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Publication Date

2012

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Dreams and Disillusionment in the City of Light: Chinese Writers and Artists Travel to
Paris, 1920s–1940s

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Angie Christine Chau

Committee in charge:

Professor Yingjin Zhang, Chair
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2012

The Dissertation of Angie Christine Chau is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor Professor Yingjin Zhang for his invaluable support throughout the years at UCSD and insightful suggestions on countless drafts of my dissertation. I would also like to thank Professors Paul Pickowicz and Wai-lim Yip for leading their graduate seminars, without whose contagious enthusiasm for Chinese literature I could not imagine writing this dissertation. Professor Winnie Woodhull provided me with meticulous feedback on my writing and much appreciated moral support. Professors Larissa Heinrich and Meg Wesling gave me their words of encouragement along the way, and for that I am truly grateful.

A 2010 NEH summer seminar on interwar Shanghai and Germany at Stanford helped me contextualize my project, and Professors Wang Ban and Russell Berman gave me useful feedback when my dissertation was still in its earliest stages. Frederik Green introduced me to Xu Xu's travel writings in the seminar, helped me with an early draft of my Chang Yu chapter, and his own work inspired my last chapter.

In France, Valentina de Monte was an incredible resource at the Fonds chinois de la Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, and she pointed me in exciting, new directions. I was extremely fortunate to work with her before her departure from the archive this year, and she presented me with such an incredibly rich amount of material in an informed, passionate and organized manner that I will never forget. Eric Lefebvre at the Musée

Cernuschi was kind enough to show me Pan Yuliang's works at the museum stowed away in storage, and I am also grateful for the hospitality of Professors Muriel Détrie and Li Xiaohong, and the staff at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Lastly, I would like to thank all my friends and family: my parents—my mom, more like Fu Lei the uncompromising protector of principle, and my dad, a combination of the decadent Li Jinfa and bohemian Chang Yu—whose help with translation always came with a sense of humor and free babysitting; my classmates at UCSD whom I miss dearly; my in-laws Anne and Conor for their encouragement and babysitting support; Bonnie my sister for the unforgettable time we shared together in Paris and Foster City; my two daughters Sophie and Ella who provided me with plenty of wanted and unwanted distractions; and most of all my loving and patient husband Neil, who gave up all his free weekends for me.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dreams and Disillusionment in the City of Light:
Chinese Writers and Artists Travel to Paris, 1920s–1940s

by

Angie Christine Chau

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2012

Professor Yingjin Zhang, Chair

My dissertation on Chinese writers and artists that traveled abroad to Paris from the 1920s to 1940s discusses several intersections between modern Chinese literature and visual art and consists of five chapters. The first chapter, an introduction, provides

historical background and contextualization of the study abroad movement in China and the significance of dreaming in literature, as well as a comparison of travel writing in the Western and Chinese traditions. The four subsequent chapters focus on the bilingual, experimental verse of modernist poet Li Jinfa; Chang Yu's nude and chrysanthemum oil paintings; Fu Lei's travel writing and art criticism; and humorous travel sketches by the fiction writer Xu Xu.

Throughout my dissertation, I argue that these four young men were shaped by their travels to France in the first half of the 20th century. Faced with a French culture in decline, these travelers detached themselves in varying degrees from the mainstream ideology of political revolution and the discourse of national salvation during the Republican era. They chose instead to retreat to alternative spaces of the imagination, dreams, and classical aesthetics, and as a result were marginalized by the national canons of literature and art history. I read the motif of dream in their work, as a symbol of their political detachment, nostalgia for home, and disillusionment with Western modernity.

My project is in dialogue with current scholarship in modern Chinese studies, comparative literature, world literature, and diaspora studies. Paris, long a site in the modern Chinese cultural imaginary, incited equal feelings of hope and disillusionment in Chinese youth. These diverse views of home, travel, and detachment can help us consider questions about the role of translation and the circulation of bodies and literature during this early moment of encountering modernity, when artists and writers were forced to negotiate their national identity in the increasingly divided political sphere from a place distinctly outside of China. This earlier period also informs the contemporary era

of globalization and transnationalism, in which China plays a new role as a global economic power, and questions about translation continue to persist.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Two days after his arrival in Paris in 1928, the young Fu Lei (傅雷 1908-1966) wrote home, describing the appearance of such “lavish enjoyment of abundant and prosperous living” that it would seem “unreal to the spiritual civilization of China, who could not even dream of such material waste.”¹ Several paragraphs later, he added the following demographic observation: “There are hundreds of Chinese students here, and you bump into them quite frequently on the streets (those that are definitely not Japanese). The study abroad situation is less than ideal, though, and those that are actually studying make up less than one-tenth [of that number]!” In his analysis of Paris, Fu Lei could not resist comparing the city to the “Paris of the Orient,” his hometown of Shanghai; but never do his complaints about the poor conditions in China suggest that the social conditions in Paris are ideal. Instead his travel account reads as a curious blend of three interrelated elements: the attempt to impress readers with the unimaginable, an expression of his disapproval of the city’s extravagant, hedonistic materiality, and lastly, a underlying unease with the overseas student identity—the danger of being identified possibly as a Japanese student or someone who is just along for the ride. His experience of studying abroad as a young Chinese student in the 1920s shaped the rest of his career, and led to a remarkably disparate aesthetic, philosophical, and professional trajectory than those of his compatriots, some of whom later became some of the leading figures in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

My dissertation on Chinese writers and artists studying abroad in Paris from the 1920s to 1940s discusses several intersections between modern Chinese literature and visual art: the bilingual verse of modernist poet Li Jinfu (李金髮 1900–1976), Chang Yu (常玉 1901–1966)’s nude and chrysanthemum oil paintings, Fu Lei’s travel accounts and art criticism, and “travel sketches” by the fiction writer Xu Xu (徐訐 1908–1980). I argue that for this group of aesthetic reformers, the experience of travel to the revolutionary capital of the world—Paris—actually pushed them away from leftist revolutionary ideology toward their eventual retreat to alternative spaces, both figuratively, in dreams and classical aesthetics, as well as literally, in geographical places outside of mainland China. As a result, these four travelers were subsequently written out of Chinese national literary history and art historiography due to their inability to find a supportive audience for their work, which was often experimental in nature. For a nation anxiously playing catch up to the West, the pressing sense of urgency in China did not reward artists for the luxury of experimentation.² Their work produced abroad or in retrospect, representing their experiences abroad, defy the existing binary notions of travel either as service for the empire or nation, or as a project of self-discovery; instead their work is ultimately used to critique the myths of modernity, such as revolutionary spirit and social equality. These examples of cultural production, both literary and visual, function as ways of rewriting, translating, or even (re)inventing two subgenres of travel writing—Western ethnography and classical Chinese travel writing [*youji wenxue* 遊記文學]—particularly in their refashioning of the dual-agenda balancing act: serving the nation and self-expression. I use the genre of travel writing loosely as a starting point,

which is not to say that there are not tremendous differences in form, function, style, and content between Chinese and Western travel writing proper and these modernist renditions of travel (literary and visual representations made possible or produced only through the act of travel). By reading their work in the context of travel literature, I show how their ongoing struggle to reconcile social concerns with aesthetic revolution is reflected in their pointed observations about French culture, the states of crisis in modern Western and Chinese art and literature, and the experience of overseas travel.

The work of Li Jinfā, Chang Yu, Fu Lei, and Xu Xu vary to a great degree in terms of the distance in which each is situated to the genre of actual travel writing. For instance, Li Jinfā's experimental poetry and Chang Yu's oil paintings may seem to have little in common with the overseas "letters" written for publication in China penned by Fu Lei and Xu Xu. But what all of these works have in common with each other is that they forego the formal elements of Chinese travel writing popular at the time, as represented by travel accounts written by giants like Liang Qichao (梁啟超 1873–1929), Lu Xun (魯迅 1881–1936), and Ba Jin (巴金 1904–2005), in which readers are spared no detail in narratives about ocean conditions, local floral and fauna, and socio-political institutions. Instead, the jarring experience of being abroad is conveyed in a variety of artistic forms, such as poetry, essays, and visual art. Considering the explicit concern of these Chinese writers and artists for the project of national salvation what is most striking is their reticence on the subject of their semicolonial condition. A number of scholars have tried to account for this omission; for instance in *Shanghai Modern* Leo Ou-fan Lee explains optimistically, "[the writers in Shanghai] never imagined themselves, nor were they regarded, as so 'foreignized' (*yanghua*) as to become slaves to foreigners (*yangnu*)...it

was only because of their unquestioned Chineseness that these writers were able to embrace Western modernity openly, without fear of colonization.”³ For Lee, there was no need to address a concern that simply did not exist. Shu-mei Shih on the other hand describes this absence in the cultural production of Chinese modernists as one of the two forms of representing urban materiality, or the two different Shanghais: on the one hand, the “flaunting of Western-style urbanism (by-product of semicolonialism) and on the other, an avoidance of written representations of explicitly colonial dimensions of urban experience (ie racism, economic exploitation).”⁴ I demonstrate how this jarring absence of anxiety gets displaced onto a number of alternative spaces including: the body of the other, which in this case is the modern urban body of the dominant host culture or the female body—both Chinese and non-Chinese; and a dream space, a middle space between the imaginary and the real that presents an altered reality. Rather than emphasizing the modern crisis of self, as the myth of modernity goes, these travelers discipline their modernist writings-about-travel to transcribe self-expressions of anxiety onto a modern crisis of France, specifically in the space of Paris.

In this introductory chapter I begin with a general overview of the Chinese study abroad experience, in the historical context of the immediate post-May Fourth period and the rise of the leftist movement. I suggest that there is something unique in the site of Paris as the birthplace of revolution, which attracted travelers with enormous expectations that could not be sustained, in effect turning some young Chinese students actually *away* from political revolution. I am interested in how travel fits in to diaspora studies and discussions of “overseas Chinese,” and I use the motif of dreaming as one method of linking this period of travel to classical and modern poetry and literature.

After a brief background on two divergent traditions of travel writing, I conclude this chapter with a brief overview of current debates in the field of comparative literature, world literature, and the role of Chinese modern literature. I hope to demonstrate that my interdisciplinary, cross-cultural approach to this frequently studied period in Chinese literature opens up new ways of thinking about the movement of people and ideas, the multilayered connections between visual art and literature, and the continuities between the cultural production of this earlier period and the contemporary era of globalization.

Chapters 2 and 3 feature two figures with very different classical tendencies—the Symbolist poet Li Jinfa and Chang Yu, sometimes called the “Chinese Matisse”—both who experimented dramatically with modernist and avant-garde aesthetics, while maintaining elements of classical themes and philosophies. The usual reading of Chinese artists and writers that studied abroad is that they were so busy studying outdated Western masterpieces and techniques from an earlier period that they were either completely oblivious to or simply not interested in avant-garde movements such as Dadaism or surrealism, but Li Jinfa and Chang Yu both disprove this theory.⁵ Li Jinfa lived in Paris and Berlin from 1919 to 1924, during which he wrote the majority of his poetry. My second chapter focuses on Li Jinfa’s experimental poetry, and I try to provide a more nuanced explanation for why he failed to win over readers and critics than the existing critiques of his language skills and bad timing. I argue that his use of the French language challenges the notion of poetic language as sacred, and pushes the boundaries of what can be called national poetry. Moreover, his poetry about Paris does not celebrate the cultural capital of the world, but instead paints a bleak picture of dystopia that is contrary to the popular myth of urban modernity as a site of desire and progress. This

chapter also challenges Pascale Casanova's claim that Paris "consecrated" writers; according to Casanova, the importation of French language rendered non-French literature more "literary," but in the case of Li Jinfa exactly the opposite was true.

In contrast to the dream-like state of intoxication that is the creative force behind Li Jinfa's inspiration, the expatriate artist Chang Yu believed that dreams could be summoned by truly visionary art. As the one figure that did not return to China after arriving in France in 1919, Chang Yu is usually depicted by art historians as a hedonistic bohemian Francophile who was plagued by commercial failure. In my third chapter, I turn to the painter's early works depicting female nudes and chrysanthemums, two iconic themes that epitomize, respectively, modernity and classical literati culture. I argue that Chang Yu's absence from both Chinese and French art historiographies is a result not only of his refusal to participate in the culture of art consumption, but also because his new minimalist visual language favored the acts of contemplation and imagination over the preferred themes of spontaneity and organic harmony.

The last two chapters focus on a slightly later period, the years leading up to the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) during which the mainstream literary sphere witnessed the rise of leftist proletarian literature. Li Jinfa and Chang Yu may have consciously distanced themselves from political discourse, but both Fu Lei and Xu Xu voiced their concerns about the social turmoil in China during the 1920s and 1930s. My fourth chapter is on the translator Fu Lei's art criticism and travel essays. He spent three years in France, from 1928 to 1931, and for the rest of his career, viewed himself as much a cultural translator as a linguistic translator. My chapter analyzes the ways in which his various acts of translation—as avant-garde art critic, as Chinese art critic for French

readers, and as Chinese student traveler for Chinese readers—function as attempts to observe from an idealized point of detachment, but always inevitably return to Fu Lei’s dreams of home and his “obsession with China.”

Chapter 5 discusses the travel sketches of the novelist and poet Xu Xu, who studied philosophy in Paris from 1936 to 1938. As a member of Lin Yutang (林語堂 1895–1976)’s Analects group, Xu Xu was not shy about voicing his disillusionment with what he interpreted as the decline of France’s once-glorious cultural and political status. In this chapter, I focus on Xu Xu’s use of the solitary figure that wavers between categories of humor and seriousness, dream and reality, compassion and detachment (dandy and flâneur). My chapter argues that Xu Xu’s insistence on the unreliability of human nature sets him apart from the mainstream discourse that celebrates the modern individual.

In the conclusion of my dissertation I comment on the legacy of traveling abroad to Paris as it continues in the contemporary moment, as debates about contemporary Chinese “world literature” authors like Gao Xingjian (高行健 b. 1940), Dai Sijie (戴思杰 b. 1954), and Ha Jin (哈金 b. 1956) continue to raise similar questions about national language and translation, political exile, diaspora, and geographical displacement that these earlier travelers experienced in an earlier historical context.

The Push and Pull of Revolutionary Politics in Paris

From 1919 to 1921, the Work Study movement alone sent more than 1,600 Chinese students to France to work at factories in exchange for a Western college education.⁶ I view my work as a reconsideration of the prevailing notion that Chinese

youth in the first half of the 20th century traveled to the West with the primary aim of returning home, equipped with a Western education, to save China.⁷ Paul Bailey has convincingly shown how Chinese overseas workers in 1916–1918 were used as political tools by the Chinese government,⁸ and a similar narrative has been told about the intellectuals and artists that also traveled to Europe in the first half of the 20th century. Statistics show that the majority of returned students entered into the political arena (in 1917, 61%), contrary to original intentions: “In the context of an increasing modernist thirst, the young Chinese who returned from study abroad possessed a special cachet because of their broader experiences and presumed better acquaintance with magical Western formulae,”⁹ explaining that returned students were given positions in the political sphere because they were deemed more valuable.

Despite their varying degrees of concern for China’s future, the four figures that I focus on in my dissertation have been marginalized by the national canon due to their reluctance to participate in leftist revolutionary politics. Their experiences as Chinese youth traveling in Paris (the last generation allowed to study abroad until the re-opening of China during the Reform period), as represented through visual art and literature, reveal for the most part more disillusionment than enchantment. The opportunity to go to France provided a lived-experience that far surpassed what reading translated works at home could offer. They were able to witness firsthand the tenuous and ambivalent legacy of the birthplace of the French Revolution, and with the exception of Chang Yu, returned home incontrovertibly altered, fueled by dreams of aesthetic not political reform. Their push for the personal (for instance Li Jinfā’s *geren* 個人) as a path toward national salvation is what led to their failed “alternative” revolutions.¹⁰

In the context of Chinese history, political revolution has generally referred to unified mass movement in the service of the nation, and as such, the political is arguably inextricable from the personal. In contemporary scholarship, the concept of the personal has been most commonly used in feminist theory, in which personal experience is validated as a source of knowledge. Most notably, Carol Hanisch's 1969 paper, "The Personal is Political," asserted that "there are things in the consciousness of 'apolitical' women ... that are as valid as any political consciousness."¹¹ In the field of modern Chinese literature, Wang Ban has also reconciled political history with the individual hero, or what he calls the "sublime" Chinese subject, making the argument that "politics does not borrow the garb of aesthetics to dress itself up but is itself fleshed out as a form of art and symbolic activity."¹² But the change that Li Jinfa, Chang Yu, Fu Lei and Xu Xu call for is not one that can be initiated or sustained by collective action, but requires recognition and revolt on an individual level of consciousness, a mode of reflection that sometimes aligns perfectly with traditional travel writing's aim of enlightenment, but may appear at other times to be at odds with travel writing's position of discursive authority.

In comparison with the wealth of information about American expatriate culture in Paris, the topic of Chinese abroad in Paris has usually been relegated to a biographical side-note or seen as a mandatory stepping stone to political activism. Considering how many Chinese intellectuals and artists traveled abroad in the 1920s due to work-study programs and government funding such as the Boxer Indemnity scholarships, relatively few written accounts have been devoted solely to the cultural production that resulted from this wave of travel to the West, especially in the field of comparative literature.

Paris was long been held up as the birthplace of political revolution, and combined with its position in the world as the mecca of creative freedom, its position of cultural grandeur was practically indisputable. The belief in its absolute superiority was shared by Chinese intellectuals and for me the greatest impression I got of this was going through the archives of the Institut franco-chinois in Lyon. It was not good enough to study in the West, or for that matter to study in France: it had to be Paris. Letters written to school administration from art and literature students like Lu Sibai (呂斯白 1905–1973), Pan Yuliang (潘玉良 1899–1977), and Luo Dagang (羅大岡 1909–1998) are implorations of the necessity to be in Paris. For instance, in the winter of 1930, Lu Sibai [Lu spa] and his classmate [the sculptor Oin Lin-y] wrote to their professor in Lyon, “Do we really need to remind you that Paris, the capital of France, whose famous museums attract visitors from all over the world, where masters from the entire world take meetings, whose salons, exhibits, and all other artistic manifestations have always taken place, that Paris is the ultimate place for those who study the fine arts? Moreover, in all of France, is there even one professor at the École des Beaux Arts who did not study in Paris? We came to France especially to study European art; would it not be a great loss for us to not be able to study in Paris, the fine arts capital?”¹³ For artists especially, nowhere was the legacy of the artistic tradition more renowned, celebrated and venerated in Paris by the institution of the museum and the art academia. This is where the masters had studied, and their masters before them. This is where the museums that held the great masterpieces were located. It may have well been this veneration for the past that allowed Li Jinfa, Chang Yu, Fu Lei, and Xu Xu to reconsider the popular notion that China’s traditional past was no longer to be of any relevance. The legacy of traveling

abroad to Paris for creative freedom appears to continue to this day, even for Chinese writers and artists, with the lives of cultural figures like the expatriate writer Nobel Prize laureate Gao Xingjian and the writer-filmmaker Dai Sijie.

Situating Travel in Historical, Diaspora, and Literary Studies

One of the goals of my project is to reconcile two divergent modes of scholarship: historical-political studies of migration and labor movements, the work-study program and emergent CCP leadership; and literary studies of Chinese modernism. The physical displacement of Chinese to the West has typically been confined to social science studies of migration and labor movements. Diaspora is the favored term of Asian American studies, and with it the study of Chinatowns, labor movements and immigration policies. For sociologists and other social scientists, the movement of Chinese people is usually limited to the realm of the flow of capital and economic interest. Wang Gungwu, the founding scholar of overseas Chinese studies, has focused on Chinese communities in South East Asia and the Americas and their permanent or semi-permanent relocation. Books like *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora* (Lynn Pa, 1994) emphasize how Chinese have adapted to life abroad outside of China.

