorities prohibited the guillotine from being exposed to the public soon

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74 See Smith, Punishment and Culture, p. 52.
after carrying out Eugène Weidmann’s execution in 1939. European intellectuals were startled to observe the release of the bloodlust. Consequently, they took over the responsibilities for thinking out a measure of inhibiting the popular bloodlust, which eventually fructified in legal reforms. Ba Jin’s revolutionary figure differs from this intervention. Though he laments the public interest in excitement, his worries cannot manufacture an improvement. Bloodlust tends to persist as far as the execution provides the public a spectacle; accordingly, its criticism demands that responsible intellectuals should develop a measure. Conscientious literati criticized the execution ground; but their rationales for discouraging the bloodlust marked a huge difference.

As a result, Ba Jin’s landscape of public execution signifies more than the criticism of the horrid exchanges between the display of administrative power and the public’s insatiable bloodlust. Similar to the European case, Chinese accounts of public executions also deal with the problems the extreme form of corporal punishment (such as lingchi) may have brought about. Through successive dynasties, the Confucian literati emphasized the ethical values the emperor and intellectuals should take into account. According to Timothy Brook and others, the literati established their moral esteem by expressing sympathy for the victims; thus, this finding challenges the simplistic view in that the promulgation of the legal reform resulted solely from the Western influence at

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75 See Smith, Punishment and Culture, p. 52. Dickens was horrified not by the execution but by the crowds: “The horrors of the gibbet and of the crime which brought the wretched murderers to it, faded in my mind before the atrocious bearing, looks and language, of the assembled spectators.” For Smith’s original source, see Charles Dickens, “To the Editor of The Times,” Times 14 Nov. 1849, p. 4. Weidmann was a serial killer who invited women to his home and choked them to death. He was known to be an astonishingly handsome man, which his murder may have benefited from. Newspapers and magazines such as Paris-Soir and Match published photo essays about his execution. One of the stories is about the women who broke into the ground and dipped their fingers into Weidmann’s blood. See Jeremy Mercer, When the Guillotine Fell: The Bloody Beginning and Horrifying End to France’s River of Blood, 1791-1977 (New York: St. Martin’s, 2008), p. 152. The French government decided to hold only “private” execution after Weidmann’s case. The full passage for the reason, Smith partially quotes, is the following: “Previously guillotining had been carried out in public behind a police cordon, but it had become apparent that far from serving as a deterrent and having a salutary effect upon the crowds witnessing the feast of blood, this promoted the baser instincts of human nature and encouraged general rowdiness and bad behavior.” For Smith’s source, see Robert Frederick Opie, Guillotine, rev. ed. (2003; Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2006), p. 5.
the end of Qing China.76 Chinese humanitarian tradition had made persistent efforts to protest the public execution; however, their proposals had no notable effect on the legal system, which further questions their intellectual capacity for implementing judicial reforms.77 Both in Europe and China, intellectuals had consistently identified the people’s bloodlust as problematic; nevertheless, Chinese literati were unable to persuade their monarchs to accommodate their humanitarian concerns. Thus, the intellectual incapacity is liable to be named as intellectual hypocrisy because the expression of concerns were only effective for enthroning them with the title *junzi* 君子 (morally superior gentlemen). In *Destruction*, Du Daxin testifies to this superior morality. Because of his sympathy, he differs from the rest of the Chinese audience; nonetheless, the revolutionary also participates in the “viewing” public without showing any confrontational attitudes. Ba Jin’s implications of intellectual incapacity also appear when he criticizes the problems in the execution ground.

Actually, the intellectual history of traditional China suggests doubt and torment over clearing impotence through writing practice. As for the most well-known instance, Sima Qian claimed to carry out the Way of Heaven in his *Records of the Grand Historian*, but he included passages implying Heaven’s debatable fairness. In “Bo Yi liezhuan” 伯夷列傳 (Memoir of Bo Yi), the authorial comments denote the Confucian scholar’s uncontrollable ambivalence: “I am deeply perplexed by all this (余甚惑焉). Perhaps this is what is meant by ‘Tiandao’ 天道 (the Way of Heaven). Is it? Or isn’t it?