Travel, then, occupies a tricky place. Viewed as a temporary break, travel barely fits into the category of “sojourning.” As a side-note to diaspora studies, travel’s major point of distinction is its purported guarantee of return, and most diaspora scholars have focused instead on Chinese in the United States as part of Asian American studies or Chinese business dynamics in Southeast Asia, especially Singapore. Wang Gungwu differentiates between migration and sojourning by explaining that “sojourning always implied the readiness to return to China. Migrant hood makes no such commitment. It is

both flexible and unpredictable where notions of home and nationality are concerned.”¹⁴

If travel can be seen as one aspect of the larger concept of the movement of people, it has been treated academically as of the least significance. Nor does Wang Gungwu’s work on overseas Chinese include the group of young Chinese that studied abroad in the 1920s; the only extant English-language studies are on anarchism, pre-CCP notable figures, and the work-study movements as related to labor movements.

Revolution Outside of Politics

Historical narratives of the study abroad movement tend to emphasize the invigorating impact of France on future CCP leaders like Zhou Enlai (周恩來 1898–1976) and Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平 1904–1997). For instance in Marilyn A. Levine’s *The Found Generation: Chinese Communists in Europe During the Twenties* (1993) she writes, “The element of travel itself has a major effect on the development of China’s future leaders. Although feelings of displacement were engendered by traveling to a new world, travel during this period was an important politicizer. New sights and experiences, particularly for those who traveled to Europe, gave rise to new abilities and new knowledge. In addition, travel reinforced their sense of self-sufficiency and contributed to analytical detachment.”¹⁵ But I point out that many students were in fact disillusioned with the political and social realities in 1920s and 1930s Paris, and felt the incredulity of *this* is where the greatest revolution had led France to? If the political revolution was dead in France, then the aesthetic revolution had managed to keep itself going only by drawing from the past, not rejecting it (the Beaux Arts style was modeled on classical antiquity and emphasized the importance of passing on that tradition to subsequent generations). There was the potential for progress in China, but it would not

come by way of political revolution. The potential answer would be personal revolution, in the form of a turning back, possibly a reworking of traditional and classical Chinese motifs.

The term political revolution in the field of Chinese history is so commonly used and accepted that it seems almost impossible to separate them at this point. However, my dissertation shows that the revolutionary aspects of these writers and artists' work are not consistently aligned with the mainstream political ideology and the dominant discourse of leftist revolution. By the term "personal revolution," I refer to the call for drastic social and cultural change by way of breaking from the past or existing aesthetic and social norms, on an individual level of engagement. In the tumultuous post-May Fourth period of political upheaval leading up to the Chinese Civil War, what I call the "personal" got pushed aside to make room for the movement of the masses, and the impending political revolution was a prefiguration of the Cultural Revolution in which the personal would be subordinate to the political. The personal revolution I refer to here is not one that necessarily celebrates the self or the individual, but I use the word "personal" and not "private," which implies something of a clandestine or secret nature. As such, the personal is situated in opposition to the political, which refers to the greater dynamics of institutions of government. In the context of Chinese history, political revolution has generally referred to unified mass movement in the service of the nation, in which the political is arguably inextricable from the personal. But the change that Li Jinfa, Chang Yu, Fu Lei and Xu Xu call for is not one that can be initiated or sustained by collective action, rather change that requires recognition and revolt on an individual level of consciousness.

For Li Jinfa, personal revolution required staying true to oneself, at the risk of being misunderstood or not understood. His poetic experiments with language and sound attempted to break through national boundaries and challenge traditional Chinese poetic convention. Unlike the more easily comprehensible and palatable poetry of his contemporaries such as Guo Moruo (郭沫若 1892–1978), Xu Zhimo (徐志摩 1897–1931), and Dai Wangshu (戴望舒 1905–1950), Li Jinfa’s poems revolutionized Chinese poetry by making the dissonant lyrical, all the while steering clear of leftist revolutionary politics.

Like Li Jinfa, the artist Chang Yu sees the revolutionary figure as a solitary figure, misunderstood among the masses, a visionary who is ahead of his time, perhaps even feared by some. Chang Yu’s understanding of personal revolution is best captured in his writing about the reception of Picasso’s artwork; responding to viewers struggling to make sense of the Cubist master’s distorted forms, Chang Yu reveals his own beliefs about the artist’s role in society: “L’artiste crée la forme humaine, c’est comme le Dieu. Il crée le monde qu’il veut.” [Like God, the artist creates the human form. He creates the world he wishes.]¹⁶ For Chang Yu, this philosophy takes shape in his uncanny ability to imbue the modern with a classical sensibility, and inversely, to make the classical anew.

The concept of personal revolution reappears in Fu Lei’s art criticism, again in the figure of the lone artist who, as a detached party, has the unique ability to perceive reality; but in Fu Lei’s case, the avant-garde movement has the potential to save China, which was less of a concern for Li Jinfa and Chang Yu. The revolutionary aspects of his travel writing are subtler, however, and I would argue that his critique of both China and France from a highly subjective perspective reflects an innovative way of representing

the experience of travel, which diverges dramatically from conventional Western and Chinese travel writing.

Finally, the aspect of revolution in Xu Xu's writings about Occupation-era Paris appears not in the context of the avant-garde literary movement that his work has been discussed,¹⁷ but rather as embodied by his homesick protagonists, whose frequent response to bouts of despair and loneliness is turning to classical Chinese literature. His narrators are characterized by their seeming nonchalance and skepticism, combined, ironically, with a genuine concern for moral propriety and social justice. For Xu Xu, the personal is a concept that is constantly under question; the personal is never reliable. And just as the self is not to be celebrated, his *xiaopin wen* are also revolutionary in their absolute refusal to celebrate Western culture and society.

In Chinese studies of literary modernism, Paris has typically been seen as the stepping-stone to modernity, perhaps only second to Japan. Contrary to the popular discourse of the "Lure of the Modern," as borrowed from Shu-mei Shih's eponymously titled study on Chinese modernism, for many of the Chinese that studied abroad in Paris in the 1920s and 30s, the promise that the literary capital of the West offered delivered disappointment instead of grandeur. While historians like Chinese art historian Michael Sullivan have quietly acknowledged the poverty and racism faced by Chinese students abroad, chapter titles like "The Call of the West"¹⁸ imply experiences of enlightenment, creative liberation, and revolution. The narrative that is now accepted of Western-trained Chinese writers and artists, in particular the Shanghai-based *haipai* school romanticized by studies like Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Shanghai Modern* paints a picture of writers that almost blindly embraced Western modernism in their adoption of salons and coffeehouses. The

practice of translating Western works, often through the intermediary language of Japanese, has been discussed at length, but only as more support of the May Fourth “vogue of *étrangerie*,”¹⁹ a byproduct of colonialism and cultural imperialism. While more recent studies like Shih’s *Lure of the Modern* have revealed the dynamics of semicolonialism and Occidentalism at play, most contemporary discussions of Chinese modernism nonetheless continue to bolster the longstanding notion of Paris as the ultimate progressive haven of aesthetic freedom, the bastion of equality and cultural open-mindedness. As Pascale Casanova has attempted to demonstrate: “Descriptions of Paris are hardly the privilege of French writers—belief in the special supremacy of Paris quickly spread throughout the world. The accounts of Paris composed by foreigners and brought back to their own countries became remote vehicles for belief in its literary power.”²⁰

But as my dissertation shows, for many Chinese students, Paris did not turn out to be the universal provider of limitless financial and cultural opportunities and creative freedom. Along with feelings of disillusionment mixed with initial and residual excitement we see repeated dystopic representations of Western modernity, and if anything the travel experience accentuated notions of home that challenge both the convention of a nostalgic longing for home and the popular promise of urban modernity. These young travelers were forced to make a begrudging acknowledgment that both China and the West suffered from being in a state of serious cultural and political decline, as most readily supported by encroaching imperialism—beginning with the Opium Wars but including the foreign concessions and ongoing Sino-Japanese conflict in China, and in France, the German occupation in WWII). But instead of confronting imperialism

head-on, these writers and artists expressed their anxiety and frustration through a variety of alternate means.

Vacillating Between Times and Places: Dreams and Travel

Throughout my dissertation I follow the motif of dream as it recurs throughout their writing, as the ultimate embodiment of personal consciousness.²¹ In mainstream revolutionary discourse, the metaphor of dream is typically used in the context of the need to awaken the masses. For example Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀 1879–1942) in his famous “Call to Youth” presented the idea of dream as a useless relic of the past. He bemoaned in 1915, “Now our country still has not awakened from its long dream, and isolates itself by going down the old rut...The progress of the world is like that of a fleet horse, galloping and galloping onward. Whatever cannot skillfully change itself and progress along with the world will find itself eliminated by natural selection because of failure to adapt to the environment. Then what can be said to defend conservatism!”²² Dream becomes a symptom of the inability to let go of the past, an impediment to progress. In many mainstream representations of dream, dream and reality stand as polar opposites (for instance “What we know and imagine is just a dream/ Reality is what we cannot imagine and know,”²³ or “Life is but a dream of substance”²⁴), explaining why, as political revolution in the modern Chinese context championed realism as its primary mode of representation, advocates of a more personal revolution retreated to older modes of representation linked to the literati tradition (spiritualism, expressionism). If the success of political revolution could be measured by lasting change on a mass-scale of influence, then personal revolution could only be measured on the individual scale. A

personal revolution had no set goals of overturning an existing government but rather the more abstract project of transforming human consciousness.

In Chinese literary history, the dream trope appears as far back as in the 4th century BCE, in the Daoist text about Zhuangzi's (莊子 369–286 BCE) dream of a butterfly: upon waking up from a dream in which he is a butterfly, Zhuangzi wonders, “Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man.” The dream trope continues in classical Chinese literature, perhaps most famously in Tao Qian's (陶潛 365–427) dream-like utopian fable *Peach Blossom Spring* [Taohuayuan ji 桃花源記], and later picked up in poems about drunkenness like Wang Ji's (王績 590?–644) drinking poem “Scribbled on a Tavern Wall” [Last night a bottle was just finished,/ This morning a jar is opened right away./ After interpreting a dream in my dream,/ I still come back to the tavern.]²⁵ and Li Bai's (李白 701–762) “Waking From Drunkenness on a Spring Day” 春日醉起言志 [處世若大夢,/ 胡爲勞其生./ 所以終日醉,頹然臥前楹./ 覺來盼庭前]. These drinking poems that associate dreaming with drunkenness carry on the tradition of Zhuangzi's playful or muddled sense of dream, but in later literature like Zhang Dai's (張岱 1597–1689) nostalgic Ming histories *Reminiscences in Dreams of Tao An* [Taoan mengyi 陶庵夢憶] (1665) and *Search the West Lake Dreams* [Xihu mengxun 西湖夢尋] (1671), the dream trope seems to align more closely with the Buddhist belief that dreams like reality are empty and false. In contrast with the Western belief that dreams function as symbolic for the subconscious, dreams in these cases served as a simile for emptiness. Of course,

the single most well known use of the word dream in all of Chinese literature is in reference to Cao Xueqin's (曹雪芹 1715–1763) 18th century masterpiece *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which also toys with notions of the real and the imaginary, or the true and the false, especially in the Chapter 5, when a goddess reveals to Baoyu the “dream of the red chamber,” a foreshadowing of the fate of the two families.²⁶

In modern Chinese literature, the trope of dream has been discussed primarily in the context of two writers: Lu Xun and Guo Moruo.²⁷ Yomi Braester in his chapter titled “Dreaming Cure for History” in *Witness Against History* argues that for Lu Xun “the experience of reading and writing is linked to dream and trauma, and the role of literature is not to awaken the reader but rather to create a dialectic that transcends simplistic utopian revelations.”²⁸ For Braester, historical consciousness acts as the most simplistic of mirages, and the author’s role is to see through that mirage. Lu Xun writes in the preface of *Cheering from the Sidelines*, “As a young man I had my share of dreams too. Later on I forgot most of them but saw nothing in the least regrettable about that.”²⁹ For the purposes of my dissertation, I am interested in Lu Xun’s belief that dreams possess no inherent value, since by definition they are ungrounded and not based in reality. In his 1933 essay “Hearing about Dreams,” Lu Xun begins, “One has the freedom to dream, but not the freedom to talk about dreams. To dream is to have a real dream; to talk about that dream, it is impossible to avoid telling a lie.”³⁰ For Lu Xun, the act of putting a dream into words is an act of mediation that transforms it into something other than the original intent.

While Braester has read Lu Xun’s use of the trope of dream as part of his larger project to awaken readers to the trauma of history, I position Lu Xun’s pessimism or

skepticism of the power of dreams, and the need of leftist discourse to awaken the masses, in contrast with the more private or personal dreams represented by the travelers in my dissertation. For the figures in my study, dreams have the potential to be productive instead of destructive, and they do not act as a bold demarcation of disjuncture but rather a smoothing over, a blurriness. On the other hand, instead of a utopic dream of idealism but a dream may act as a kind of hyper-reality. It is in this hazy third space between the real and imaginary that writers like Li Jinfan and Fu Lei have the creative room to reflect on their anxieties about Western modernity and the national crisis of China.

Outside of revolutionary discourse, dreams have also been discussed alongside the theme of sexuality in the avant-garde work of Creation Society writer Guo Moruo, who openly acknowledged the significance of Freudian psychoanalysis in his short stories.³¹ But in the case of Chang Yu and Xu Xu, dreams are not loaded erotic symbols that can then be decoded for the viewer or reader.

Like dreams, the duration of travel may seem too fleeting, too temporary; the movement does not last long enough to make a serious impact. In writing this introduction I came across the difficulty of trying to conceptualize the kind of travel that these Chinese youth chose to embark on. The displacement or to use a more neutral word, movement, of Chinese people is usually discussed in terms of diaspora, which has now taken on both voluntary and involuntary acts of relocation; but diaspora does not imply the guarantee of return that travel does. Of course we can also see in the case of Chang Yu that there is never a real guarantee of return. Diaspora studies seems to have been claimed by Asian American studies, or socio-historical studies of labor movements

in “overseas Chinese” studies. My topic has less direct economic consequence, seems less serious and more frivolous in its transience and temporality. To sever it or even distance it from its political ties removes yet another layer of significance: to distance it from the anarchy or CCP movements makes it seem superficial, as if it had no lasting impact on the future of China.

My concerns recall the quintessential figure of modernity, Baudelaire’s *flâneur*, who was, after all, a world traveler: “For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define.”³² This paradox of passion and impartiality resonates in the work of cultural anthropologist James Clifford. In *Writing Culture*, Clifford explains that ethnography “makes the familiar strange, the exotic quotidian.”³³ Baudelaire’s ideal, “To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home” is also captured in Clifford’s argument about roots and routes. According to Clifford, travel should be viewed as “untethered,” so that “Practices of displacement might emerge as *constitutive* of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension.”³⁴ The concept of rootedness is thus a myth, as I have hinted at the impossibility for these Chinese travelers to stay rooted in mainland China.

Mary Louise Pratt’s conception of transculturation is also helpful in approaching the experience of studying abroad in France along the terms, if we are to read these

students as part of her categorization of “subordinated or marginal groups [that] select and invent from materials submitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.”³⁵ Surely Paris qualifies as a contact zone, given the semicolonial nature of Shanghai and China beginning from the late-19th century, and scholars have pointed out the complicated nature of going abroad to gain expertise from the West that is also the source of economic and political oppression. But again this seems to not fit perfectly either, as the distance between Westerners living in the concessions is hazy: not much as been written about this middle space. There seem to be two conflicting assumptions; one is that Chinese and Westerners stayed apart and the Chinese were not allowed in most of the Western concessions and the Westerners had no reason to leave the concessions. In this scenario, a resulting implication is that upon going abroad, Chinese students were shocked at the dismal socio-economic conditions of Westerners in their home countries, in contrast with their relatively superior conditions in the concessions, and one faces the challenge of trying to figure out how to reconcile these two disparate views of Westerners. The conflicting assumption is that Chinese travelers were already familiar with French culture, given the accessibility of French material goods, language, and institutions in the readily available concessions in Shanghai. Regardless of which assumption about the relationship between the Chinese and the French concessions is more accurate, it seems evident from all literary accounts that the Chinese students who did travel abroad were indeed surprised by a variety of aspects of French culture and society.

Returning to Pratt’s argument, I believe that it may be helpful to view the works of these young Chinese travelers under the category of travel writing. The usual

discussion of travel writing in the context of China brings up the work of André Malraux (1901–1976) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) perhaps, as Pratt calls travel writing an institution, like much of European literary history, that is based on the imperial metropolis or center’s “need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself.”³⁶ While travel writing in the West developed as a metaphor for the journey of the self, its Chinese counterpart shared the characteristic of being in service of the empire. In *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China*, Richard E. Strassberg traces the evolution of imperial travel writing from its historiographical purpose in the Tang and Song dynasties, but as far back as the late-Zhou, to its eventual form of a mode of expressive and aesthetic responses to the landscape derived from poetic genres that could be termed ‘lyrical.’³⁷ In this later phase of Chinese travel writing, the literati practice common to both classical poetry and painting of inscribing the landscape with an expression of the self became the standard. The mode of lyrical poeticism gave rise to the lyric travel writer, who acted as both historian and poet. Strassberg links its development to the increasing tension between private and public in the case of exiled officials.³⁸ Vacillating between these two modes of Chinese travel writing—the historiographical and the lyrical—the artists and writers that traveled to Paris never completely detached themselves from their national identity, nor did they allow themselves to identify with their new surroundings. Although often the atmosphere of Paris contributes to their feelings of confusion or isolation, the natural landscape of traditional China is replaced with a bizarre version of urban modernity.

The literary and artistic representations of travel that I focus on in my project may not fit perfectly with this genre of writing, yet I find the similarities between imperial

travel writing and Western ethnography striking, such as the relationship between historian-writer and state power. Strassberg writes, “As a writer, the historian was primarily a processor of information that he collected, evaluated, edited, and retold. He regarded himself as engaging in a self-effacing act of documentation, which allowed him effectively to transmit the meaning of events with the proper combination of factuality and literary embellishment. There was from the outset a close connection between historiographical discourse and state power... Thus, when a travel writer adopted the narrative persona of the historian, he was appropriating a potent form of literary authority.”³⁹ In *Routes*, James Clifford delineates the differences between ethnographic fieldwork and travel writing. For Clifford, travel is an inclusive term encompassing “a range of more or less voluntarist practices of leaving ‘home’ to go to some ‘other’ place. The displacement takes place for the purpose of gain—material, spiritual, scientific. It involves obtaining knowledge and/or having an ‘experience’ (exciting, edifying, pleasurable, estranging, broadening).”⁴⁰ Fieldwork alone holds the distinction of “The injunction to dwell intensively, to learn local languages, to produce a ‘deep’ interpretation...”⁴¹ According to Clifford disciplinary norms were applied to the field of ethnography, in order to make it distinct from travel writing: the fieldworker became known as “a homebody abroad, not a cosmopolitan visitor,” that commuted within a space, circulating and working, not exploring or surveying.⁴² Emotions and moral judgments had to be downplayed or excluded; experiences of gender, race, and sex should be marginalized. The biggest taboo was sexual liaisons with his objects of study.⁴³ These distinctions force us to ask, to what extent were these Chinese youths

“tourists,” or on the other hand “sophisticated” or “independent” travelers that attempted to “dwell intensively”?⁴⁴

Can Chinese Literature Really Save Comparative Literature?

As Haun Saussy observed astutely in 2011, people today seem to believe that “Chinese literature is valuable, interesting and important because *China* is important.”⁴⁵ In 1953, when James Robert Hightower published “Chinese Literature in the Context of World Literature,” few could have predicted that China would be the giant global economic power it has become in the 21st century, and as such, Chinese literature is no longer the “by-product” of a “special interest” particular only to sinologists.⁴⁶ Another consequence of China’s position in today’s globalized economy is the soaring prices in the contemporary Chinese visual art marketplace, which in turn have revived critical and consumer (the two often converging or at the very least interrelated) interest in Chinese modern art. Chang Yu, who died of gas poisoning, penniless in Paris, and was forgotten for the most part by both Chinese and Western art historiography, was suddenly “rediscovered” on the art auction circuit. In 2009, for instance, Sotheby’s Hong Kong sold Chang Yu’s landscape oil painting, “Lotus et Poissons Rouses,” to a Chinese buyer for \$4.68M U.S. It is difficult to imagine that the struggling artist who was criticized during his lifetime as being too easygoing and undisciplined to be successful would one day command top prices, leading the head of Sotheby’s 20th Century Chinese Art department, Lily Lee, to remark, “We recognized ‘Lotus et Poissons Rouges’ immediately as a work of exceptional importance, carefully cultivating top collectors through our presale efforts to result in the atmosphere that created the strong price achieved today. This demonstrates once again that collectors are willing to pay premium

prices for noble, seminal works that are fresh to the market. We are honored to have been entrusted to sell such extraordinary paintings, and we look forward to offering more quality, rare works with great provenance to the market.”⁴⁷

The consumer market also demands more translations of Chinese literature, and Saussy recounts the urging of Chinese professors to world literature professors to simply add more Chinese literary works to anthologies and syllabi for world literature courses—no matter which ones really. The canon of modern Chinese literature in the larger discipline of world literature is still in the process of formation, and Saussy’s concern is that the proper works get chosen for this new canon. He dismisses the straightforward replication of the Chinese canon for the Chinese portion of the world literature reading list in favor of one that may be “idiosyncratic, even perverse, but it would have the advantage of being ours.” The Chinese canon of world literature is of course related to the more specific issue of translation. David Damrosch contends in *What is World Literature?* that the category of world literature encompasses “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language.”⁴⁸ But Damrosch also concedes that “a work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture.” His argument that world literature is more about “a mode of circulation and of reading” than a kind of infinitely expanding canon raises the question of how literary works that never achieved a certain level of critical approval in their country of origin can hope to achieve a world readership.⁴⁹ Because the works of these Chinese travelers were never translated from Chinese, they would presumably not be included in the category of world literature, according to Damrosch’s definition, but my

dissertation claims that they nonetheless play a significant role in the mode of world circulation. It is also interesting note that the one figure whose work is now in circulation on a global scale is Chang Yu, whose paintings defy linguistic translation. In the conclusion of my dissertation I discuss the work of Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian and writer-director Dai Sijie, who now “fit” under the category of world literature in terms of their linguistic success and their success in visual genres such as painting, drama, and film.

While historically the May Fourth movement has been identified as the point at which modern Chinese literature officially entered the arena of world literature, I hope to show in my dissertation that there are works of Chinese “world literature” that fall outside of this mainstream national narrative,⁵⁰ just as there are multiple competing canons of Chinese literature, in addition to the dominant official syllabus. In order to truly enter the playing field of world literature, Chinese literature needs to be continually reexamined, beginning with the rethinking of the work of early 20th century artists and writers, in anticipation of the era of globalization, as neither wholly embracing nor rejecting Western aesthetics and culture but as a hybridization of mutual influence. For the most part, Zhang Longxi’s concern about the paucity of East-West comparative studies remains true today. He proposed in nearly two decades ago, “The kind of study we try to envision cannot be the simply confrontation or juxtaposition of sinology or Asian studies on the one hand and a Eurocentric comparative literature or Western literary theory on the other, it must be established in a third area, a mediating ground on which East-West comparative literature will acquire its own identity as different from either of the specialist branches mentioned above.”⁵¹ Recent literary studies on

Occidentalism (Xiaomei Chen), the sinophone (Shu-mei Shih), translingual practice (Lydia Liu), and semicolonial modernity (Shu-mei Shih) have all revealed the deeply complicated colonial processes at the root of China's interaction with the West but for the most part address the interactions between China with other parts of Asia such as Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan. I hope that by illustrating a selection of traveler reactions to and representations of early encounters with Western modernity, I provide one possible way of shifting the existing focus from May Fourth Western enlightenment discourse.

Furthermore, the exploration of interdisciplinary dialogues is crucial to the growth of the fields of Chinese literature and world literature. The challenge for Comparative Literature continues to be one of scope and territoriality. In 2003 Spivak called for the intervention of Comparative Literature to collaborate with Area Studies: "It would work to make the traditional linguistic sophistication of Comparative Literature supplement Area Studies (and history, anthropology, political theory, and sociology) by approaching the language of the other not only as a 'field' language."⁵² A year later in 2004, Franco Moretti eschewed the importance of reading literature in its original language for a "second hand" reading, or what he calls "a patchwork of other people's research, *without a single direct textual reading*" in his inflammatory essay "Conjectures on World Literature."⁵³ His proposal—that "distant reading" could be performed by specialists, in a literary version of division of labor—was met with widespread indignation. Moretti also contended that "there is no other justification for the study of world literature but this: to be a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures—especially the local literature."⁵⁴ The issue of language is one that continues to plague comparatists, but as sinophone studies continues to grow, scholars will have eventually

have to acknowledge the role of bilingual writing and come to terms with the proliferation of translated works used in academic study.

I agree with Jing Tsu and David Der-wei's complaint about the nationally-dominant, consecrating tendencies of the study of modern Chinese literature. They argue for the importance of the "creation of new dialogues among the fields of area studies, Asian American studies, and ethnic studies. Although each has largely focused on its own stakes in examining the notion of Chinese diaspora, they have long been implicated in one another's histories."⁵⁵ While literary scholars have increasingly turned to media like film, the dialogue between visual art and literature is one that continues to be largely neglected. What better time than now to expand the boundaries of world literature, comparative literature, and Chinese literature? Almost a quarter of a century ago, art historian Ralph Croizier complained about the discrepancy in attention given to literature and art: "Modern Chinese literature, mostly fiction, has achieved recognition for its relevance to the dynamics of modern social, political, and intellectual change. But art, apparently one step further removed from social and political issues, has not received the same attention. The art historians are in Ming; the historians are into Mao. Meanwhile, modern Chinese art—the art of the twentieth-century revolution and of the period of East-West cultural confrontation—has awaited serious and integrated historical study."⁵⁶ Not only does the East-West encounter continue to be insufficiently studied outside the influence model, but further, as my dissertation demonstrates, literary studies can greatly benefit from being studied alongside visual art and vice-versa, given the fact that the fields of visual art and literature were in constantly fluctuating states of overlap and intersection throughout Chinese history. During the period of the 1920s–40s, both poetry

and art took a backseat to prose, yet among the four figures I focus on, Li Jinfa went to Paris to study sculpture and returned a poet. Chang Yu studied painting but also composed poetry; Fu Lei was an avid art and music critic, and close friends with the painter Liu Haisu (劉海粟 1896–1994). Xu Xu was both a poet and novelist, and wrote stories about the bohemian art scene in Paris. With the rapid proliferation of new forms of publications beginning in Shanghai in the 1920s, art groups and literary associations increasingly relied on the written word in media such as periodicals, catalogues, advertisements, posters, and translations.⁵⁷ Generally, studies about this period in Chinese history have been limited to their focus on the cultural center of Shanghai; my project broadens the spotlight to include the known but not truly known locale of Paris.

The myth of Paris as creative muse persists to this day: consider the award-winning critical success of Woody Allen's film *Midnight in Paris* (2011). In the movie, struggling screenwriter-turned-aspiring-novelist Gil Pender (Owen Wilson) stumbles across a magical taxi that acts as a portal, transporting him back to the glamorous Paris of the Roaring 20s. Much to his astonishment and delight he soon finds himself consorting with Lost Generation celebrities like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, and even Picasso. But as much as *Midnight in Paris* perpetuates the myth of the allure of Paris and in many ways can be viewed as just another love letter to the City of Light, Woody Allen's film is also a playful attempt to deconstruct that same myth. When Pender falls for Picasso's mistress Adriana (Marion Cotillard), he realizes that people—no matter what era they live in—always romanticize the past. One evening Pender and Adriana stumble into a carriage that transports them back to the turn of the 20th century, the Golden Age of Paris. Adriana decides to stay there, informing Pender: "I'm from the

20s, and I'm telling you the Golden Age is la Belle Époque." At this moment, the myth of Paris is shattered and Pender realizes that his nostalgia is a form of denial: the Paris he has been enamored with is only a fantasy.

It is my hope that not only does my dissertation expose the myth of Paris, but also the myth of what Marilyn A. Levine has called the "found generation." Levine juxtaposes the Chinese youth that traveled to Paris in the 1920s with their more famous Western counterpart, the celebrated "Lost Generation," hence her title for them, the "found generation," what she describes as a group of youths infused with great cultural pride and confidently pledging themselves to immediate revolution: "while the Western seekers of the new order had memories of a rosier age to shadow their solutions, the Chinese youth were not chained by youthful illusions and were freer in their search for solutions and new lifestyles and were more able to commit themselves and develop new ideas."⁵⁸ My dissertation, which shows how some of the most creative and daring minds of this generation slipped through the cracks of history, is an effort to recover their work and their stories.

¹ Fu Lei 傅雷, "Going to France by letter" [Faxing tongxin 法行通信], written on his way to Marseilles and Paris in 1928, first published in *Gongxian xunkan* 貢獻旬刊, 3–72; reproduced in *Fu Lei's Selected Essays* [Fu Lei sanwen 傅雷散文] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2000), 61.

² See for instance Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 195.

³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 312.

⁴ Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 233.

⁵ For example, “In 1920, the high point of the Paris Dada movement, Tzara’s absurd play ‘The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine’, created violent reactions, meeting with great uproar and success. Though Paris did not maintain its interest in Dada, the ideas of automatism, improvisation and ‘ready-made’ objects inspired by Dada were practiced in Paris for a while. It seems, however, that these ideas never bothered the Chinese artists who enjoyed the free air of Bohemianism in Montmartre and Montparnasse. Some of them entered art academies, while some joined private studios. In their leisure time, they visited all the museums, or the memorial residences of Millet or Van Gogh. They assumed that the trend of ‘anti-art’ after the war was meaningless.” (Rita Yuan-chien Chang, “The Essence of Chinese Art Reformation in the Early Twentieth Century” in *China-Paris: Seven Chinese Painters Who Studied in France 1918-1960*, (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1988), 51–52.

⁶ Marilyn A. Levine, *The Found Generation: Chinese Communists in Europe during the Twenties* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 7.

⁷ See for instance John Yu Zou, “Travel and Translation: An Aspect of China’s Cultural Modernity, 1862–1926” in Yingjin Zhang, ed. *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998):

“Determined by the unequal balance of power between China and the West, they [Chinese modernizers] did not partake in the exotics of the other, but rather constituted projects that fulfilled an urgent purpose: the acquisition of powers from the West. Positioned against the overwhelming shadow of Western imperialist hegemony, travel and translation were meant to remedy deficiencies” (133–134).

⁸ Paul Bailey, “Semi-Colonialism and Cultural Interaction,” in Assandri, Friederike and Dora Martins, eds., *From Early Tang Court Debates to China’s Peaceful Rise* (Amsterdam: ICAS/ Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 113–114. Bailey argues that the recruitment of Chinese laborers during WWI in France anticipated the Chinese government’s foreign policy with Africa and use of Chinese labor in the post-Mao era.

⁹ Levine, *The Found Generation*, 23.

¹⁰ When I refer to national salvation, I distinguish their unique projects for a better China from the mainstream discourse of Western science and technology as cure-all for the “sick man of Asia.”

¹¹ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” February 1969, originally published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation* (1970), reprinted online: <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>

¹² Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 15.

¹³ Institut franco-chinois, BML, Lu Spa box, pieces #20–21, letter dated Dec. 9, 1930.

Original in French, ““[A]vons-nous besoin de vous dire que Paris, capitale de la France, où de célèbres musées attirent les regard des visiteurs de tous les pays, où, les maîtres du monde entier se donnent rendez-vous, où des salons, des expositions et toutes manifestations artistiques ont lieu presque tous les jours, que Paris est vraiment une terre

de choix pour ceux qui étudient les beaux-arts? De plus, en France, n’y a-t-il un professeur de l’école des Beaux-arts qui n’ait fait ses études à Paris? Nous sommes venus en France spécialement pour étudier l’art européen, n’est-il pas une grande lacune pour nous de ne pouvoir faire nos études à Paris—capitale des beaux-arts?”

¹⁴ Wang Gungwu, keynote address to ISSCO V (11 May 2004).

¹⁵ Levine, *The Found Generation*, 204–205.

¹⁶ Sanyu [Chang Yu], “Opinions d’un peintre chinois sur Picasso,” *Parisien Libéré*, Jan. 19, 1945, reprinted in Rita Wong, *Sanyu Catalogue Raisonné: Oil Paintings* (Taipei: Yageo Foundation and Lin & Keng Publications, 2001), 64.

¹⁷ See for instance Christopher John Rosenmeier, “Shanghai avant-garde: the fiction of Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiyong, Xu Xu and Wumingshi,” PhD diss. (University of London, 2006).

¹⁸ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 40–41.

¹⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 275–276.

²⁰ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 26–27.

²¹ In Western philosophy however, Walter Benjamin made the argument in 1935 for “collective dreams” induced by capitalism, and from whose slumber it was the historian’s job to awaken (Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 455. Benjamin was criticized by Adorno for his “Surrealist Marxism”—his mapping of psychoanalysis applicable to the individual of bourgeois ideology onto the collective—and later revised his argument.

²² Translated in Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915), 240–246.

²³ Xu Yunnuo, “Little Poems - No. 3,” translated by Michelle Yeh in *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 4.

²⁴ Xu Zhimo, “Elegy for Mansfield,” (1923), translated by Michelle Yeh in *Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry*, 6.

²⁵ Translation from Ding Xiang Warner’s *A Wild Deer Among Soaring Phoenixes: The Opposition Poetics of Wang Ji* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 111.

²⁶ Outside the field of literature, dreams have long been associated with the Duke of Zhou, a book of dream symbols from the Zhou dynasty that was used to predict the future and referenced by Confucius; and also in traditional Chinese medicine studies, with health problems (unhealthy body conditions like qi not circulating properly, or organ deficiencies etc.).

²⁷ See for instance Carolyn Brown, “Lu Xun’s Interpretation of Dreams,” in Carolyn Brown, ed. *Psycho-Sinology: The Universe of Dreams in Chinese Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), 67–79. Charles A. Laughlin also devotes a chapter in his book on *xiaopin wen*, *The Literature of Leisure*

and Chinese Modernity (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008) to dreaming. He writes in "Dreaming: From the Crescent Moon Group to the Beijing School": "The dream has been associated with literature at the margins of the intellectual, social, and moral norms of Confucianism—the literatures of hermits, eccentrics, and poets of unusual imagination and lyrical vision, particularly in the late imperial period, when works of fiction, drama, and essays that elaborate the trope of the dream were particularly numerous... What makes the dream differ from wandering, indulgence in enjoyment, and humor (though not from learning), is that its elaboration in prose essays is rarely done for the sake of amusement. Among the activities I have used to define the various types of modern essay, in fact, dreaming may be said to be the most serious and the paradigm that lends itself best to the creation of lasting works of literary art" (139–140).

²⁸ Yomi Braester, *Witness Against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 31–32.

²⁹ Lu Xun, "Preface," *Cheering from the Sidelines*, trans. William A. Lyell (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), 21.

³⁰ In Chinese the original reads, "做夢，是自由的，說夢，就不自由。做夢，是做真夢的，說夢，就難免說謊。" This article is Lu Xun's response to reading a feature in *Dongfang zazhi's* New Year's issue in 1933, which featured a reader survey asking about "dreams for China's future" and "individual life." Here too we see that dream is assigned to both the individual as well as to China's future at large.

³¹ See for example Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature*, 172–173; and Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 102–109.

³² Charles Baudelaire, "The Artist, Man of the World, Man of the Crowd, Child," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 9.

³³ James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths" in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 2.

³⁴ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.

³⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 6–7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁷ Richard E. Strassberg, *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

⁴⁰ Clifford, *Routes*, 66.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 69–72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

⁴⁵ Haun Saussy, “China, World Literature, and the Shape of the Humanities,” MLA talk, Jan. 10, 2011, reproduced online <http://www.printculture.com/index.php?itemid=2793>

⁴⁶ James Robert Hightower, “Chinese Literature in the Context of World Literature,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring, 1953), 117.

⁴⁷ “Sotheby’s Hong Kong Achieves US\$4,680,000 for Sanyu’s Masterpiece,” *Art Knowledge News*, October 7, 2009. Accessed online <http://www.artknowledgenews.com/2009-10-07-23-10-32-sothebys-hong-kong-achieves-us4680000-for-sanyus-masterpiece.html>.

⁴⁸ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ See for instance, statements like Wang Ning on China and world literature: “Here the modern period is considered to have started with the May Fourth Movement in 1919, not only because of the movement’s political significance but also because it marked the most open time in the twentieth century for Chinese literary, cultural, and intellectual life. During this period Chinese literature began to show a consciousness of totality and internationalization; it lost its character as an isolated phenomenon and joined the sphere of world literature. Indeed, the May Fourth Movement anticipated China’s enthusiastic involvement in late-twentieth-century (economic) globalization—the second overall Westernization.” (“Rethinking Modern Chinese Literature in a Global Context,” accessed online: <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/images/wangning.pdf>).

⁵¹ Zhong Longxi, “The Challenge of East-West Comparative Literature” in Yingjin Zhang, ed. *China in a Polycentric World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 35.

⁵² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 9.

⁵³ Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature” in Christopher Prendergast ed., *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), 151. Originally published in *New Left Review*, Jan.–Feb. 2000.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 161–162.

⁵⁵ Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang, “Introduction” in Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang, eds. *Global Chinese Literature* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 3.

⁵⁶ Ralph Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906-1951* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 3.

⁵⁷ See for example Julia F. Andrews, “The Heavenly Horse Society (Tianmahui) and Chinese Landscape Painting” [天馬會和中國山水畫] in *Collected Research on 20th Century Landscape Painting* [十二世紀山水畫研究文集] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2006), 563.

⁵⁸ Levine, *The Found Generation*, 22.

CHAPTER 2

Poetry of Intoxication: Li Jinfa's Linguistic Play and Dreams of Home

In 1921, four years after May Fourth intellectual Hu Shi (胡適 1891–1962) advocated his “8 Don'ts” for practitioners of new Chinese literature, *New Youth* published his poem “Dreams and Poetry”:

都是平常經驗	It's all ordinary experience,
都是平常影像	All ordinary images.
偶然湧到夢中來	By chance they emerge in a dream,
變換出多少新奇花樣	Turning out infinite new patterns.

都是平常情感	It's all ordinary feelings,
都是平常語言	All ordinary words.
偶然碰著個詩人	By chance they encounter a poet,
變換出多少新奇詩句	Turning out infinite new verses.

醉過才知酒濃	Once intoxicated, one learns the strength of wine,
愛過才知情重	Once smitten, one learns the power of love:
你不能做我的詩	You cannot write my poems
正如我不能做你的夢!	Just as I cannot dream your dreams. ¹

Hu Shi explained to his *La jeunesse* readers, “This is my ‘experiential poetic theory.’ To put it in simpler terms, even to dream requires experience at its foundation, let alone composing poetry? These days the main problem is that people love trying to write poetry without having any experience as their base.” For Hu Shi, dreams and poetry share a transformative, creative power, changing the ordinary into the sublime. He highlights two additional qualities: the necessity of experience, and the quality of subjectivity or individuality.

More than a decade later, Li Jinfa in *A Record of My Own Inspiration* confessed, “When writing poems I never prepared myself to worry if people found them difficult, I

simply sought to give vent to the poetic feeling [*shiyi* 詩意] in my heart of hearts. Now, indeed, there are many in the world whose heartstrings have struck a common chord with mine. My style has universal appeal. I just cannot be like others and use poetry to write about revolutionary thought, or stir people to strike out or shed blood. My poetry is a record of my own inspiration, a song sung aloud in intoxication, I cannot hope that everyone will understand it.”² Both Hu Shi and Li Jinfā highlight the inherent contradiction in poetry: its aim at universal appeal while retaining a sense of the poet’s personal inspiration. Moreover, they share the metaphor of drunkenness to express the lack of logical control, out of body, out of mind sensation that constitutes the experience of writing poetry. Instead of Hu Shi’s straightforward “drunk,” Li Jinfā uses the word “intoxication” [*taozui* 陶醉], which accentuates the unabashed, almost primal force behind his “song” or poetry. Both pay homage to the classical practice of associating drinking with the composition of poetry, the genre of drinking poems made most famous by Li Bai.³ For many classical poets, the relationship between drunkenness and poetry writing was inextricable, the condition of one almost a prerequisite for the other. Adding a third element of dream to the mix, these poets seemed to recall Zhuangzi’s puzzling and playful “butterfly dream,” where the boundaries between dream and reality are constantly blurred.⁴

But for the two modern poets Hu Shi and Li Jinfā, intoxication becomes not merely a vehicle for contemplation, but the transformation of the ordinary into the new, the expression of something strikingly different but that actually always existed. This chapter examines how Li Jinfā’s ambitious project to revolutionize modern Chinese poetry went awry; critics in the past have often pointed to his lack of mastery in both

Chinese and French languages, his poor timing, his ignorance of classical Chinese poetry, among other reasons. I argue instead that Li Jinfā's failure to win over readers and critics can be explained by his dismissal of two crucial tenets of Chinese modernity: the sanctity of a national poetry and consequentially, the role of the poet; and the promise of Western urbanity.