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77 Brook et al., *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, p. 95.
Presenting Confucius’s favored disciple Yan Hui’s 颜回 (521-481 BC) miserable death, Sima points out that morally superior gentlemen often lived in distress and faced premature death; in contrast, the notorious villains such as Dao Zhi 盗蹠 (fl. 475 BC) lived well and lived long. Stephen W. Durrant notes this tension in Sima’s writing because the Confucian historian maintained his dubious attitude while transmitting the teachings of Old Sages. From the “disconnected series of quotations,” Durrant comprehends the impassable sense of impotence: “[T]he wisdom of the past provides only facile and almost ridiculous answers to this grave question. Sima Qian, I believe, is expressing extreme dissatisfaction—he finds no magic antidote in the words of either Confucius or Laozi to cure the fierce doubt that plagues him.” While composing the criticism of worldly events, the Confucian scholar’s frustration deepened; furthermore, the Grand Historian must have sensed the dangerous influence of his writings. Instead of transmitting the moral teachings, his historiography would pass down the despicable means for how to get along in the world. As a result, writings of criticism, at the absence of mitigating impotence, rather intensify the frustration and confusion the intellectual desperately wanted to unburden.

When the historical criticism was likely to aggravate the impotence, intellectuals often resorted to the creation of vengeful characters even at the risk of destabilizing their moral principles. Sima Qian’s inclusion of assassins in his “Cike liezhuan” 刺客列傳

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79 Sima, “Bo Yi liezhuan,” p. 1690. For English, see Cheng et al., trans., “Po Yi, Memoir 1,” p. 4.

(Memoirs of assassins) provoked heated debates as to whether the “outlaws” were worthy of admiration. For example, Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), the author of *Hanshu 漢書* (Dynastic History of the Former Han, 92), “felt that [the assassins] were little more than hired thugs and murderers.”81 Because the assassins died for those who recognized their worth, the transmission of their records may uphold almost un-Confucian acts, as is seen in the famous passage: “A knight dies for the one who appreciates him, a woman dresses for the one who takes pleasure in her” (士為知己者死, 女為悅己者容).82 Nevertheless, Sima’s impotence transitions to the special attention to the assassins who were at least recognized by someone; furthermore, the assassins had means to clear their impotence at the sacrifice of their own lives.83 In this respect, the creation of assassins reflects the writer’s wish-fulfillment through which he could clear his impotence. More than two thousand years later, Ba Jin caricatured the anarchist assassin who wanted to eliminate his impotence. Ba Jin’s interest in the revenge theme had been consistent through his novelist career. In 1930, he published “Fuchou” 復仇 (Revenge)84 in which a German assassin avenges his wife’s wrongful death by eliminating two military personnel. A lawyer who believes in the world of justice sympathizes with the motive of the assassin

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82 Sima Qian, “Cike liezhuan 刺客列傳 [Memoirs of assassins],” in Sima Qian, *Shiji*, vol. 3, p. 1962. For English, see Tsai-fa Cheng et al., trans., “The Assassin-Retainers, Memoir 26,” in *The Grand Scribe’s Records Volume VII*, ed. Nienhauser, trans. Cheng et al., p. 321. I have slightly modified the English translation here. This passage appears when Yu Rang 豫讓 (fl. 453 BC) made up his mind to avenge his late master Zhibo 智伯 (the Earl of Zhi, d. 453 BC). Yu was hiding in the mountains and he must have been informed of the Earl of Zhi’s humiliating death in that Zhao Xiangzi 趙襄子 (d. 425 BC) had his master’s skull lacquered and used it as a drinking vessel.


and concludes, “At present, the measure for an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth is the only option.” Political chaos motivated the intellectuals to work on writing criticism (no matter whether they were a Confucian literatus or a revolutionary anarchist); in addition, the political impotence of intellectuals prompted them to develop vengeful characters who could courageously carry out what they believed to be right (no matter whether they were a historian or a novelist).

In this regard, assassination could be a measure for the anarchist novelist who felt even more impotent while writing social criticism. In modern China, Ba Jin finds a suicidal assassin ideal for alleviating his pessimism. Three days after witnessing Zhang’s decapitation, Du Daxin has a morally disrupting dream. Hearing gunshots, he goes downstairs and meets a woman he knows very well. Implying the misery and pain Zhang’s bereaved family would experience, the dream demands that the revolutionary should pass down his revenge generation after generation:

Du ran into her in a hurry. He realized that she was Zhang Weiqun’s wife from her qiaocui憔悴 (haggard) look. Her face was huibai 灰白 (pale) as if it were a piece of paper with eyes half closed and he was breathless. He called her once. She looked at him with blank eyes and suddenly sat down placing her hand on the ground. She gritted her teeth and unbuttoned her clothes with blood pouring out of her left side. At her breast, she had tied her baby but it looked smaller than before. She unfastened the sling and handed the baby to Du, saying: “Mr. Du, I have killed the Director of Martial Law and have avenged my husband. They are chasing me now. [...] I wanted to preserve my husband’s blood so I ran away. Now I ran into you by chance and I entrust this baby to you. [...] When he has grown up, you should let him know how his parents died. Remember to ask him to revenge us!” (141)

Zhang’s decapitation traumatizes Du Daxin because he could not prevent his friend’s decapitation. In addition, Du temporarily misrecognizes Zhang’s wife as his lover Li Jingshu, which, with this emotional overlap, signifies the victim’s misery identified with

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85 Ba Jin, “Fuchou,” p. 15.
his own hopeless love. In so doing, his sympathy embodies his political frustration, which was also embedded in the descriptions of revolutionary romanticism. Insofar as the “determination upon the deed”\textsuperscript{86} is a required attitude for impotent intellectuals, the dream of revenge facilitates the anarchist’s decision for a suicidal assassination. As a result, Ba Jin individualizes the trauma even up to the degree of endangering all political principles (and he knew this well). Ba Jin’s choice of assassination counters humanitarian concerns and all revolutionary significance. As long as he can consume his impotence, however, he finds it compelling to inherit the writing strategy the Chinese literati developed to overcome doubt and torment. Thus, Ba Jin has enough reason for introducing the anarchist assassin as the most sympathetic figure of modern China. This was the most effective measure for the “anarchist novelist” who had to grapple with pessimistic criticism.

**Conclusion**

With Ba Jin’s *Destruction* as primary text, I have discussed how the revenge theme developed in fiction in China during the 1920s. I began my discussion by exploring how the pessimism in the protagonist Du Daxin developed into the revenge motive. By challenging the simplistic analyses of nihilistic terrorism and artistic failure, I proposed that Ba Jin’s fictionalization of pessimism has a serious meaning in relation to the implications of revenge. Then, I discussed Ba Jin’s original development of his own anarchism, which differed from the Russian nihilism and also from the popular

\textsuperscript{86} Sima Qian respected those who were “determined upon the deed” and could give up their lives despite their morally arguable behaviors. Sima commented at the end of “Memoir of Assassins”: “From Cao Mo 曹沫 down to Jing Ke 荊軻, some of these five men were successful and some of them not in their righteous endeavors (此其義或成或不成). But it is perfectly clear that they had all determined upon the deed (然其立意較然). They did not sell their goals short. How could it be perverse that their names should be handed down to later generations?” See Sima, “Cike liezhuan,” p. 1975. For English, see Cheng et al., trans., “The Assassin-Retainers, Memoir 26,” p. 333.
anarchistic activism of the time. Though Ba Jin was ambivalent in developing political principles, he was even more steadfast in putting forward his political ideas. In particular, I noted how his anarchism had carefully incorporated people’s misery and how his anarchist hero sympathized with the victims of society. Next, I explored Ba Jin’s strategies for politicizing sentimentality. In order to avenge victims of society, the removal of the Shanghai warlord would not be compelling because the political unrest of modern China resulted from multiple factors. Moreover, the various political groups were unable to suggest the optimistic future either. With a reference to popular revolutionary romanticism, I paid attention to the intellectual incapacity embedded as the motifs such as tuberculosis, hopeless love and the remarkable woman. Instead of discussing the literary fashion as a modern phenomenon, I traced back to the traditional assets of Confucian literati; thus, I demonstrated that the traditional and modern literati relied on a similar sentimental narrative for reflecting their failure.

Interpreting Ba Jin’s *Destruction* as a representation of the political impotence of intellectuals, I engaged with the literati’s writing practice and their interest in the revenge theme. Political disorder and subsequent misery demanded intellectual responsibility. As Sima Qian’s motive for writing historiography suggests, the sufferings of political frustration could positively come up with the criticism of social events. In the illustrations of the execution field, the criticism of an unjust society reaches its highest point. On the one hand, the warlord regime wanted to terrorize and discipline people with public execution. On the other hand, the Chinese public participated in the bloody spectacle through their desire for excitement. In doing so, Ba Jin carried out his criticism of contemporary society; at the same time, he could portray the morally superior
intellectual. Meanwhile, the revolutionary had to admit that he was an impotent figure who could not find a means to save his friend, not to mention the abolition of public execution. Viewing the bloodlust as a common response also observed in Europe, I argued that its criticism rather reveals the political impotence of Chinese intellectuals. As Sima Qian respected the assassins for their courageous actions, Ba Jin created a suicidal assassin as a representation of his own anarchism. As a result, the political despair of intellectuals, regardless of different historical context and different ideologies, resulted in fictional and historical portrayals of assassins. The intellectuals consistently favored the revenge theme whenever they felt impotent before the pessimistic conditions, which only their writing practice could transform into intellectual redemption.
Conclusions: Looking Back Over Injustice