His individual experience in France led him away from leftist revolutionary ideology toward an alternative space, or the creation of what I call a poetry of intoxication—a combination of linguistic experimentation and dystopic dreamworld imagery—resulting in groundbreaking poetry that is illogical, personally inspired, and unfortunately difficult to appreciate. Just as he was compelled to experiment linguistically with Western language in his Chinese poetry, Li Jinfā's use of dreams in poems written in and about France, demonstrate a creative playfulness. His pronounced political detachment, apparent from the poetry he feverishly produced in the years he was in Europe (1923–1928), places him at the periphery of the Chinese literary canon; and unlike the work of his contemporaries such as Guo Moruo, whose reputation as a national poet was firmly established with the publication of *The Goddesses* [Nüshen 女神, 1921] in the immediate aftermath of the May Fourth Movement, or his successors such as Dai Wangshu, who for example was able to blend the musicality of traditional Chinese poetry with a modern sensibility, Li Jinfā's poetry remains an unsettling reminder that aesthetic revolution was insufficient in the face of national revolution.

Li Jinfā (né Li Shuliang) was born in Meixian, Guangdong province and arrived in France in 1919 at the age of 19, after one year of schooling in Shanghai. Traveling with the work-study program, Li Jinfā studied sculpture in Paris and Berlin, returned to

China in 1925, and taught art from 1928 to 1930 at Hangzhou Academy.⁵ Before arriving in France, Li Jinfa had never written poetry and spoke no French, although he did have limited understanding of English. Upon arrival in France, he and his fellow Chinese work-study compatriots were sent to a middle school in Fontainebleau to learn French with no teacher and a French-Chinese dictionary to share.⁶ As legend goes, he adopted the pen name “Jinfa” (golden-hair) while in France, after having fallen ill and being “saved” by a golden-haired angelic visitor. “How my pen name came about was entirely the result of a dream,” he recounts one summer spent with friends in Paris’s Hotel Senate.⁷ Suddenly overcome with dizziness while he was taking a walk one day, Li Jinfa was struck with a fever for days, during which a “golden-haired goddess dressed in white” visited his dreams numerous times. After his miraculous recovery, he believed that this divine force was what allowed him to survive. His three major volumes of poetry were composed during his stay in Paris and Berlin from 1920 to 1924. *Light Rain* [Wei yu 微雨] was subsequently published in 1925, *A Visitor in Hard Times* [Shike yu xiongnian 食客與凶年] in 1926, and *Singing for Good Fortune* [Wei xingfu er ge 為幸福而歌] in 1927. His translations of Western poetry appeared most notably in *Light Rain*, as an appendix of twenty-eight poems translated from a wide range of non-Chinese poets, including Lord Byron, Baudelaire, Tagore, and Verlaine.

In order to contextualize his failure in the national project, I first present a brief survey of the wide-ranging critical backlash that Li Jinfa received and continues to receive today. My goal is to provide an alternative to two currently existing modes of reading Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu’s poetic experimentation: either brushing off their

bilingual poems as misguided or inadvertent imitations of Western literature, or treating them as complete aberrations of their larger work. Taking into account some of the major criticisms launched against Li Jinfa's work, I look briefly at his poems "Woman Forsaken" and "A Chat With Verlaine," then move to a lesser-explored theme of his work, travel and homesickness. Finally, Dai Wangshu's career serves as a telling point of comparison, as both poets shared an affinity for French Symbolist poetry and the French language in general, but Dai Wangshu eventually evolved from being called the Rainy Alley poet to penning such well-known patriotic verses as "With My Maimed Hand."

Reception and Criticism of Li Jinfa's Poetry

Although Li Jinfa's work was heralded by prominent literary critic (and poet himself) Zhou Zuoren (周作人 1885–1967), brother of the father of modern Chinese literature Lu Xun, as groundbreaking,⁸ the overall reception of his first volume of poetry *Light Rain* was generally negative. Li Jinfa's contemporaries were shocked by his "use of eccentric images and obscure meanings, his monstrous cult of decadence and his ungrammatical syntax (Su Xuelin 1969: 152-159). Some labeled him as "un poète du bizarre" (*Shiguai*), some even mocked his poetry as an awkward riddle" (*Benmi*) or criticized its "muddled style" (*Hutu ti*)."⁹ In what is widely cited as the definitive assessment of his poetry from editor Zhao Jiabi's 1935 *A Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature* [Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi 中國新文學大系], Zhu Ziqing warns, "Li's poetry has no tangible organisation. One may understand it in parts, but when the parts are put together, the meaning is lost. He is not concerned with meaning but with expressing sensibilities of feelings. His poems are like many small and big beads with the connecting thread deliberately hidden by the poet, who expects the reader to supply

the missing link. This is a technique first employed by the French Symbolists and Li is the first to introduce it into Modern Chinese poetry.”¹⁰

The incomprehensibility of his poetry continues to be echoed by critics in more recent decades (for example Bonnie McDougall likens Li Jinfu’s poetic approach to “shock tactics,” pointing out his “suspension of logical and grammatical relationships, bizarre imagery, and irony”¹¹), although most contemporary critics distance themselves from their predecessors in the 20s and 30s by identifying readers’ unfamiliarity with Symbolism as the main culprit. Gregory Lee writes, “Much influenced by Verlaine and Baudelaire his poetry was seen by many as incomprehensible, as if he were translating the paraphernalia of the early Symbolists rather than the spirit...Li Jinfu’s poetry was just too symbolistic for the poetry readers of the 1920s to understand.”¹² Similarly, Mi Jiayan notes that “what really shocked the established aesthetic taste of Chinese readers at the time was not the form that Li adopted but a kind of decadent sensibility, an aesthetic consciousness that was extremely devoted to the novelty, pleasure and beauty of human decay, degeneration and ruin, which readers had never witnessed before in the aesthetics of Chinese literature.”¹³

On the other hand, some critics have pointed to the connections between French Symbolist poetry and traditional Chinese poetry. For instance, Harold Acton writes, “evocation and suggestion” were “the most conspicuous features of Chinese poetry. As an aesthetic principle, Verlaine’s ‘pas de couleur, rien que de la nuance’ was more Chinese than French in its general application.”¹⁴ Likewise, Ming-hui Chang Lin recognizes that “a large body of Chinese traditional lyrics shared the Symbolists’ devotion to the delicate delineations of the various shades of feelings by means of highly

evocative images as well as the suggestive power inherent in the musical quality of the language itself.”¹⁵ More recently, Michelle Yeh has demonstrated that “contrary to the claim that modern Chinese poetry involves a complete rupture with tradition, there is a necessarily organic connection. Although the radical ways in which modern Chinese poets transform the tradition represent a new beginning in Chinese poetry, it is nevertheless a beginning that could not have taken place outside the Chinese tradition.”¹⁶ For all of Li Jinfa’s innovation, decadent sensibility and unfamiliar imagery, his poetry is nevertheless an homage to tradition, and in more ways than just the often mentioned clunky classical diction, replete with characters like the classical pronoun *zhi* (之).

For instance, in his most famous poem “Woman Forsaken,”¹⁷ the first poem in *Light Rain*, Li Jinfa’s shock tactics take shape in his transformation of the conventional Tang dynasty female boudoir grievance genre [guiyuan 閨怨] of an abandoned woman yearning for her mate into a smattering of grotesque images revealing the eternal nature of decay and the passing of time. Not only does the narrative point of view change halfway through the poem—he begins speaking from the forsaken woman’s perspective then shifts halfway through the second stanza to speaking about her in the third-person—but Li Jinfa also uses remarkably visceral images of life and death, such as the “rapid flow of fresh blood” [鮮血之急流] and the “slumber of dry bones” [枯骨之沉睡]. But unlike traditional Chinese poetry, in which the isolation of often self-sought loneliness brings solitude and peacefulness, here the figure of the forsaken woman—usually read as representing the unappreciated or misunderstood artist or poet faced with society’s hostility and contempt—stands for something much more desolate and tortured. As the

shamed woman wanders among graves, incongruous references to God, transitory elements of nature such as the howling wind, the setting sun, smoke, and the tumbling sea abound.

Li Jinfa's much more successful contemporary and founder of the Crescent Moon Society Xu Zhimo employed similar imagery in the third stanza of his poem "Dream of Seaside," a dream about the search for love and home from the sea. He writes, of the poem's two suicidal lovers, "This seaside is not yet our home,/ Look over there at the bright blood of the dusky clouds/ We want to commit suicide,/ We jump, embracing, toward the wave's center,/ Extinguishing this human body."¹⁸ Although he shares Li Jinfa's use of "fresh blood"[xian xue 鮮血] Xu Zhimo uses it to describe a natural phenomenon, the rosy color of the clouds—not decay—and the tension in the stanza resolves with the romantic image of a "newly arrived twin star...hung up in heaven," which emits "the inextinguishable radiance of love."

Another contemporary of Li Jinfa, the poet Wen Yiduo (聞一多 1899–1946) wrote about a tormented, abandoned woman in "What is This Dream?" the fourth poem from his second volume of poetry, *Dead Water* (Sishui 死水, 1928). As she contemplates death and taking her own life, she is brought back to reality with the cries of her baby. The poem ends with her grief-stricken question, "What, oh what is this that I am dreaming?" Known as a great advocate of retaining poetic meter in modern poetry,¹⁹ Wen Yiduo paid careful attention to rhythm, metrical feet, and the length of his lines, so it comes as no surprise that "What is This Dream?" despite its irregular appearance, actually employs a flowing rhythm and melodic refrain.²⁰ Like Xu Zhimo's "A Seaside

Dream,” “What is this Dream?” also hints at the melancholic and bizarre imagery that is ubiquitous in Li Jinfa’s poetry, but both poems here offer readers a poetic narrative that is easy to follow with a clear resolution at its conclusion.

Based on the critical excerpts above, it would appear that most scholars explain Li Jinfa’s unpopularity purely by way of his strangeness, but I want to narrow in on criticisms of his use of the French language, which I view as one possible way in which he is successful in challenging the idea of a new national modern poetry. Bian Zhilin (卞之琳 1910-2000), a Crescent School poet who co-edited the poetry journal *New Poems* [Xin shi 新詩] with Dai Wangshu in the late 1930s, also translated Symbolist writings as well as Shakespeare, Auden, and Brecht. His own poetry has been categorized by literary historians as “difficult,”²¹ and ironically, his condemnation of Li Jinfa is by far the harshest:

his efforts were worse than fruitless and their influence on China’s ‘New Poetry’ during a certain time was pernicious. It is not that he lacked any poetic talent and had not somehow caught the aroma of the Symbolist poetry of the late Nineteenth Century. The fact is that his far from adequate knowledge of French and his no less inadequate mastery of his mother tongue, both in *Baihua* (the vernacular) and *Wenyan* (the literary language), did gross injustice to the French Symbolists. His ‘translation’ from them and his ‘imitations’ of them mystified the Chinese reading public as well as his followers so that so-called symbolist poetry was considered just a jumble of incomprehensible dazzling words devoid of meaning or logic.²²

According to Bian Zhilin, Li Jinfa’s greatest flaw was his poor language ability, both in Chinese and French. What is interesting about this is that the discussion is no longer about unfamiliar form or content, but rather the serious consequences of mistranslation. Bian Zhilin blames Li Jinfa’s personal “inadequate mastery” of language for single-handedly ruining the literary reputation of French Symbolist poetry in China. Mi Jiayan

astutely observes that, “Because of its allegedly Europeanized language, Li’s poetry is considered incomprehensible, and he is condemned as ‘a chief criminal’ who does damage to the Chinese language (Sheng Xizheng 1981). On the contrary, however, Dai’s poetry is seen as quite clear and thus more comprehensible (Zhu Ziqing 1936; Lee 1989).”²³ Mi Jiayan points out Bian Zhilin’s claim that Li Jinfa’s poor language skills in Chinese and French were responsible for not only failing to win over Chinese readers, but moreover somehow contaminated (in his words, did “gross injustice” to) the poetry of French Symbolists, and his act of contamination reaches back to the Chinese language.

Many literary critics have remarked on the sheer quantity of non-Chinese words in Li Jinfa’s poetry. In reference to *Singing for Good Fortune* one critic observes, “Li Jinfa begins twenty-five of these poems with quotations from European poets, the majority of them French. This is supposed to be a clear indication of his source of ‘inspiration’.”²⁴ Or, as another scholar writes, “Of the 291 poems in Li’s three collections, 173 contain some kind of foreign text, either in French, English or German.”²⁵ In his discussion of Dai Wangshu’s *My Memory* [Wo de jiyi 我的記憶] Gregory Lee concedes, “the French language itself seems to have captivated the young poet; words and even whole lines of French are scattered throughout the half-dozen poems included in this pivotal intermezzo of the collection.”²⁶ The insertion of foreign text in Chinese modernist literature is commonplace and leads to equally frequent surmising of its purpose and effectiveness, or as one critic wonders, “is this involvement deep and meaningful enough or are these quotations indications of an attempt to be different from other modern Chinese poets?”²⁷ Bonnie McDougall guesses: “For added exoticism, French and German words and allusions are freely (sometimes perhaps at

random) scattered in the text.”²⁸ Rarely is this multilingual expression viewed as an asset; even in the case of Dai Wangshu’s supposedly more accessible poetry, Gregory Lee places “Change your mind” [Huile xiner ba 回了心兒吧] on the opposite end of “Rainy alley” [Yu xiang 雨巷], and calls the former “the poem the worse afflicted by Dai’s fad for the use of French.”²⁹ The danger of dismissing this ubiquitous characteristic of Chinese modernist writing as a trend or fad is the subsequent failure to identify the reasons for its appeal.

If we no longer believe Leo Ou-fan Lee’s assertion about Western colonization in China—that “in spite of their reading knowledge of foreign literatures, modern Chinese writers did not use any foreign languages to write their work and continued to use the Chinese language as their *only* language”³⁰—then indeed an entire category of multilingual writing opens up.³¹ Paul Manfredi acknowledges the fad and exoticism appeal of non-Chinese text, but classifies the profusion of foreign text as “typical of May Fourth literature where the inclusion of Western language text functions first and foremost as a sign of the author’s own broad learning. There is no reason to believe, for instance, that Li or any other early modern Chinese writer imagined that their audience would recognize all the foreign language references they allude to. Nonetheless, it is not enough to dismiss this tendency as merely one of fashion, a sophomoric propensity to demonstrate one’s polyglotism, as there are subtleties at work which have important implications for May Fourth literature as a whole and Li’s work in particular.”³² According to Manfredi, the foreign text in their poetry serves a specific purpose, which has not been recognized by some critics, as much symbol of the unfamiliarity of modernity itself as say, a reference to God.

Leo Ou-fan Lee argues in *Shanghai Modern* that the writers in Shanghai “never imagined themselves, nor were they regarded, as so ‘foreignized’ (*yanghua*) as to become slaves to foreigners (*yangnu*)...it was only because of their unquestioned Chineseness that these writers were able to embrace Western modernity openly, without fear of colonization.”³³ Hence by writing in French in addition to Chinese, Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu were in effect openly questioning and allowing others to question their Chineseness. Furthermore, I would actually argue that this bilingual writing is an example of what Lydia Liu calls translingual practice, or the process “by which new words, meanings, discourses and modes of representation arise, circulate, and acquire legitimacy within the host language due to, or in spite of, the latter’s contact/ collision with the guest language.”³⁴ That is, by writing bilingual poetry, Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu created new meanings not in the sense of forming a new vocabulary, but challenging Chinese readers to reconsider what could be considered modern Chinese poetry. The fact that so many critics were and continue to be frustrated by their efforts reveals the anxiety surrounding questions of nationalism and cultural legitimacy, namely how can a Chinese writer express himself using non-Chinese language and still be perceived as a modern Chinese writer.

If we look closer at two examples and the effects of French text that have been ridiculed by critics, it becomes apparent that non-Chinese words are seen as unnecessary if not incomprehensible. Li Jinfa’s poem “A chat with Verlaine” [Xi yu Wei-lun tan 戲與魏崙談] from *Singing for Good Fortune*³⁵ is essentially an imaginary dialogue between the two poets. Verlaine’s remarks in French are selected from his poem “Ô mon Dieu, vous m’avez blessé d’amour” from his 1881 collection of poetry *Sagesse* and

inserted verbatim into the dialogue. They range from deliberately vague (“Vous connaissez tout cela, tout cela”) to incomplete (“Toutes mes peurs toutes mes ignorances”) to blatantly Catholic (“Noyez mon âme aux flots de votre Vin fondez ma vie au Pain de votre table”). In the original, the speaker’s firsthand plea to God is sprinkled with allusions to the Eucharist, Cavalry and penance, and repetition and parallelisms tie the seventeen stanzas together.

In Li Jinfa’s reworking of Verlaine’s ode, he uses the device of a dialogue, which again is not altogether unfamiliar to Chinese readers who have encountered the dialogues of Confucius and Mencius. But if Verlaine’s version is unified around the theme of Catholic conversion and religious devotion, Li Jinfa, albeit adopting a similar pattern of repetition of key phrases (for example 吁我以先執了理智的警告 in the first stanza) and exclamatory “Ô” (吁), alternates between bewildering references to Daoism (縱為大道張皇為青春與嘆), evil demon spirits (山麓魑魅待人), and sexual desire (摸索腰圍的輕瘦). With the exception of one word repeated twice (“baisers”), Li’s responses are in Chinese; while it’s clear why Verlaine would be speaking in French, Li’s choice to use the word “baisers” rather than the Chinese equivalent for “kiss” is less evident. And the relationship between the excerpts written by Verlaine and those by Li Jinfa are tenuous at best; for instance, following Verlaine’s first remark about giving all one has to God, Li Jinfa’s speaker responds much more hesitantly, almost cynically: “Oh, I have already held the warning of reason,/ so I am scared to come to the hometown of my upbringing,/ Stealing a glance,/ Absurdly lost, palms open I walk toward man,/ Oh, I have already held the warning of reason” [吁我以先執了理智的警告，怕來此生強之故里迨後偷偷

眼兒，迷妄了，張手向人走去，吁，我以先執了理智的警告]. But Li Jinfa's innovative approach, such as playing with reader's expectations of the character 已 for 以, requires more engagement with Verlaine's poem than the simple addition of an epigraph at the top of a poem, and instead of directly extracting lines in sequential order from the verses of one of the founders of the French Symbolist movement, Li Jinfa has chosen to playfully engage Verlaine in dialogue. The resulting piece may be more aptly described as pastiche or bricolage; and while intertextuality is certainly a ubiquitous trait of Chinese literature practiced well before the New Culture Movement, Li Jinfa's poem calls its reader to a much more challenging task: ascertaining whether and how the speaker's responses align with the Symbolist text.

As a useful point of comparison to "A chat with Verlaine," Dai Wangshu's early poem "Change your mind!"³⁶ from 1927 also features three phrases in French. In the poem, the speaker directs his first line at "Ma chère ennemie" and begins the last stanza with the exclamatory command "Aime un peu!" concluding the poem with "Un peu d'amour, pour moi; c'est déjà trop!"³⁷ The poem is a straightforward love poem lamenting the speaker's loss. According to Gregory Lee, after appearing in *My Memory* the poem was not republished again until posthumously, because of its "overemployment" of French: Lee writes, "The use of French is overdone and without this artifice, an already weak poem becomes even weaker."³⁸ Judging Dai Wangshu's use of French, Lee distinguishes between phrases taken from French sources and those of Dai's own creation: "Apart from 'chère ennemie'—borrowed from Ronsard—the other phrases in French would seem to be the poet's own; certainly 'Aime un peu' (line 7) is not very good

French.”³⁹ Thematically and stylistically, with the exception of the use of French interjections, “Change your mind” and “A chat with Verlaine” could not be more disparate. But Li Jinfa’s linguistic experimentation has also been interpreted by literary critics as inauthentic and irrelevant: “It is true that sometimes the occidental accent is the result of an authentic meeting between the Chinese poet and Nerval, Apollinaire, Rimbaud or Rilke, but most often the use of French or German words is only a facile mannerism. Aside from numerous misprints and misspellings, the excerpts from Victor Hugo, Tristan Corbière, Tagore, D’Annunzio, Henri de Régnier, Verlaine and others lack true relevance to the content.”⁴⁰ Gregory Lee’s criticism narrows in on a crucial point: when are these modern Chinese poets warranted to use French or any other non-Chinese language? Is it merely a question of foreign language proficiency, as Lee suggests? Are we to use Pierre Ronsard’s 16th century French as the yardstick of “very good French,” as he does indeed use the phrase “chère ennemie” in his love poem “Douce Maîtresse”? Or, if the concerns are relevance and necessity, how are those criteria to be determined?

As a final point for comparison, Guo Moruo’s “Waves of Snow” was originally published in 1920 and included in *The Goddesses*.⁴¹ The poem begins with the poet’s reference to reading a chapter on Shakespeare and Dante titled “Hero as Poet” in Thomas Carlyle’s series of lectures, *Heroes and Hero Worship* (1840). Guo Moruo uses five English phrases in the poem, the first merely Carlyle’s name and the title of his literary work, which is then later repeated as an exclamatory second to last line, “Hero-Poet 哟!” In the fifth line, he cries out, “Open-secret 哟!” a direct quote from Carlyle’s discussion of Goethe and the “mystery of the universe.” The last three lines of the poem all feature

English words including “symphony,” “Hero-Poet,” and finally, “Proletarian poet 哟!” Inspired by Carlyle’s notion of “the inner harmony of things...what Nature meant, what musical idea Nature has wrapped up in these often rough embodiments,” Guo Moruo adds his own interpretation of the poet’s role as proletarian martyr, “Surely that cannot be all my body’s blood?/ All of my body’s blood dripping out soundlessly” [那可不是我全身的血液?/ 我全身的血液點滴出律呂的幽音]. But despite the theme of self-sacrifice and blood imagery, “Waves of Snow” retains a harmonious rhythm using repetition “Flowing along the ocean waves in harmony, the whispering pines in harmony, the waves of snow in harmony” [同那海濤相和，松濤相和，雪濤相和], and the use of English reinforces the poem’s political urgency rather than poses an obstacle for readers. In contrast to Dai Wangshu and Li Jinfā’s bilingual poetry, “Waves of Snow” is able to reconcile non-Chinese elements with the leftist literary agenda in a way that is aesthetically pleasing and politically acceptable.

Travel, Homesickness and Paris in Li Jinfā’s “Love Poetry”

While linguistic experimentation is one of the main reasons often cited for Li Jinfā’s unpopularity, “A chat with Verlaine” is not by any means representative of his entire oeuvre. In this section, I look at two poems from the same volume, *Singing for Good Fortune*, written before 1923 when Li Jinfā traveled to Europe, as well as a selection from *Light Rain*, mostly composed in France in 1922. In his foreword to the former, dated October 1925 from Shanghai, he recounts sending his two collections of poetry to Zhou Zuoren for publication two years earlier. Classifying his work as a volume of love poetry (情詩) he admits that some readers may complain about its

intimately loving nature (卿卿我我), but he hopes his poetry can improve what he sees as the desolate conditions between the two sexes in China (補救中國人两性間的冷淡), and he explains that this is the only way for a free and public heart-to-heart discussion (公開的談心).

For all of the scholarly attention that Li Jinfa's poetry has received on the themes of degeneration, ruin, disillusionment, there is a void of commentary on the theme of travel, which undoubtedly played a crucial role in his creative process as a poet. In these self-proclaimed love poems, Li Jinfa employs the theme of travel to emphasize the despair of distance. As much a characteristic of his cosmopolitanism as the frequency with which he employs the French language, his references to travel and homesickness seem nonetheless ill fitting for his self-proclaimed project of sexual renewal, yet they reveal his complicated attitude toward his country during this formative time abroad. In his foreword, he clearly positions himself as an outsider, having gained the experience of studying abroad and familiarity with Western notions of romantic love. Of the 111 total poems in *Singing for Good Fortune*, I have chosen two that appear to address the distance of and longing for home: "Paroles" (p. 64) and "The Song of a Distant Place" [Yuandi de ge 遠地的歌] (p. 84), although there are certainly more that warrant attention, such as "Ocean Tide" [Hai chao 海潮] (p. 103), and "An Occasional Feeling of Homesick" [Ouran de Home-sick 偶然的Home-sick] (p. 250). As a sampling of poems from *Light Rain*, I will also discuss "Night's Song" [Ye zhi ge 夜之歌] (p. 79), composed in Paris in 1922, as well as "Hometown" [Gu xiang 故鄉] (p. 90). These four poems could be easily

read as love poems, but I am more interested in how they depict the passage of time and physical travel, especially in contrast with his two poems from *Light Rain* specifically about Paris: “Luxembourg Gardens” [Lusenbao gongyuan 盧森堡公園] (p. 52) and “Paris Somniloquy” [Bali zhi yiyu 巴黎之囈語] (p. 54).

In “Paroles,” a poem most likely named after Verlaine’s 1874 collection *Romances sans paroles*, which recounts his tormented experience of leaving his wife for fellow-Symbolist poet Rimbaud, Li Jinfa describes a “chance encounter” that takes place in the middle of the ocean. The poem plays on the paradoxical relationships between destiny and chance, cycles of decay and rebirth, and the fleeting nature of time: movement is seen as something incidental and unpremeditated (遂無意地安排了). The changing of seasons (黃葉隨秋落地) and the passing of time (生命之河流上), while natural and expected, still manages to trigger grief, and another place’s landscape is no substitute for the narrator’s home, a land of “tall grass and spring breeze” that makes him think of rejuvenation and pleasure. The home becomes an unreal, imagined place, in stark contrast to the sensory, man’s cries over his harsh fate (人痛哭崎嶇之命運). As a love poem, “Paroles” provides meager comfort: company is negligible. And as a poem about travel, any sense of adventure that the reader may hope for is replaced with a teary sense of homesickness.

“The Song of a Distant Place” begins with an epigraph from “Ô triste, triste était mon âme” from Verlaine’s aforementioned *Romances sans paroles*, an imaginary dialogue between the poet’s sensitive heart and his grieving soul complaining about the failure of voluntary exile from one’s love to bring about expected relief. Like “Paroles,”

this poem also begins afloat ocean waves, and from the first line, sets up the mood as dreamy and nostalgic (“In the dreamy spirits of days past” 往日夢魂裡) for a past of domestic bliss and the comfort of the familiar (“In the dreamy spirits of the present, there is a murmur by the screen window, the setting sun briefly touches the curtain hook, the swallows chirp, returning with the wind.” In addition to setting up the contrast between former dreams and those of the present day, Li Jinfa uses the phrase “dream spirit” [夢魂] instead of simply “dream,” implying an otherworldly or supernatural quality outside of the commonplace act of dreaming. But if the beach is usually viewed as a destination place for rest after the endless ocean, here it is seen as a place of decay and despair (老弱之希望，在岸頭哭泣), and movement and distance are equated to the sadness one experiences at separation (來往在辭別的淒清裡). Unlike Verlaine’s poem in which the male narrator’s heart and soul have fled the female love interest, the speaker in Li Jinfa’s poem wonders why the woman in her beautiful dress, dancing and singing, drifted away (“Ah, *Jadis*, tell me where you have wandered off to” 呵！*Jadis*，告訴我何處流落了).

The theme of exile is picked up again in “Night’s Song” from *Light Rain*. Written in Paris, the poem is addressed to an unnamed woman and captures the speaker’s unwillingness to part. Beginning with a reference to a hidden meeting that takes place in the dark of night, a sense of anonymity is established with the disregard for common courtesy (No need to say *Salut*, or nod 不須說 *Salut*, 更不消點頭). The poet-speaker views himself as someone that has been exiled from the chaos (忙亂中之逐客者) and never allowed to return. Fatigue is a repeated symptom in Li Jinfa’s poetry and the

speaker compares his own desire for a deep slumber with the tired footsteps of pedestrians (數行人之倦步).

In “Hometown,” the memory of the speaker’s birthplace is a haunting shadow that refuses to let go. The title “Hometown” [Gu xiang 故鄉] is a common subject in classical Chinese poetry,⁴² but here, the juxtaposition of the lingering past in images of echoing footsteps and the “indulgent dreams of my youth” (我青春沉緬之夢) with images of natural cycles of decay and rebirth (fallen leaves, green moss, breaking dawn, a July breeze) ends abruptly with the transition from years of aimless drifting (飄泊之年歲), laughter and play, to bitter cries and “the only thing that remains, this scar” (獨餘剩這傷痕). Again, home is depicted as a dream-like idyllic place of the past, with the passing of time ending only in pain and sorrow. The poem’s speaker, instead of lamenting for his place of birth, points out the impermanence of youth: if once he dreamed of love he no longer feels the same desire since the passage of time as shown by nature’s clues. He scolds the unnamed former object of affection, “Why must you always accompany me?” The poem is anti-nostalgic in sentiment, inverting the reader’s expectations about a poem titled “Hometown.” The poet’s “dream” is not a romantic longing for the past, but rather the waking up from an illusory, outdated notion. His poems that refer to home share an aimless, exhausting quality not altogether unlike that of his poetic representations of Paris. If he is homesick, it not from an innocent yearning for home, but the frustration he feels at the memory of home.

When Li Jinfa writes explicitly about Paris in “Luxembourg Gardens” and “Paris Somniloquy,” the city setting’s impact is strongly felt, most likely a nod to Baudelaire’s

famous practice in *Les fleurs du mal* of allegorizing Paris and reading the modern city as a psychological space. Once again, “Luxembourg Gardens” begins by describing a dreamy setting, this time among the wild birds and mulberry trees of the Luxembourg Gardens. Addressed to an unnamed woman that has fallen asleep, the last line in the first stanza expresses an ambiguity about her presence; she is said to bring forth both peace and a kind of restlessness [“You bring peace while scanning from afar” 你總帶著閑靜而眺望]. The four verses pick up many of the images and themes in Li Jinfā’s other poems, such as the ocean, the poet’s sigh, youthful adoration, yet the poem has a distinctly encapsulated feel, as if all that occurs takes place in a contained amount of time and space, perhaps due to the garden’s setting as an artificial, man-made refuge from the city. Although the poem begins with the woman’s state of sleep, the last line in the first verse quickly hints that tranquility is always short-lived and the park can only provide temporary relief. But surprisingly the narrator does not turn to the theme of decay in the last verse; instead, the poem concludes with a sense of ambivalence, as the speaker and the woman disappear together into the distance, like a far-off hurricane—more comforting than threatening [“A hurricane viewed from afar, full of warm raindrops” 遙望之颶風，滿貯著溫熱之雨滴], providing a storm of warm rain rather than pelting drops and torrid winds. The last line, presumably referring to the storm, is even more mysterious: “Like the passing of a veiled woman, apparently reluctant and rather shy” (如幕面之女人走過，不願意還帶點羞). This image of a subdued and modest woman stands in stark contrast to the poem’s opening lines about the woman that shamelessly falls asleep with her fancy clothes spread on display, and the reader cannot help but also

think back to the “forsaken woman” in the first poem of the collection, wandering in a state of unleashed despair.

The inability to sleep peacefully reappears in “Paris Somniloquy,” the poem that immediately follows “Luxembourg Gardens” in *Light Rain*, and the most direct poetic account of Li Jinfa’s impressions of the city of Paris and the social conditions of the urban dwellers. The title, about talking in one’s sleep, gives the poem an imaginary, subconscious connotation, a reading that stands in stark contrast to the visceral details provided by the narrator. Paris is described as being misty and stuffy, obstructed by “frail feelings,” and as the troubled sleeper exists as God’s mere plaything, the speaker likens the so-called most glorious city to a rotting, putrid cellar inhabited by wicked reptiles, and travelers to intoxicated victims. All appreciation of nature has been destroyed, as distracted, heavily burdened pedestrians are overwhelmed by the dust of cars. In the poem’s tenth verse, the individuals in a crowd are compared to a starving, thirsty horse panting beneath his harness. Concrete references to real physical spaces like the “Vieux Faubourg,” the old Parisian city outskirts, and the Trocadero, an area in the 16th arrondissement located between the Seine River and the Eiffel Tower are periodically offset by surreal images, such as a blood-filled lake in which people bathe, and the coiling metallic Great Wall (an iconic image that resurfaces in the surreal dream writing of Chang Yu). While at first these images may appear to be further confirm Li Jinfa’s strangeness, a closer look at the theme of travel reveals that physical distance and separation allow for a reassessment of one’s home and one’s position in life, just as the subconscious mutterings of someone who is asleep convey some semblance of reality. The traveler’s journey is tiring and endless (“No resting for even a moment” 没勾留之一

刻), and the poem concludes with the paradoxical role of the poet: he is the only one who has the ability to hear but his position of isolation distances him from the rest of mankind (“Only the proud poet can hear” 惟有傲骨之詩人能聽). The concept of poet as outsider is not anything new in Chinese literature of course, but he may be the first to lament the utter despair that accompanies the role.

We can compare Li Jinfa’s travel poems to Xu Zhimo’s best-loved poem from 1928, “Saying Goodbye to Cambridge,” in which the speaker is resigned to the futility of chasing a dream, as impossible as rowing a boat upstream. His inability to hold onto his experience at Cambridge, and the impossibility of capturing a physical memento of his time abroad accentuate the transitory nature of travel and in general, the passing of time. In the end, all that remains is the impression that it was all an illusion. “Saying Goodbye to Cambridge” offers everything that “Paris Somniloquy” does not: a coherent narrative arc, attractive natural imagery, a nostalgic and sentimental tone, and a melodious quality full of repetition that makes it pleasing to the ear. Xu Zhimo’s poem is about quietness and lightness—the words “light” [qing 輕] and “quietly” [qiao 悄] both appear repeatedly throughout the poem, whereas Li Jinfa’s poem revels in its noisiness and emphasizes harsh sounds like panting, shouting, and laughing.

More than any other poem in *Light Rain* and *Singing for Good Fortune*, “Paris Somniloquy” challenges readers’ assumptions of modernity. First, instead of celebrating the liberating revolutionary aspects of the Western capital city, Li Jinfa reveals its dark underside. As the “troubled sleeper,” Li Jinfa views the city’s inhabitants as almost powerless entities, shouting wildly, not with the eloquence of a leader but with the sick

lunacy of a madman [“The rambling rag-seller is screaming the names of our forefathers in the street” 多言之破布商，在街道盡頭呼喚着我們先帝之名字]. His dystopic, nightmarish hallucination of the capital of Western culture reveals Li Jinfa’s disillusionment with the social dissonance of urban modernity. But more than a social commentary about the injustices of living in Paris, his poem returns to the burden of the poet-as-traveler. Unlike the classical poet who travels and appreciates the unknown scenery unfolding before him as a site of contemplation or possibility, the city impressions here are overwhelming and almost hallucinatory. He seems to be asking himself chidingly, “Don’t you feel like you’ve had enough?” [你不覺已足麼?].

Second, if we think of travel in the modern sense as moving through physical time and space, then Li Jinfa’s presents a new way of writing about movement. Instead of the sense of timelessness and indeterminacy of geographic location more characteristic of classical Chinese poetry than Western modernism,⁴³ Li Jinfa’s traveler is someone that is always moving forward but looking backward. Aided by the Symbolist philosophy that symbols alone—not descriptions or allegories—have the power to evoke feelings, Li Jinfa’s images coexist like the elements in a classical Chinese painting or poem, not linearly but side by side. Lacking in a coherent narrative, Li Jinfa’s poetic project removes him from the immediacy of national and local discourse; and by questioning modern sensibilities of language reform, the role of literature and poetry, and progress, his attempts to blend classical diction with unfamiliar images and non-Chinese language failed to find a captive readership, just as his poetry about love and travel did not convey idealism and adventure in the same way that say Ai Qing’s (艾青 1910–1966) “Reed-

Pipe” [Ludi 蘆笛] written ten years later, appealed to readers in a time of revolution.

Dai Wangshu: From Rainy Alley to National Salvation

In 1932, Dai Wangshu published his bold criticism of leftist writers in Ding Ling’s (丁玲 1904–1986) journal *The Big Dipper* (Beidou 北斗). In addition to chastising young writers for lacking life experience of neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie, and practicing immature literary technique, he pointedly stated, “I hope that the esteemed critics will not insist that everyone adopt the correct [political] line of thinking on any given issues; this would be both impossible and futile.”⁴⁴ His subsequent departure for France in 1933 took place in the immediate aftermath of the heated debate that took place in Shi Zhecun’s (施蛰存 1905–2003) journal *Les contemporains* between Du Heng (杜衡 1907–1964) and League of Left-Wing Writers policymakers Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白 1899–1935) and Lu Xun over the “Third Kind of Man” [disanzhong ren 第三種人]—writers not belonging to the apolitical intelligentsia class or the “unfree group bound to the Party.”⁴⁵ As a writer with leftist leanings, Dai Wangshu ultimately believed in the independence of writers and was far from advocating the artist’s abandonment of social and political realities. It may be difficult to reconcile the fervent Dai Wangshu actively cooperating with the French Communist party with the lyrical composer of the iconic Modernist hit “Rainy alley,” but in the conclusion of this chapter, I argue that the main difference between the way literary history has remembered Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu is linked to Dai Wangshu’s continuous participation in the political movements of the 1920s and 1930s, and beyond.

Although today both Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu are considered by modern

Chinese literary historians to be the leading practitioners of Chinese Symbolist poetry, the response to and scholarship of their work—quite disparate in the late-1920s and 1930s—remains divergent today. Dai Wangshu was born in Hangzhou, and after graduating from high school in 1923, he enrolled first in Shanghai University then transferred to Shanghai's Aurore University because of his increasing interest in foreign, especially French, literature. The Jesuit institution offered a special one-year intensive course in French, called *le cours special*, which taught by rote learning and extensive reading of texts.⁴⁶ In 1932, Dai Wangshu left for France and spent the next three years in Paris, Lyon, Marseilles and traveling in Spain until his return to Shanghai in 1935. In addition to composing his own poetry, Dai Wangshu published Chinese translations of French and Spanish short stories (Paul Vaillant-Couturier, Paul Morand, Blasco Ibáñez, Azorín, Lorca), French poetry (Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* pub. in 1947, Verhaeren, Paul Fort, Francis Jammes), and even Ovid's *Amores* translated from French, Russian writers translated from French, Blake from maybe English.⁴⁷ His most famous collected works are *My Memory* [Wo de jiyi 我的記憶, 1929], *Rough Drafts of Wangshu* [Wangshu cao 望舒草, 1933], and *Scripts of Wangshu's Poems* [Wangshu shigao 望舒詩稿, 1937]. In modern Chinese literary history, Li Jinfa is acknowledged as the first poet to introduce French symbolism to China, but his literary contribution continues to be a source of debate, whereas Dai Wangshu is considered a representative figure of Chinese modernist poetry.⁴⁸ Dai Wangshu's poetry was much more warmly received upon initial publication less than five years later in the early- and mid-1930s, and his reputation as one of the top modern Chinese poets persists today, most notably as seen by Hong

Kong's Chinese University Press publication in 1989 of an English-language biography by Gregory Lee.