During the period covered by this dissertation (from the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries), Chinese history continued to be violent, and accordingly the literature of revenge flourished to carry out moral criticism. During this period, the Opium Wars, the Taiping and Boxer Uprisings and the White Terror dominated Chinese politics. Subsequently, the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) multiplied the need for “justifiable revenge.” On August 7, 1937, one month after Manchuria was under attack, the leftist playwright Cao Yu 曹禺 (1910-96) staged his Yuanye 原野 (The wilderness, 1937) at Carlton Theatre in Shanghai. Unlike other works which attempted to mobilize nationalism, this revenge drama was based upon the Marxist vision of class struggle. For this reason, the stage play received little attention while other works of nationalism appeared more timely and necessary. Cao Yu’s drama, nevertheless, exemplifies the complexities of the revenge narrative. I want to summarize and conclude my dissertation by looking into Cao Yu’s criticism of violence, history and injustice. In doing so, I will show that the revenge theme is continuously applied to literary genres other than fictional narrative. Moreover, the revenge theme, I argue, is employed by the Marxist ideology, which is subsequently connected to the long legacy of previous authors: Yu Wanchun’s Confucianism, Wu Jianren’s nationalism, Lu Xun’s May Fourth cultural criticism and Ba Jin’s anarchism. Cao Yu presents an excellent example for literati revenge narrative:


2 For example, an anti-Japanese play Baowei Lugouqiao 保衛盧溝橋 [Protect the Marco-Polo Bridge!] was on stage at this time and drew an enthusiastic response from the patriotic audience.
they sought ways to inherit and pass down the literati discourse of justice and also elaborated this legacy according to the perennial outbreaks of violence.

At a glance, *The Wilderness* is representative of the Marxist political standpoint; however, further textual analysis reveals inherent complexities. This Three-Act drama centers on four characters: Qiu Hu 仇虎 (peasant), Jiao Yanwang 焦閻王 (landlord), Jiao Daxing 焦大星 (the landlord’s son) and Jiao Dama 焦大媽 (the landlord’s wife). The plotline is rather conventional: The landlord exploits the peasant family by using all the abusive methods such as murder, human trafficking and imprisonment (566; 190). Meanwhile, the vengeful son escapes from prison, and since the landlord is already dead, he takes revenge on the landlord’s family instead. On the other hand, *The Wilderness* complicates the possibility of expressing Marxism through the revenge theme. Is the peasant’s revenge justifiable when Qiu Hu murders his old friend Jiao Daxing and induces Jiao Dama to smash her own grandson to death? What does Cao Yu imply through the protagonist’s psychoses after Qiu Hu has accomplished his revenge? Critics have noticed Cao Yu’s complicated message, but they misinterpreted *The Wilderness* simply as a “failure” devoid of artistic elaboration. For instance, the leftist critics were unhappy with his illustrations of fatalism because they believed this would weaken the Marxist historical consciousness. Likewise, critics also pointed out the

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3 This is well described in Qiu Hu’s plea to the King of Hell in Scene Four, Act Three. The details are as follows: Jiao Yanwang murdered Qiu Hu’s father Qiu Rong 仇榮 and took over his land; the landlord then sold Qiu Hu’s sister Qiu Guniang 仇姑娘 off to the pleasure quarters, which ultimately forced her to hang herself; the villain wrongly accused Qiu Hu for which he was imprisoned and the beatings he suffered there crippled him. In this conclusion, the numbers in parentheses indicate the page numbers; first, the Chinese original; second, the English translation.

incomprehensible “syncretism”; for them, Cao Yu failed to fuse his fatalism and class struggle into a coherent dramatic refinement. Cao Yu’s narrative challenges the construction of the revenge theme even up to the level of contradicting his Marxist dedication. At the same time, this narrative complexity paves the way for his philosophy of “cosmic cruelty,” which in the long run reinforces the discourse of Marxist conviction.