Dai Wangshu's career is usually seen as consisting of two periods: his earlier Romantic and neo-Symbolist poetry and translation work, and his patriotic turn later in life, defined by the fifteen-year break between the publication of *Scripts of Wangshu's Poems* and *Years of Disaster* [Zainan de suiyue 災難的歲月, 1948] usually attributed to the political turmoil and civil war. Along with fellow writers Shi Zhecun and Liu Na'ou (劉吶鷗 1905–1940), Dai Wangshu co-founded the famous Shanghai publishing house Diyi shudian, later renamed Shuimo shudian. By age 23, Dai Wangshu's reputation had already been firmly established and his most celebrated poem "Rainy alley" was published in 1928. As New Poetry slowly gained limited acceptance, readers clamored for Dai's first volume *My Memory*: the first run sold one thousand copies, and it was followed by a second run of the same only six months later.⁴⁹ To draw a connection between Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu is inevitable, given their affinity for the Symbolist movement and more generally their negotiations with Western culture, whether through travel, poetry, or translation. But if Li Jinfa's verse is consistently characterized as "elliptical and idiosyncratic," Dai Wangshu is the "gentler and more musical Symbolist."⁵⁰ Or as Kai-yu Hsu explains, "When the symbolist poet Li Chin-fa shocked the reader of modern Chinese poetry in the 1920s and 1930s with his baffling verse, Tai Wang-shu, also a symbolist, won a good following with his simpler and more lyrical lines."⁵¹

Many scholars have attempted to explain the discrepancy in the reception of the two poets' work. The most common explanation is one of timing and pace: Chinese

readers were seemingly more ready for Symbolism by Dai Wangshu's time. For instance, Bian Zhilin recounts, "We had to wait for Dai Wangshu and a few others to dispel the mysterious clouds over such French Symbolists in their pioneering work and their own creative practice, and to know how to write poetry somewhat in the French way."⁵² Or, in Gregory Lee's words, "The major difference between the two poets rests perhaps in their apprenticeships. Li was directly inspired by the great masters of French Symbolism and tried to emulate them by throwing a plethora of disconnected images at the reader. Dai came to use Symbolist techniques and images at a more gradual pace and took as his models the less effervescent French poets."⁵³ Given the short period between their most prolific years as poets however it is unlikely that in a few years, readers would have changed their tastes so drastically.

In the case of Dai Wangshu, who has been more successful than Li Jinfa in retaining the title of national poet, his Francophile leanings are perceived to be offset by his Chineseness and vice-versa, his Chineseness is fortified by his French, but most importantly Dai Wangshu's poetry is celebrated because it is French-inspired, not actually French.⁵⁴ And curiously, as a parallel to how Li Jinfa's French language ability is so horrible it ruined his Chinese poetry, by the time Dai improves his French, his Chinese poetry reaps the benefits: "By the time he wrote 'Rainy alley' Dai had benefited from the opportunity and time to gain a greater proficiency in the French language and to attain a closer acquaintance with recent French poetry."⁵⁵ Presumably to be skilled in the French language would mean that one was no longer a Chinese subject but an object of Western colonization, but in the case of Dai Wangshu the opposite is true: fluency in French allegedly leads to excellence in composing Chinese poetry. And "Rainy Alley" of

course includes the famous refrain in the fifth and fourth stanzas, “Like a dream” [像夢一般地，/ 像夢一般地淒婉迷茫/ 像夢中飄過], describing the floating movement of the lilac girl.

These analyses of timing and language competency and fluency only provide a limited perspective of the two poets’ appeal, especially if we take into account the possibility that “the May Fourth writer writing in the vernacular was not someone who collected the ‘words from the street corners and alleyways’ (*jietou xiangyu*), as in the *xiaoshuo* tradition, but rather was more of a *double translator*, translating Chinese vernacular into a more scientific and ‘modern’ language while translating Western and Japanese languages into Chinese. His or her heavily Europeanized and Japanized (i.e., translated) vernacular might in effect be as alien to the ordinary reader as *wenyan*.”⁵⁶ For many readers, the literature that followed the May Fourth period, especially works redolent with references to Western literature such as the poetry of both Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu, continued to baffle. It seems to me much more plausible that Dai Wangshu’s longterm popularity with critics and readers alike is to some degree related to his poetry’s lyricism and readability, but also enhanced by the leftist leaning that eventually surfaced full force, and which rescued him from sharing Li Jinfa’s fate of relative literary history obscurity.

Two poems in particular, published in the periodical *New Literature and Art* [Xin wenyi 新文藝] on March 15, 1930, titled “Flowing water” [Liu shui 流水] and “Our little mother” [Women de xiao muqin 我們的小母親] have been described by Gregory Lee as exceptional in the sense that “they are both of a popular or leftist bent out of tune

thematically with the poetry Dai was writing at the time.”⁵⁷ While Gregory Lee faults “the usual contemporary Chinese critical standpoint” for the narrow, “over-simplified opinions” and “unsophisticated periodization”⁵⁸ and categorization of Dai Wangshu’s political consciousness as being awakened by the anti-Japanese resistance movement during the Civil War period, he generally agrees that Dai Wangshu “concerned himself very little with”⁵⁹ social and political themes in his poetry and writes that “much of Dai’s poetry not only shuns politics and social concerns but excludes the outside world altogether in favour of the inner world of dreams and the imagination, concentrating on the self and individual, rather than, societal perceptions.”⁶⁰ The existence of these two poems refute the idea that he either suddenly turned patriotic later in life, or that he had earlier tendencies but simply squashed them.

However, as Gregory Lee points out, the two leftist poems from 1930 were not included in his 1932 collection *Rough Drafts of Wangshu* and for this he gives two possible explanations: Dai Wangshu’s disillusionment with the literary doctrines of the League of Left Wing Writers, or his distaste with the poems’ literary style.⁶¹ His reluctance to republish these two poems is surely a combination of the two, seeing as how literary style and leftist literary doctrine were inextricable during the 1930s. For example, using the extended metaphor of rushing water returning to the sea, “coverging from everywhere,/ From the mountains, from the countryside,/ From the gutters of the city.../...Rushing towards the home of the sun, the speaker in “Flowing water” calls forth to his companions to “Hold onto your resolve.”⁶² In the poem “Our little mother” the prediction is that the machine is an instrument that will save the masses rather than be an instrument of oppression. Personified as a loving mother of man’s children, the machine

is an embodiment of strength and hope. Using repetition the speaker urges readers to reconsider, but instead of achieving the lyricism that Dai Wangshu is known for, the lines are more reminiscent of leftist propaganda. In both of these poems, the call for class struggle and national salvation are too obvious to be ignored, and subsequent letters written by Dai Wangshu only three years later record that the poet was dismissed from the Institut franco-chinois in Lyon where he was studying, for unexcused visits to Spain and Paris, where he was suspected of participating in communist activities.

Leo Ou-fan Lee's argument about Chinese modernity highlights the inescapable tension between Western modernism and Chinese nationalism: "it was the Chinese writers' fervent espousal of Occidental exoticism that turned Western culture itself into an 'other' in the process of constructing their own modern imaginary. This process of appropriation was crucial to their own quest for modernity—a quest conducted with full confidence in their identity as Chinese nationalists. In fact, in their minds modernity itself was in the service of nationalism."⁶³ Dai Wangshu's early passion for French literature, as seen in the numerous works of French literature he meticulously translated into Chinese,⁶⁴ spilled over to his passion for revolutionary politics, which had its consequences both positive and negative in literary history. For Li Jinfu on the other hand, the causal relationship between nationalism and modernity was not so clear-cut, and his failed alternative revolution in both linguistic and thematic terms signals a moment of disruption in the narrative of Chinese modern literature, a moment of challenging the poet's role in modern society.

"Always be drunk! ... Get drunk and stay that way! ... On wine, on poetry, on virtue, whatever!" exclaimed Baudelaire in his poem "Enivrez-vous."⁶⁵ Many of

Baudelaire's poems promoted drinking and intoxication as a way of channeling a state of euphoria and avoiding feeling the burden of time; but Roland Barthes explains, "For Baudelaire, wine is memory and forgetting, joy and melancholy; it is what permits the subject to be transported outside himself, to make his ego's consistency yield to certain alienated states; it is a path of deviance; in short, a drug."⁶⁶ For Li Jinfa, the state of being drunk, like the state of dreaming, was not a mode of escapism or detachment as we see in Baudelaire, but rather a way of expressing personal concerns, such as the role of the poet in a modern society and the experiences of a student-traveler in the West, in a wholly new manner. Unlike Hu Shi's belief that poetry, like dreams, must first be experienced in order to have some kind of legitimacy or authenticity at its foundation, Li Jinfa's poetic philosophy did not make any claims outside of the purely personal; for him, poetry was something that could best be expressed in a dream-like drunken state, "inspiration" transformed through an undiluted expression of individuality.

In this chapter, I have shown how Li Jinfa's "poetry of intoxication"—a unique blend of classical poetic sensibility, linguistic experimentation and an ambivalence and disillusionment about notions of travel and home—resulted in a literary project that failed to make a significant impact on the national canon. By challenging the essentially modern notions of Chinese literature as sacred and (Western) urban modernity as the pinnacle of social progress, Li Jinfa chose to forego participating the literary discourse of political revolution and retreat to a space of dreaming and experimentation. In the next chapter on Chang Yu's new visual language I will continue to investigate how the motif of dream gets reinterpreted by a visual medium, and how another figure at the crossroads

of Western modernism and the Chinese literati tradition gets overlooked by not one but two national art historiographies.

¹ Originally appeared in *Xin qingnian*, Jan. 1, 1921, Vol. 8 No. 5; reprinted in Hu Shi 胡适, *Hu Shi shi cun: Zeng bu ben* 胡适詩存：增補本 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe: Xinhua shudian, 1989), 230, Kai-yu Hsu's English translation.

² Li Jinfa 李金髮, *A Record of My Own Inspiration* [Shi geren linggan de jilu biao 是個人靈感的記錄表], Written Aug. 31, 1933, originally published in *Wenyi dalu*, Nov. 29, 1933; compiled by Yang Yunda 楊允達, *Zhongguo xiandai shilun* Vol. 1 (1986), 250; translated by Kirk A. Denton in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 390–391.

³ See for instance Li Bai's "Waking From Drunkenness on a Spring Day" 春日醉起言志 [處世若大夢, / 胡為勞其生, / 所以終日醉, 頹然臥前楹, / 覺來盼庭前] and Wang Ji's (590–644) "Scribbled on a Tavern Wall" [Last night a bottle was just finished, / This morning a jar is opened right away, / After interpreting a dream in my dream, / I still come back to the tavern.] (translation from Ding Xiang Warner's *A Wild Deer Among Soaring Phoenixes: The Opposition Poetics of Wang Ji*, 111).

⁴ Lin Yutang's translation of Zhuangzi: "While they dream, they do not know that they are dreaming. Some will even interpret the very dream they are dreaming; and only when they awake do they know it was a dream. By and by comes the great awakening, and then we find out that this life is really a great dream... Once upon a time, I, Chuang Chou {18}, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Chou. Soon I awaked, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly there is necessarily a distinction. The transition is called the transformation of material things {19}." Accessed online <http://www.vl-site.org/taoism/cz-text2.html>.

⁵ For additional biographical information in English, see Tu Kuo-ch'ing's "Li Chin-fa and Kambara Ariake: The First Symbolist Poets in China and Japan" in Chan Ping-leung, ed., *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Fung Ping Shan Library (1932–1982)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1982), 317–344, especially in the appendix on Li Jinfa, p. 344; Paul Manfredi's M.A. Thesis "Quest for the Missing String: On Li Jinfa's 'Symbolist Poetry,'" (Indiana University, 1998); and Michael Sullivan, *Modern Chinese Artists: A Biographical Dictionary* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006). In Chinese, see Chen Houcheng's 陳厚誠 biography of Li Jinfa, *Smiling at the Lips of Death: The Biography of Li Jinfa* [Si

shen chunbian de xiao: Li Jinfa zhuan 死神唇邊的笑：李金髮傳] (Taipei: Ye qiang chubanshe, 1994). Manfredi argues that Li Jinfa's work is far more decadent than symbolist: "one often finds discussions of Li's poetry proceeding in terms of its conformity or divergence from an often very unclear Symbolist standard. What results is a tendency to miss altogether what characterizes Li's work as distinct from that of his contemporaries and to focus on what amounts to superficial affinity with Western Symbolist poetry...Li Jinfa may well have introduced Symbolism to China, but he was no Symbolist poet" (p. viii). This argument is useful in the context of critics judging Li's poetry "under the accepted poetic standards of the French symbolist school" in N.G.D. Malmqvist, *Modern Chinese Poetry Collections 1900-1949*, (Strasbourg: European Science Foundation, 1980), 152.

⁶ Li Jinfa's prose writings, including memoirs, are collected in Chen Houcheng 陳厚誠, *The Memoirs of Li Jinfa* [Li Jinfa huiyi lu 李金髮回憶錄] (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996). Details about his trip to France were first published as a serial "Fu shen zhongji" in the Malaysian periodical *Banana wind* [Jiaofeng 蕉風] (October 1964–April 1966), 144–162.

⁷ Recounted by Li Jinfa in Yang Yunda 楊允達, *The Critical Biography of Li Jinfa* [Li Jinfa pingzhuan 李金髮評傳] (Taipei: Youshi wenhua shiye gongsi, 1986), 57–58.

⁸ For Zhou Zuoren's assessment of Li Jinfa's poetry, see for example Manfredi, p. vii: "something heretofore unknown in China" from Zhou Liangpei, 周良沛, ed., *Collected Poems of Li Jinfa* [Li Jinfa shiji 李金髮詩集] (Sichuan: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 1987). Also, Zhou Zuoren wrote a letter to Li Jinfa, admitting that "We cannot find another poet writing in this manner in all of China; you have a truly original style," quoted by Fang Liping, "Li Jinfa, le premier poete symboliste chinois," in Zheng Lihua and Yang Xiaomin, eds. *France-Chine: Migrations de pensées et de technologies* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 73.

⁹ See Mi Jiayan, *Self-Fashioning and Reflexive Modernity in Chinese Poetry, 1919–1949* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Ed. Mellen Press, 2004), 89.

¹⁰ Zhao Jiabi 趙家璧. *The Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature* [Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi 中國新文學大系] (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu, 1935), 7–8. Michelle Loi quotes Julia Lin's translation in Lloyd Haft, ed., *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900–1949, Volume III: The Poem* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 157. See also Lydia Liu's analysis of the *Compendium* as a "self-colonizing project in which the West serves as the ultimate source of authority in terms in which one had to renegotiate what was meaningful in Chinese literature" in Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity, China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, University of California Press, 1995), 235.

¹¹ Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 59–60.

¹² Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu: The Life and Poetry of a Chinese Modernist* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1989), 217.

¹³ Mi Jiayan, *Self-Fashioning and Reflexive Modernity in Chinese Poetry*, 89.

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- ¹⁴ Harold Acton and Ch'en Shih-hsiang, trans. *Modern Chinese Poetry* (London: Duckworth, 1936), 19.
- ¹⁵ Ming-hui Chang Lin, *Tradition and Innovation in Modern Chinese Poetry*, (University of Washington [Ph.D. dissertation], 1965), 219.
- ¹⁶ Michelle Yeh, *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice Since 1917*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 4.
- ¹⁷ "Woman Forsaken" appears on page 3 of *Light Rain*. All subsequent poems from *Light Rain* are taken from the 1925 Xinchao she wenyi cong shu 新潮社文藝叢書之八 series edition: Li Jinfa, *Wei yu: Li Jinfa shi ji* (Beijing: Beijing shuju, 1925).
- ¹⁸ Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, "Dream of Seaside" [Haibian de meng 海邊的夢] first published in *Xiandai pinglun* 2.51 (Nov. 28, 1925), reproduced in *The Collected Works of Xu Zhimo* [Xu Zhimo quanji 徐志摩全集], Vol. 6 (Taiwan: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1969).
- ¹⁹ See Wen Yiduo 聞一多, "The Form of Poetry" [Shi de gelu 詩的格律], *The Complete Works of Wen Yiduo* [Wen Yiduo quanji 聞一多全集], Vol. 3 (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1948), 411–412.
- ²⁰ See T.M. McClellan, "Wen Yiduo's Sishui Metre: Themes, Variations and a Classic Variation," *CLEAR*, 21 (1999), 164. For Wen Yiduo, dream seems to be associated with death, as in "The Dreamer" [Mengzhe 夢者]: 假如那綠晶晶的鬼火/ 是墓中人底/ 夢裡迸出的星光, /那我也不怕死了! [If those twinkling green glows/ Are starlights bursting/ From the dreams of the dweller in the tomb,/ Then I will have no fear for death!] (Michelle Yeh translation).
- ²¹ Wai-lim Yip, *Lyrics from Shelters: Modern Chinese Poetry, 1930-1950* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 208.
- ²² Bian Zhilin 卞之琳, "The Development of China's 'New Poetry' and the Influence from the West," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan., 1982), 154.
- ²³ Mi Jiayan, *Self-Fashioning and Reflexive Modernity in Chinese Poetry*, 238.
- ²⁴ *Modern Chinese Poetry Collections 1900–1949*, 152.
- ²⁵ Paul Manfredi, "Quest for the Missing String," 10–11.
- ²⁶ Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 139.
- ²⁷ *Modern Chinese Poetry Collections 1900–1949*, 152.
- ²⁸ McDougall and Louie, 59. Another critic agrees: "It is true that sometimes the occidental accent is the result of an authentic meeting between the Chinese poet and Nerval, Apollinaire, Rimbaud or Rilke, but most often the use of French or German words is only a facile mannerism. Aside from numerous misprints and misspellings, the excerpts from Victor Hugo, Tristan Corbière, Tagore, D'Annunzio, Henri de Régnier, Verlaine and others lack true relevance to the content" (*Modern Chinese Poetry Collections 1900–1949*, 158–159).
- ²⁹ Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 153.
- ³⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 310, emphasis added.

³¹ It would be also worthwhile to look at the poems that both poets published entirely in French and the subsequent criticism of those works. For instance, “L’impression” and “Printemps va,” Li Jinfā’s two French poems in *Wei yu*, have been described as the “most Chinese of all as regards imagery, but the heavy rhythm and fundamental ignorance of the French language render them unsuccessful, even as masterpieces of *naïveté*,” *Modern Chinese Poetry Collections 1900–1949*, 159.

³² Paul Manfredi, “Quest for the Missing String,” 10–11. Manfredi also says that the content of foreign text is less important than its presence: “Implicit in the patently foreign presence of this unfamiliar text in Li’s poetry, as in the work of many of his compatriots, is no less than the promise of modernity itself. The reader, in engaging the literary text, comes to understand and know all that the text makes available. The actual meaning of the Western text, then, is often secondary to its presence in the first place as a sign of the impending modernity bestowed upon the reader who manages to make it familiar” (12–13).

³³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 312.

³⁴ Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 26.

³⁵ “A chat with Verlaine” appears on page 75 of Dai Wangshu, *The Complete Collected Poems of Dai Wangshu* [Dai Wangshu shi quan bian 戴望舒詩全編] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1989). All subsequent poems by Dai Wangshu are taken from this volume.

³⁶ *DWSSQB*, 22. Gregory Lee translates the title of “Huile xiner ba” to “Change your mind!” on p. 359 of *Dai Wangshu: The Life and Poetry of a Chinese Modernist*.

³⁷ In the 2001 edition, the editor has provided Chinese translations of the French phrases in footnotes. “Ma chère ennemie” is translated as 親愛的冤家, “Aime un peu” is 給我一點愛, and the footnote for the last line is 給我一點愛，對我來說已是太多了！(Dai Wangshu 戴望舒, *Dai Wangshu’s Selected Poems* [Dai Wangshu shi 戴望舒詩] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 2001), 20). I have also seen online versions of the poem that do not include the French original but have already translated the French lines into the Chinese included in this note.

³⁸ Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 153–154.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 154. In a footnote on the same page, Lee cites Dai Wangshu in *Xin wenyi* (1929) as quoting 16th-century French poet Ronsard’s words “Ma chère ennemie.”

⁴⁰ *Modern Chinese Poetry Collections 1900–1949*, 158–159.

⁴¹ Guo Moruo 郭沫若, “Waves of Snow,” *Shanghai Daily News – Learning Lamp* [Shishi xinbao – Xue deng 時事新報 – 學燈] Jan. 10, 1920, later published in *The Goddesses* 女神 (1921).

⁴² For instance, the best-loved Chinese poem, Li Bai’s “Thoughts on a Still Night” [Jing ye si 靜夜思] ends with the melancholic line “I lower my head and long for home” 低頭思故鄉.