Cao Yu’s *The Wilderness* consolidates multiple messages, which thus liberates the work from a simple analysis of the Marxist principle. In my study of revenge narrative, I have argued that literati developed multiple layers of narrative structure. Moreover, I have challenged the interpretations of literati writing from a simplistic ideological and historical standpoint. Towards the end of the Qing empire, Yu Wanchun was dedicated to suppressing peasant rebellions, not to mention disapproving of their honorary title, bandit heroes. My analysis of implied messages, however, revealed that the Confucian loyalist sympathized with the peasants’ impoverished conditions. Consequently, Yu Wanchun’s impartial imperial rule of legal justice betrayed his search for the origins of their uprisings: the deluded emperor and abusive ministers. Before the imminent dynastic collapse, Wu Jianren wanted to inspire nationalism among late Qing readers as a strategy for saving China from foreign aggression. My analysis of historical

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analogy, on the other hand, disclosed his emphasis on superior morality. Wu Jianren delved into the origins of atrocities and his reflection on Chinese civilization suggested that a conclusive solution was contingent upon the restoration of traditional morality. At a glance, the embedded messages might endanger the formation of their intended plans. However, the literati, because of their narrative strategy, could put forward their moral criticism. Accordingly, they engaged with Confucianism and nationalism; at the same time, they freed themselves from narrow political interpretations.

Even after the May Fourth movement, intellectuals insinuated their criticism of injustice. I have discussed the works of new intellectuals who, in the wake of the historic event in 1919, had different values from their predecessors; nonetheless, I have argued that they were similar in elaborating techniques of indirection. Based on multiple versions of the Meijianchi tale, Lu Xun developed his own version of filial revenge and continued his cultural criticism. Meanwhile, the supernatural elements gave rise to questions regarding the author’s fictional representation of the three characters: the despot, the filial son and the Dark Man. Lu Xun’s compilation and editorial changes intimated his complicity with cultural injustice, and ultimately, his confessional self-criticism. As a lifelong anarchist, Ba Jin illustrated an underground revolutionary who sacrificed himself in order to assassinate the Shanghai warlord. My analysis of his psychological exploration focused on the political incapacity of intellectuals: this seemingly attenuated principles of anarchism, but was eventually successful to evoke sympathy among the young Chinese readers. Before and after the end of Qing dynasty, the aforementioned authors all engaged with disparate historical exigencies: Confucian loyalism, nationalism, cultural criticism, and anarchism. Regarding their narrative
formulations, however, they were of the same mind in relying on implication to carry their political messages. As a result, they could enrich their writings with criticism of injustice, which would otherwise have been simple reflections of mainstream political beliefs.

Writing another tumultuous decade later, Cao Yu inherited the legacy of the revenge narrative and formulated his own dramatic style. The playwright was aware that his narrative technique is meaningful only insofar as he could develop his own ideas necessary for deepening his understandings of justice and injustice. According to critics such as Joseph S. M. Lau, Cao Yu’s philosophy is coherent through his early dramatic forms.6 In his preface to Leiyu 雷雨 (Thunderstorm, 1934), Cao Yu summarized his philosophy as the “cosmic cruelty” (天地間的殘忍): “What Thunderstorm reveals is not yin’guo 因果 (cause and effect), nor that of baoying 報應 (retribution), but the cosmic ‘cruelty.’”7 Because misfortunes take place almost randomly, even irrelevant to the principle of poetic justice, the events and characters are vaguely related each other; as a result, the best description for this cosmic cruelty would be “inexplicable” relationship. The Wilderness presents examples for this principle. Jiao Daxing and Jiao Dama all become the victims of merciless fate only because Jiao Yanwang is already dead after victimizing Qiu Hu’s family. Similarly, the misfortunes Qiu Hu’s family experienced result not from their previous misbehaviors, but because they happened to meet the landlord and the society could not prevent the landlord from exploiting innocent people.

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6 Joseph S. M. Lau 劉紹銘 argues that the “primitive spirit” (原始精神) has been continuous from Thunderstorm to The Wilderness, and he understands that Cao Yu suggested the “racial reformation” (改良中國的人種) as the only way for reforming China. See Liu Shaoming, Cao Yu lun 曹禺論/Ts’ao Yu Re-evaluated (Xianggang: Wenyi shuwu, 1970), p. 75.

Even though the blood feud is based upon the class contradiction, Cao Yu does not single out the political struggle as the unique origin for the cosmic cruelty. Instead, Cao Yu suggests that the misfortunes have perennial characteristics transcending any specific period, location and ideology.

As a strategy for dramatizing cosmic cruelty, Cao Yu explored another dimension of violence: psychological disruption in the aftermath of revenge. While examining the multiple narrative structures, I paid special attention to the illustrations of violence because the literati novelists were able to control their styles and nuances according to their differing purposes. For example, Yu Wanchun envisioned impartial imperial rule so he illustrated “death by slicing” following the steps the legal justice regulated. Since he wanted to emphasize the recurring atrocities, Wu Jianren modulated his illustrations of “massacre of a whole city,” which remain generic, without distinguishing the domestic origins from the foreign ones. Meanwhile, Lu Xun’s self-criticism has implications in the illustrations of supernatural “decapitation”: the three heads are all cooked and melted down in the same cauldron and buried also in the same coffin. Finally, Ba Jin prepared vivid descriptions of “public beheading” reflected through the protagonist’s eyes. Including the revolutionary just as one of the bystanders, the anarchist author maximized the feeling of helplessness before the merciless warlord rule. Unlike the earlier examples, Cao Yu did not display any gruesome details of corporal violence; instead, he illustrated Qiu Hu’s mental breakdown in which the avenger suffers from hallucinations. Because *The Wilderness* is a drama composed for performance, the psychological violence is no less realistic: Qiu Hu’s father and his younger sister would appear as ghosts and impress audiences with their visual and auditory images.
In particular, the hallucination testifies to Cao Yu’s argument of cosmic cruelty when Yanluo (the King of Hell) transforms into the arch villain Jiao Yanwang.\(^8\) In Scene Four, Act Three, Qiu Hu believes in his eventual moral triumph, a form of divine retribution (561; 184). However, his hallucination enables him to witness the judgment made to his deceased father and sister. Despite their aggrieved death and Qiu Hu’s sympathetic appeal, the King of Hell sentences them to be sent to Hell while he let the villain Jiao Yanwang go up to Heaven (567; 191). As soon as the judgment is finalized, the King of Hell and other assistants turn into Jiao Yanwang’s hateful countenance (567; 192). In this way, Cao Yu negates the principle of retribution; furthermore, all private revenge becomes problematic. Qiu Hu punishes the landlord’s family members in place of the villain who is no longer alive: this instrumental violence is hardly justifiable and rarely sympathetic. In *The Wilderness*, the completion of revenge suggests the reproduction of victims of violence; at the same time, the victim becomes yet another despicable villain. In doing so, the chain of revenge complicates the discussion of justice and injustice. On the surface, Cao Yu’s cosmic cruelty proposes a pessimistic prospect: private revenge is inexcusable. The dramatic forms of violence, however, indict the order of justice, pointing out instead the system of injustice not only in the human society but also in the divine retribution. Furthermore, theatrical adaptation of hallucination enables Cao Yu’s drama to carry an even stronger political message. The landlord is paralleled to the King of Hell, who wields absolute and cruel power, the conclusive source of all manner of violence.

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\(^8\) In Chinese, Yanluo (the King of Hell) and Yanwang (阎王, have the same meaning. Cao Yu arranges their faces be overlapped each other; thus, Jiao Yanwang is both the exploitive landlord (this world) and the King of Hell (the next world) who wields absolute and infinite power.
The revenge theme has provided a rich tradition for the Chinese intellectuals who were dedicated to the critique of injustice. Moreover, they have been aware of the need to elaborate strategies of narrative formulation. Throughout the transitional period from late Qing to early Republican China, the authors of revenge narratives consistently generated their cultural, political and historical criticism. From Confucianism to anarchism, the four respective authors had different ideas and various answers for renovating China. Nevertheless, they were equally serious in criticizing injustice, and hereby, however pessimistic, looking forward to the advent of justice. In particular, the illustrations of violence signified that the literati not merely suffered from unjust events but also utilized them for persuading readers to comprehend their arguments. One step further, Cao Yu’s revenge drama sheds light on the prospect that the literati writing would continue its responsibilities and explore further possibilities. Across time, place and genre, the Chinese intellectuals have committed themselves to expressing unfairness. They accommodated the changing forms and manners because they had no problem in modulating their intricate expressions. Overall, the literature of vengeance demonstrates the perennial legacy of literati criticism: Writers would nonetheless promote moral justice while human civilization would continue witnessing violence.
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