⁴³ “The classical language is *tenseless*... The fact is: if the Chinese poet has avoided restricting actions to one specific agent, he has also refrained from committing them to finite time. (Or shall we say, the mental horizon of the Chinese poets does not lead them

to posit an event within a segment of finite time.) The past, present and future tenses in Indo-European languages set time and space limits even on the linguistic level, but the Chinese verbs (or verb elements) tend to return to Phenomenon itself, that undifferentiated mode of being, *which is timeless, the concept of time being a human invention arbitrarily imposed upon Phenomenon.*” See Wai-lim Yip, *Chinese Poetry: An Anthology of Major Modes and Genres* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 5.

⁴⁴ Dai Wangshu, “Yidian yijian” 一點意見, *Beidou* 北斗, 2 (1932), 148. Excerpted and translated in Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 18–19.

⁴⁵ Du Heng 杜衡, pseudonym Su Wen 蘇汶, “Guanyu ‘wenxin’ yu Hu Qiuyuan de wenyi lubian” 關於“文新”與胡秋原的文藝論辯, *Xiandai*, 1 (1933), p. 378–385; Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白, pseudonym Yi Jia 易嘉, “Wenyi ziyou he wenzxuejia de bu ziyou” 文藝自由和文學家的不自由, *Xiandai*, 1 (1932), 780–792; and Lu Xun, “You lun disanzhongren” 又論第三種人, *Wenxue* 文學, 1 (1933), 29–31. Footnoted in Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 37–39.

⁴⁶ Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 2–3. According to his biographer Gregory Lee, this training is the reason why Dai’s reading ability was much stronger than his speaking ability.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–9; 63.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 281: “We can describe Dai Wangshu as a Modernist, as a representative of Chinese Modernism, but we cannot find in each and every of his poems written over a period of twenty years, an example of that Modernism; but each adds to the composite picture of the poet. Now that a reevaluation of the poet’s work has been tentatively embarked upon in his native land, the poet’s legacy is coming to be acknowledged: that he opened up Chinese poetry to the Modernist poetic and that his worth lies in his achievements as an innovator. Dai discovered and translated the best of Western Modernism—both French and Spanish—and attempted to introduce the spirit of its potential into his own poetry. Towards the end of his life he was overtaken by events and the nascent Chinese Modernism he evolved had to await disciples in a later generation.” *And*, p. 282 “Nevertheless his place in modern Chinese poetry as the father of the Chinese Modernist tradition is assured.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁰ Julia C. Lin, *Modern Chinese Poetry: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), 152. On p. 156, Lin writes, “In Li Chin-fa’s poetry one discovers little concern for the musical quality and richness of sound effects that characterize, for example, the verse of the Symbolist Tai Wang-shu. Li Chin-fa is primarily preoccupied with the darker, harsher, and bolder aspects in symbolism.” On p. 164, “Like his fellow Symbolist Li Chin-fa, Tai Wang-shu was greatly interested in French Symbolist poetry, which he eagerly studied during his stay in France in the early thirties. Unlike Li, who was particularly attracted to the Gothic qualities of horror and the grotesque, Tai inherited the softer and more musical aspects of symbolism.”

⁵¹ Kai-yu Hsu, *Twentieth Century Chinese Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 179.

⁵² Bian Zhilin, “The Development of China’s ‘New Poetry’ and the Influence from the West,” 154.

⁵³ Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 217.

⁵⁴ See for example “Dai Wangshu was attracted to the French symbolists, discovering motifs and images in their poetry which subconsciously matured in his own works. Certain of his verses are imitations of Francis Jammes and Paul Verlaine. “Spleen”, for example, is an obvious imitation of Baudelaire’s poem of the same name. He has borrowed certain of his favorite images—dead leaves, tobacco pipes, etc.—from Jammes. Despite this influence from the French symbolists, however, Dai Wangshu always remained a deeply national poet” in *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature, 1900–1949, Vol. 3 The Poem*, 83.

⁵⁵ Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 139.

⁵⁶ Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 71.

⁵⁷ Gregory Lee compares the two leftist poems with “Bachongzi” (八重子) and “Wo de sumiao” (我的素描) in *Dai Wangshu*, 11–12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁶² Originally published in *Xin wenyi* 新文藝, 2 (1930), 96–97, collected in *Dai Wangshu shi quanbian* 戴望舒詩全編 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1989), 153–154. Excerpted and translated by Gregory Lee, *Dai Wangshu*, 223.

⁶³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 308–309.

⁶⁴ See for instance, his letter to the Doyen at Institut franco-chinois, Jun. 28, 1933, BML archives.

⁶⁵ Charles Baudelaire, “Enivrez-vous!” *Le spleen de Paris: petits poèmes en prose*, XXXIII (Paris: Pléiade, 1973), 286.

⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 254.

CHAPTER 3

A Visual Language of Contemplation and Imagination: Chang Yu's wenren xihua

When the French art critic André Warnod coined the term *École de Paris* in 1925, he was referring to the group of mainly non-French artists living and working in the working-class neighborhood of Montparnasse in Paris in the 1920s, including heavy hitters such as Picasso, Chagall, and Modigliani. Although the actual definition Warnod provided was ambiguous at best—he admitted, “Later, art historians can, better than we can, define the character and study the elements that make up this group”¹—his article nonetheless highlights the conflicted sentiment felt by some French art critics toward the influx of international visitors. On the one hand their cultural pride and their unassailable confidence in the supremacy of their artistic heritage equipped them with a benevolent understanding of why these visitors wanted to come to Paris, not just for the amazing museums but also to embody the old masters: “these artists want to know the country where the great painters lived, breathe the air that they breathed, to be moved by the prospects of our home, of such a beautiful order, to enjoy the mild climate, the sunlight, to know finally the joy of living and enjoy this liberty without which art cannot blossom.”² The foreign students were depicted as almost parasitic, landing in France with the intent to soak up French art and then export it: “Should we be upset that they bring with them nothing more than the desire to enrich their art with what they find here [in France]? They create, if nothing else, a very useful climate. Never rest on their laurels; furthermore, there are among them some great artists, creative artists that give more than they take.”

Yet Warnod was shrewd enough to perceive the potential benefits of this parasitic relationship between host country and foreign student: “They pay for the others, the followers, the imitators, the junk sellers, the others that know to stay in their place and happily to come to France to study the Beaux-arts, then [they could] just go home to use what they came here to acquire and loyally spread the sovereignty of French art around the world.”³ It would have been rather shocking and disappointing for Warnod then, to discover that the Chinese artist Chang Yu did not think highly of European art, nor of modern art. He was quoted in *Le Parisien Libéré* as declaring proudly, “I do not cheat, hence I cannot be a painter in today’s sense of the word.”⁴ Not only did Chang Yu fail to “spread the sovereignty of French art” in China by staying in France for the rest of his life, but moreover he found fault with French culture and used his studies in France to revisit his training in the Chinese literati tradition rather than to emulate the French masters. Chang Yu, known in France by his self-appointed name Sanyu, took pride in what he saw as a dramatic aesthetic contrast between his own work and Western art: “European painting is like a rich feast resplendent with roasts, fried foods, all sort of meats of different shapes and colors. My paintings are, if you like, vegetables and fruits, and salads too, which can give you a break from your usual tastes in painting.”⁵ With a quiet modesty, Chang Yu’s pointed simile succeeded in coming short of calling the entire Western art tradition a greasy overblown affair, setting his own work apart for its unique simplicity.

As the sole figure of my dissertation who did not return to China after his time spent studying in Paris, Chang Yu was the most successful in detaching himself from the national salvation movement in China, but at the same time, or most likely because of his

decision to remain in France until his death, he is also the most neglected by Chinese and French art historiographies. This chapter seeks to explore some of the reasons why Chang Yu occupies such a marginal position in studies on modern Chinese art and Western modernism. Although Eugene Wang calls 1920s–1930s Paris “the right place...the right time,” Rita Wong identifies Chang Yu’s art as “misplaced and mistimed.”⁶ But what do these evaluations of Chang Yu’s timing mean in the context of 1920s China and France? The French Symbolist poet Paul Valéry (1871–1945), in writing about formalistic rules and regulations, contrasted the poetic medium from that of visual art: “But art, in the opinion of the moderns, is so closely associated with the fixed idea of spontaneity, or a kind of revolutionary spiritualism, that a work that breathes of any slight rebellion or other faction is presumed unattractive.”⁷ Valéry calls this trend “nothing more than a convention of rupture and incommensurability that replaces the old.” In this chapter, I argue that Chang Yu’s contemplative paintings of female nudes and chrysanthemums demonstrate his deliberate rejection of modernity’s mantra of spontaneity, or to quote Baudelaire, “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent.”⁸ Instead, he carved out an alternative space with his essentialist aesthetic, which allowed him to explore the evocative powers of dreams and the imagination.

Unlike Li Jinfa, Fu Lei, and Xu Xu, Chang Yu did not publish prolifically, which was not necessarily a consequence of his status as an artist as opposed to a writer, as many of his colleagues such as Xu Beihong (徐悲鴻 1895–1953) and Liu Haisu contributed regularly to journals and art periodicals. Therefore I use a combination of written texts, culled from his poetry, journal publications and letters, in addition to his paintings, to show how Chang Yu’s disappointment with the increasingly commercial art

market in the West on the one hand and the increasingly politicized role of art in China on the other, led to his creation of what he called “le simplicisme” or essentialism: a synthetic visual language whose major breakthrough was exposing the rupture and seams of Western modernism and Chinese literati art, rather than trying to blend the two traditions into one seemingly organic tradition. Like his invention of the sport ping-tennis,⁹ his aesthetic philosophy flaunted the human agency required in the act of putting together two distinct entities, the end result of a creative act of the imagination. For Chang Yu, the artist’s position of contemplation was far from a passive one. His paintings, which depict a dreamlike, depoliticized space, support his philosophy that truly visionary art stimulates the creative spirit, and that the imaginary has the potential to become reality.

Throughout the chapter I suggest that Chang Yu’s unique experience as an expatriate artist led him to create a new visual language that retreats from a celebration of Western modernity, favoring instead an imaginary dreamscape that obscures the personal but still manages to convey a sense of a private, inner world. Rather than relying on gimmicky cultural referents, his work relies on a paring down, a refusal to participate in the visual trickery of modern art. I begin with a preliminary discussion on the concept of literati Western-style painting (*wenren xihua*) as a mixture of distinct elements and aesthetic practices with some areas of overlap. My analysis focuses on Chang Yu’s paintings of female nudes and chrysanthemums—one the quintessential marker of Western modernity, the other extending back to traditional culture in Chinese art history. His oil paintings emphasize the acts of contemplation and imagination, on both the part of the artist as well as that of the beholder of art, and I show how these two motifs are the

ideal subject matter for constituting a private space free from the constraints of mainstream national, revolutionary, and commercial discourse.

Chang Yu was born on October 14, 1901 in Nanchong, Sichuan to a relatively prosperous family, which owned a large silk mill in Sichuan. He arrived in Paris in 1921 as an art student, possibly partially sponsored by the Chinese government but definitely also funded by his family, after studying in Japan and spending a brief period in Berlin. As a youth in Sichuan, he had studied painting from his father and calligraphy with the Sichuan master Zhao Xi (趙熙 1877–1948). Much has been made of Chang Yu's decision to study at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Montparnasse, the avant-garde hub of Paris, rather than the École des Beaux-Arts, the more typical choice of students seeking a proper academic setting. This deliberate move, along with his staying in France for the rest of his life, unlike most of his compatriots who returned to China after their schooling in Europe, have routinely set Chang Yu apart from other modern Chinese artists like Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian (林風眠 1900–1991), Liu Haisu, and Pang Xunqin (龐薰琹 1906–1985).

Chang Yu's erasure from art historiography in the West and in China has generally been blamed on weakness in character. For instance, Eugene Wang explains, "Chang's venture ... is a story of missed opportunities. He was in the right place, Paris, and at the right time, the 1920s and 1930s. His sensitivity in adapting traditional Chinese art to new possibilities and idioms could well have made him a great modernist when European modernism was drawing inspiration from Asian art. Yet his lack of enterprise, his self-absorption and carefree hedonism—all traits associated with traditional Chinese

literati—left him insensitive to the pulse and pressures of the art market.”¹⁰ In Chinese studies, he has been called “the lonely artist,”¹¹ and the scarce art historical studies have consistently depicted him as an exception among the Chinese artists that studied abroad in the West, alongside Pan Yuliang, who also remained in Paris. His failure is explained by way of his eccentric personality and his bohemian lifestyle, his consorting with Parisian “locals” and contemporary Western artists, implying his isolation from Chinese contemporaries.¹²

Only recently have scholars started to recognize that Chang Yu’s dismissal of the art market was not caused by insensitivity or laziness, but a steadfast refusal to buckle under the pressures of consumerism. Gu Yue in his 2009 study attributes Chang Yu’s “complete lack of interest in material gain” to the “desirable self control of a Chinese literatus” and the “integrity and independence of a Chinese artist.”¹³ But in letters that he wrote to his friend the Dutch composer Johan Franco (1908–1988) in the early 1930s, Chang Yu lamented the incompatibility of his moral obligation as a bohemian artist with the material necessity of financial survival, “I am obliged to stay on in Paris to live the life of a bohemian.”¹⁴ His belief that great art could transcend materiality also played into his life motto, which according to Gu Yue was “Art must be the path to man’s transcendence.”¹⁵ Chang Yu was not as entirely uninterested in money as imagined: “As for my situation, it is very bad. My art dealer [Henri-Pierre Roché] is paying me half the price and he buys very little from me. This is all due to the crisis. I can hardly go on living anymore. I don’t know what I will do.”¹⁶ One month later, he bemoaned hopefully, “The misery of the lives of artists. They ought to be poor, always poor, until the end. I could abandon all that I have now. But there is a chance: My love has not died

yet.”¹⁷ His inability to buy into the narrative of France as paternalistic benefactor (both cultural and monetary) secured his position on the outskirts of art history.

National Art as “Harmonious Synthesis”

In 1930, the poet, translator, and philosopher Liang Zongdai (梁宗岱 1903–1983) published a collection of translated poetry by the Six Dynasties literati poet-recluse Tao Qian (also known as Tao Yuanming) in the French language, featuring three etchings or *eaux-fortes* by Chang Yu, and the preface by Valéry that was cited earlier. In his “Notes sur T’ao Ts’ien,” Liang Zongdai wrote of the self-exiled official, “It is remarkable that, having lived during a period in which the profusion of language and rich imagery predominated literature, T’ao Ts’ien distinguished himself through simplicity and naturalness. A T’ang critic said of him, ‘His feelings are real, his landscapes are real, his facts are real, and his thoughts are real. His art reaches such a fullness that it seems perfectly spontaneous. His *labor limae* did not leave any visible cracks.’”¹⁸ Tao Qian distinguished himself during a period when the dominant literary aesthetic was flowery and lavish, and his greatest accomplishment was his simple and natural diction, which seemed more realistic and spontaneous than the popular, overblown style of his time. The emphasis that both Tao Qian and Chang Yu placed on simplicity may be their only point of similarity, for if Tao Qian’s accomplishment was convincing viewers that his poetic art was based on real and authentic experience, Chang Yu preferred to depict a much more imaginative dream world. And where Tao Qian’s life long labor was to make sure that his art reached a “fullness,” to the point that there were no visible cracks in his work, Chang Yu made sure to expose the cracks and explore where the points of rupture could lead.

The artist and Chang Yu's close friend Xu Beihong proposed his recipe for reform in 1920: "As far as the ancient methods are concerned, maintain the good ones, revive the interrupted ones, improve those that are not good, strengthen the weak ones, and assimilate the appropriate elements from Western painting."¹⁹ The prescriptive language of synthesis, representing the larger goal of China's harmonious assimilation into modernization, was simply not Chang Yu's priority. His affinity for literati themes and techniques may have charmed his French contemporaries,²⁰ but did little for his reputation back in China, despite the irony of *guohua*'s connection with the nation.²¹ In May 1926, another painter that had studied in France, Lin Fengmian, published his article "The Future of Oriental and Occidental Art," urging students that "the ancient art of China urgently awaits reorganization, the artistic theories of the East and the West urgently await harmonious synthesis and study, the new art of the future of China urgently awaits creation."²² Traditional art was meant to celebrate or at least perpetuate the harmony of man with nature or man with man, and for many progressive art reformers, the "new art" of China's future was still based on the idea of harmony, albeit synthesized with Western artistic theories. For artists that studied abroad in the West, their return to China was supposed to precipitate a re-examination of traditional art with a newfound perspective, which in turn would lead back to the inevitable question of national salvation. Mayching Kao writes optimistically, "The result of the more successful of these experiments was a synthesis of the two artistic traditions of East and West, striking a precarious harmony between the antithesis of native and foreign elements as well as a transition from tradition to modernity."²³ Chang Yu's work occupies a much trickier position; his themes, techniques, and style all defy quick

categorization of native versus foreign, traditional versus modern, East versus West. As such, the tendency has been to speak of his art in terms of integration and hybridization.

As Rita Wong argues persuasively in *Sanyu Catalogue Raisonné: Oil Paintings*, Chang Yu's work brought together "his perception of explicit Western ideas with the implicit quietness of Chinese aesthetics, resulting in a traditional *guohua*-type interpretation of conventional Western themes":

What the Chinese saw in Sanyu's peaceful and harmonious representations, therefore, was a unique form of *wenrenhua*, or literati painting, wherein the artist as literatus disengages from the mundane to enjoy leisurely and lofty pursuits such as painting, poetry, and music and creates art as a form of visual poetry. Sanyu's affluent family background and carefree personality fostered an emotional freedom and detachment that allowed him to openly observe his environment, to absorb creative energies, and to integrate them organically, almost effortlessly, into his paintings. Together with his disdain for the commercial in art, Sanyu was, in effect, a modern *wenren* (literatus) expatriate in Paris, and his paintings represent a unique *wenren xihua*, or literati Western-style painting.²⁴

The concept of *wenren xihua* is immensely effective, as it highlights the seemingly contradictory relationship between Chang Yu's Western modernist aesthetic with the characteristics of his Chinese literati upbringing as seamlessly integrated. However, I am interested in another possible way of reading *wenren xihua* as an example of synthesis: a mode of combining two things that accentuates and emphasizes difference and imagination, rather than trying to integrate them "organically" or naturally.

A brief background on the literati tradition may be useful here. The notion of scholar's art or literally translated "literary men's art," *wenren hua* originated near the end of the 11th century during the Northern Song period, with the theoretical writings of Su Shih (蘇軾 1037–1101), or Su Dongpo, and his colleagues. In traditional Chinese society *wenren* referred to the literati class, an elite group of scholar-officials renowned

for the amateur poetry and calligraphy they produced in their leisure time. Painting was seen as merely one more element in scholarly culture and the “polite arts” of officialdom, especially inextricable from poetry and calligraphy, but hierarchy relegated painting to the bottom of the list due to its relatively latecomer status. In the 11th century, scholars attempted to elevate the status of painting to that of poetry, and *wenren hua*, the painting produced by the literati, was initially posited in contrast to the work of professional artists produced for profit and financial gain in the court system or for patrons.²⁵

As a reflection of Confucian philosophy, the artist’s lofty, noble character was viewed as the core of *wenren hua* during the Song, just as it had in literati poetry and calligraphy. As James Cahill explains,

Poetry and music, and later calligraphy, had long been treated in Confucian writing as vehicles for embodying one’s personal thought and feeling, for conveying to others something of one’s very nature...The quality of a painting, said the literati writers, reflects the personal quality of the artist; its expressive content derives from his mind, and has no necessary relationship to anything the artist or viewer thinks or feels about the object represented.²⁶

The idea of being faithful to nature, or accurately representing reality, was not seen as a valid criterion in *wenren hua*, which prioritized the quality of expressive transformation: the painter’s role was one of transformation, to use the brush as a tool to transform the subject matter in nature into “an artistic idiom” that would reveal something about the artist, in particular his mood. Su Shih, who is quoted as saying, “Anyone who talks about painting in terms of likeness deserves to be classed with children,”²⁷ and his followers are generally regarded in art history as the first to formally challenge the traditional notion in Chinese painting that visual representations should have the same evocative power as the actual objects being depicted, and I will return repeatedly to the role of realism in modern

painting later in this chapter.

The other half of *wenren xihua* is *xihua*, which points to another divisive moment in the development of Chinese art theory. *Xihua*, often used in the context of *xihua yundong* or the New Art Movement, refers to imported Western-style painting, in contrast with national painting or *guohua*,²⁸ which refers to the use of traditional literati characteristics in the modern period. These two modes of painting were often at odds at the beginning of the 20th century, and just as the movement for new literature triggered the outraged reaction of many conservative thinkers, Chen Duxiu's call for Western science-based art for national salvation in *New Youth* and even earlier, Kang Youwei's (康有為 1858–1927) rant lamenting the decline of Chinese painting and blaming the literati spirit of painting as a leisure activity for preventing national artistic development,²⁹ were sore points of contention for traditionalists. As literati art was increasingly attacked for being irrelevant and outdated, just as classical *wenyan* was criticized for being insufficient and a liability in a time of social, technological and political upheaval, an untenable impediment to progress, *xihua* was viewed as a potential remedy and began to be taught in art institutions, in some places even replacing *guohua* curriculum.

Likewise in 1917, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868–1940) published the text of a lecture he gave in Beijing in *New Youth*, arguing that, “art should be disengaged from the individualism and intimacy of the traditional literati art, which emphasizes personal cultivation, ‘apprenticeship’, and is subordinated to the other humanities. Instead, art should have popularity, be promoted through school education, be distinguished from the other humanities and become the noble ideal.”³⁰ The elitism of literati art was viewed as

harmful for China's uncertain future, but the promise of Western art was also hotly debated. When Chen Duxiu blasted Ming dynasty Dong Qichang's (董其昌 1555–1636) literati school of expressionist painting that same year in the hopes of destroying the orthodoxy of the Four Wangs tradition,³¹ he insisted upon the tenets of Western realism, not the whole of the Western modernist art movement, to take its place. If there was any point of agreement among intellectuals, it was that some kind of synthesis of Western and Chinese art would be most likely to rescue Chinese painting from extinction.

For Chinese artists that studied abroad, the lively debate between *guohua* and *xihua* did not appear spontaneously upon their arrival in Europe. Most had already been exposed to Western painting in China, usually by way of Japan,³² or through journals like *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern miscellany) and *Zhenxiang huabao*, which introduced Western works by German Expressionists, leading masters of 19th century European painting, and theories of Western modernism such as Cubism and Futurism in the early- to mid-1910s.³³ Qingli Wan estimates that “in the twenty-year period from 1917 to 1937, in Shanghai alone, some sixty varieties of Western art books were published,”³⁴ with countless more articles in journals and newspapers. Nevertheless the hostile attitude held by some modern reformers persisted well into the 1930s, and by the eve of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), many intellectuals were still dissatisfied with the state of modern Chinese art. Writer and literary critic Wen Yuanning (溫源寧 1899–1984) complained, “We look in vain for an expression of the perplexing and troubled scene around us. Surely, we say to ourselves, the business of present-day art is to make us at home in this world of steam, electricity and radio: why have our artists turned their backs on the ‘now’ and ‘here’ and chosen for their art the themes of a bygone era?”³⁵ Perhaps

Chang Yu's greatest feat (or offense) was that despite his "explicit Western ideas" and interpretation of "conventional Western themes," he still managed somehow to avoid confronting the world of urban modernity that was so pressing to Wen Yuanning.

Actually, what these intellectuals missed in their debate was that Western modernism and *guohua* were not entirely dissimilar. Like the 13th century literati critics that believed brush traces should not be visible to the eye, Western realism called for the artifice of art to remain hidden. In terms of aesthetic movements, the aesthetic revolution in 14th century Chinese landscape painting has often been likened to that in 20th century Western painting. Citing Clement Greenberg's description of modernist art, Wen C. Fong points out that, "Modernism used art to call attention to art."³⁶ Rather than trying to conceal the limitations of the medium of painting, modernist painting openly acknowledged these very limitations. For instance, the "calligraphic brushwork" of both Chinese landscape and Western modernist painters "created free-flowing rhythms on a flat picture surface, using not only brush and ink but the movement of his own body as a medium of expression."³⁷ But where was art to turn once this thirst for personal expression through technique had been satisfied? In Western art and literature, the surrealist movement was created as an answer to the crisis of modern art in the mid-1920s, when art was perceived to be too preoccupied with technical issues. Key figures like André Breton (1896–1966) believed that the modern artist should return to poetry's traditional emphasis on the mind's imaginative faculty, and that the artist's role was to "define and create an art that is not simply devoted to depicting preexisting things."³⁸

For the poet Li Jinfa, a metaphorical state of intoxication was the creative impetus for his art. Chang Yu on the other hand believed that truly great art had the evocative

power to summon forth its beholder's dreams. He once described the hallucinatory effects of attending a Picasso exhibit in Paris: "I gaze and gaze again. I am completely immersed in reverie, hallucinated by these paintings. It is no longer painting but something colossal and grandiose. It is a python snake, long as the Great Wall, a mosquito as big as the Pyramids, an athlete that seizes the mountain, a thousand fireflies in the dark night..."³⁹ In this trance-like state, Chang Yu imagined a world in which man could live in the air or in the water, switch the rain on with a valve, or push a button for the sun to come out, "We will go to Asia like we go to Versailles, we will spend a weekend at the moon." Armed with his vivid imagination, Chang Yu nonetheless accepted the inevitability that the avant-garde of one generation would be viewed as conservative by the next, which in turn meant that even Picasso's shocking and bewildering art would eventually appear to be timid, or to take it to the next logical step, Picasso's bizarre images would one day come to life and become reality.⁴⁰ This review also provides a glimpse into Chang Yu's philosophy of art appreciation; writing from the role of viewer rather than artist, he takes pleasure in immersing himself in the act of imagination, losing himself in the stream of images and thoughts unleashed by Picasso's paintings.

Like Picasso, Chang Yu created a new form of visual art that depicted or allowed for the creation of an alternative reality through the juxtaposition of unlike elements, working with the belief that the relationship between discordant things could reveal new meanings. It makes sense then that in the context of Western aesthetics, Chang Yu's art has usually been discussed in terms of its connections with the surrealist movement. For example, Eugene Wang has made a connection between *xieyi*, which he translates to

sketch conceptualism, and the practice of surrealist automatism, the expression of the subconscious through “automatic” drawing that originated with Breton in the early 1920s and continued to be popular into the 1930s. Breton defines surrealism in the *Surrealist Manifesto* as “Pure psychic automatism with which one proposes to express the real process of thought, either orally or in writing, or in any other manner. Thought's dictation, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, outside any esthetic or moral concerns.”⁴¹ However, Eugene Wang points out essential differences in the two philosophies: “Sketch conceptualism requires a highly codified discipline of the brushwork, whereas surrealist automatism, in surrendering to the dictates of the inner voice, is emphatically against any codified regimentation in favour of a passive recording of the instinctual outpouring.”⁴² However playful and spontaneous *moxi* and *xieyi* claimed or aspired to be, literati painters still had to follow certain conventions of brush painting.

Eugene Wang goes further in specifying the relationship between surrealist automatic drawing and *xieyi*:

The surrealist automatic drawing offered something beyond the technical resources of sketch conceptualism. Its emphasis on release of the inner promptings and the continuous speed of execution gave him a formal apparatus to gain the freedom to execute fluid lines uninhibited by the codified internal variations and modulations of cursive linearism required of the Chinese ink-and-brush discipline.⁴³

The paradox of literati painting rests in the artist’s desire for spontaneous creation of an original cultural product that is simultaneously the evidence of one’s learning and knowledge of the literati tradition. Derisive of antiquated limitations and rules, art critics and connoisseurs in the literati tradition nonetheless continuously set forth new

limitations and rules on art appreciation and the artist's morality. The surrealist movement provided Chang Yu with the possibility of expressing himself beyond the confines of rational, aesthetic and moral bounds.

However, Chang Yu also realized that not all viewers would understand or be able to appreciate this imaginary world. Like the literati tradition, the surrealist movement in practice was not a movement for the masses. The powerful role of dreams for Chang Yu and for the surrealist movement was based on the individual psyche. As Breton stipulated in his *Manifesto*, "Surrealism rests on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of associations neglected before it, in the omnipotence of the dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin definitively all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in the resolution of the principal problems of life."⁴⁴ But given that dream verism for the surrealists was about depicting the dream world in a precise, realist mode, Chang Yu's conception of dreaming gestured instead toward the obscure and the intensely private. This difference may have been due to the disillusionment that Chang Yu experienced in the bewildered reactions of an art-viewing public that simply did not "get" the avant-garde. In the same review of the Picasso exhibit, Chang Yu describes with some distaste and disappointment the facial expressions of "the public," impatient to "understand the true significance" of Picasso's paintings, questioning the reasons for his popularity. He recounts a conversation with a female observer who complains, "I find that old paintings have much more value than this, take for example Rembrandt's painting."⁴⁵ For Chang Yu, the act of dreaming was an intimate one involving the piece of art and the unique viewer who was able to understand and appreciate the artist's vision. Painting was an act of progress and evolution, and

most people—even those at the center of the art world—were not ready for change.

The Female Nude as Site of the Imaginary

Chang Yu has been called the “Chinese Matisse,”⁴⁶ if not unfairly so, partially due to his countless depictions of the female nude form. The first thing that stands out about his nudes is their exaggerated proportions; as one critic has noted, Chang Yu’s “abstract figures always had a small head, big body and exaggerated legs which occupied almost the entire canvas. He adopted the ‘figure-landscape’ concept, popular at the time, which had been created by the sculptors Henry Moore, Jacques Lipchitz and Julio Gonzalez, and the painter Fernand Léger.”⁴⁷ But while Léger’s nudes possess an industrial, machine-like efficiency in their geometric form, and Henry Moore’s nude sculptures and drawings lean toward the surreal, Chang Yu’s ink drawings and oil paintings are much more fluid and languorous than the works of these aforementioned Western modernists.

In the transition period from watercolor and ink drawings to the medium of oil on canvas in 1927 and 1928, we see evidence of Chang Yu’s attempt to forge a new visual language and break from realism. Two of Chang Yu’s representative watercolor illustrations from 1927 and 1928 include “Nude with Full-Makeup” 整妝的裸女 (illus. 2) and “Kneeling Nude” 跪着的裸女 (illus. 3)⁴⁸ respectively; both pieces feature a nude female, body twisted in motion set in a plane of empty space. In the first piece, it is obvious that the continuity of the heavy black outline of the figure has been interrupted at various points along the arms, where lines have been traced over multiple times, and Chang Yu allows the viewer to see his dry brushwork, as the thick black outline tapers to a barely visible gray blur toward the corners of the paper. This texturing of ink

emphasizes the movement of his brush, and the dynamic interaction between paper and watercolor, just as one would expect from a work of calligraphy. But even though Chang Yu is already gesturing toward the grotesquely large body and disproportionately small head that he eventually develops into a motif, “Nude with Full-Makeup,” with its well-defined facial features and genitalia, still relies heavily on color and shading to depict the contours and musculature of the body, resulting in a nuanced contemplation of the female form in movement.

Similarly, in “Kneeling Nude” Chang Yu uses the same black outline to delineate the body’s curves, highlighting the body’s musculature with shading in thick brushstrokes of realistic flesh-tones. Again, Chang Yu employs a dry brush, revealing the movement of each stroke, hence the movement of the body itself. Here, the rear-view of a female nude is depicted on her knees, face turned to the side so that her profile is visible, and while the kneeling position usually implies immobility, in this piece the woman almost appears to be launching forward into the space behind. The more delicate lines and contours of the body present the viewer with a gentle sense of simplicity, the slightly turned, downward-looking head implying a quiet state of relaxation and solitude. Both of these early watercolors foreshadow recurring themes in Chang Yu’s later work—in “Kneeling Nude” we see his signature elongated, flipper-like hands—but it is not until he moves to the medium of oil that Chang Yu truly begins to experiment with the literati concept of *xieyi* in the modernist context of the nude figure.

Most art historians agree that spatial realism developed in the genre of Chinese landscape painting around the year 1000, but that by 1300, a noticeable shift occurred: “No longer is the aim of the painter truth to nature; rather the representation of nature

becomes a vehicle for self-expression. This shift is reflected in the new literati painting of the Yüan period. Brushwork, which now becomes calligraphic in its expression, assumes an autonomy that transcends its function as a means of creating representational form.”⁴⁹ The concept of *xieyi*, literally translated to “to write” or “to sketch” ideas, or loosely translated to “freehand sketch,” was emergent in the writings of Song painter Mi Fu (米芾 1051–1107) and his son Mi Youren (米友仁 1074–1153): Mi Fu uses the term “yiqu” 意趣 to describe the “lofty and antique” 高古 mood of one of his landscapes, and Mi Youren describes “sketch[ing] the true flavor” 寫氣真趣 of scenic spots, two of the closest instances that Song literati comes to the later term *xieyi*.⁵⁰ The spontaneous act of grasping an idea as formally having antirealist connotations in the Yüan in the writings of literati such as Tang Hou (湯垕 active c. 1291–1328) was also anticipated by earlier concepts like “deyi” 得意 and Mi Youren’s use of “moxi” 墨戲 or ink-play.⁵¹ By the Yüan dynasty, Tang Hou was setting forth well-defined rules for art viewers and connoisseurs: “Looking at paintings is like judging beautiful women: their spirit and bone structure are more important than their flesh and limbs. Contemporaries who judge masterpieces are certain to look first for formal likeness, then coloring, and then the subjects illustrated; and this is definitely not the proper method of connoisseurship.”⁵² Susan Bush explains, “Evidently the total impression received from a painting should be a sense of the artist himself and his ways of working; the subject and its technical execution are secondary matters. This, then is the correct way to view the idea-sketching ink-plays of scholars, which do not aim at resemblance to nature.”⁵³ The painting’s inner spirit should thus be a reflection of the artist’s spirit; its outward form was not altogether

insignificant but should never be the artist or viewer's primary concern.

As Chang Yu moved from the medium of his earlier watercolor, ink and charcoal to painting his nudes in oil, his "Pink Period," which is usually classified as beginning until 1929, reveals an even more streamlined minimalist approach with blocks of contrasting color and much less concern for detailed accuracy to the female form. His "Reclining Nude" (illus. 4)⁵⁴ from the 1930s dismisses any clear delineation between human figure and space, having gotten rid of the black outline of his watercolors. The soft curves of the undulating body are offset by the sharp edges of the black tapestry, and the viewer is forced to make sense of the rounded mass, in effect to fill in or imagine the details that have purposely been left out. The faceless figure with her arms reaching behind her head is a fleshy mass of pink, and the only break in her draws the viewer's eye to the pubic region: a lone black triangle that breaks up the otherwise almost amorphous surface. As with Chang Yu's early watercolors, the nude figure takes up almost all of the space in the painting, but here the force of the body's twisting movement does not come from the obvious movement created by the brush-line, or any underlying concern with three-dimensional perspective. What can be seen as the painting's flatness is also what allows Chang Yu to achieve the painting's aim of self-expression, and the body's natural vitality and relaxed spirit are captured by the artist's ability to capture the mood of emotional solitude at one particular moment in time.

While some critics have read Chang Yu's use of Chinese tapestries in his paintings as a heavy-handed reference to his family's silk-mill business in Sichuan, or more broadly a nod to Chinese culture since they are usually adorned with traditional Chinese designs such as landscapes, insignias, birds, animals, and plants, it seems to me

that rather than being presented in the exotic way that Matisse used his collection of African and Oriental textiles, Chang Yu's tapestries succeed foremost in juxtaposing the detailed realism of these decorative, inanimate objects with the Expressionist shapes and colors of his human subjects. The space where the viewer is accustomed to seeing detail, or expects to find detail, is surprisingly free of facial features. Instead, the viewer's attention is drawn to the minutiae of what would usually be a non-descript or at least less central blanket setting. The contrast between the nude female form—signaling the modern and the cutting edge—and the detailing on the blanket, which features distinctly Chinese architecture, swimming carp, and a fishing boat, among other things, is also jarring. By placing these items in context with one another, Chang Yu draws attention to their disparity, accentuating the gap between the two cultures, not attempting to blend them into one. The element of unfamiliarity or exoticism is constituted by their physical proximity to each other, not by the inherent qualities in the subjects themselves.

That so much of Chang Yu's work, especially pieces produced in the 1920s, consists of nudes is not particularly exceptional, as many of his colleagues in Paris, such as Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, and Pan Yuliang, shared his interest in this subject matter. La Grande Chaumière, the atelier at which Chang Yu studied, provided students with little more than a live model. Back in China, Liu Haisu, who returned from France in 1936, gained much notoriety for his introduction of *plein air* painting and studio classes using nude models at the Shanghai Art Academy [Shanghai meizhuan] that he founded in 1912. For Chinese audiences, the nude as an art form was completely unfamiliar and stirred up heated debate. For instance, Lin Yutang tried to explain the difference between Chinese and Western conceptions of the "feminine" to Western readers in 1935:

While in Western art the feminine body is taken as the source of inspiration and the highest perfection of pure rhythm, in Chinese art the feminine body itself borrows its beauty from the rhythms of nature... With the seclusion of women, the exposure of the female form, both in art and in everyday life, seems indecorous to the extreme, and some of the masterpieces of Western painting in the Dresden Gallery are definitely classed under the category of pornography. The fashionable modern Chinese artists who are aping the Western dare not say so, but there are Continental artists who frankly admit the sensuous origin of all art and make no secret of it.⁵⁵

The issue of nude models and the nude figure in modern Chinese painting quickly evolved from an aesthetic issue into a moral one. Lin Yutang's explanation reveals that the female nude in painting also became a facile signifier for following fashion, or "aping the Western." Along these lines, scholars have argued that symbolically the nude represents modernity in Chinese painting of the early 20th century: "Partly because of its status as an imported Western idea, and partly because of its illicit overtones, the female nude quickly became one of the central symbols of modernity along with airplanes, radio towers, and cigarettes—other popular signifiers of technological and social 'progress.'"⁵⁶ Chang Yu's nudes on the other hand seem to represent a quality of timelessness, or perhaps more accurately, an eternity. His nude paintings are always almost entirely devoid of any clues pointing to urban modernity, and for Chang Yu, the female body seems to be a depoliticized, detached space upon which he can experiment with only the essential elements: technique, color, and form.

Another way of reading of Chang Yu's nudes requires closer analysis of his brushwork. John Hay addresses this possibility in his essay "The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?" suggesting that in Chinese art the rhythm of the brushline, unlike the expected volumes and surfaces in Western nudes, is more representative of the concept of

qi or essence, the body's true vital substance.⁵⁷ While some art historians have suggested that for Chang Yu his nudes depict his shocked reaction at bordello culture, and the open sexual climate of 1920s Parisian culture (by way of their frank facial expressions, their exaggerated genitalia and gargantuan extremities), I read these distortions not as descriptive or symbolic but rather as a variation on ink play, a way for him to emphasize his brushwork and the brushline, to emphasize the calligraphic quality of his painting and the calligraphic quality of the female body. To associate Chang Yu's paintings with the tradition of literati calligraphy and poetry is to recognize the energy or mood that his brushstrokes convey, to realize how much his brush strokes reveal.

The unique calligraphic quality of his nudes can be made even more evident if we turn to nude works by his contemporaries Xu Beihong, Liu Haisu and Pan Yuliang⁵⁸ — three modern artists that studied Western painting in Paris around the same time as Chang Yu, and who are usually likened to Chang Yu in their innovative blending of Chinese- and Western-style art. Xu Beihong's 1924 "Back View of a Female Nude" is a telling example of his classical training in Paris. Using chiaroscuro or dramatic shading to emphasize his mastery of the female nude figure, Xu Beihong's charcoal and white chalk on paper has a softness that disappears from his later works. The white chalk at the delicately sloping nape of the neck and the curvature above the left ankle gives the otherwise darkly shaded piece a glimmer of luminescence and reflectivity. Although this work is by no means representative of the social realist style Xu Beihong is better known for later in his career, in contrast with Chang Yu's early watercolors, the realist mode Xu Beihong is working in here shows how varied approaches to the same subject matter could be among Chinese colleagues studying in Paris in the 1920s.

Began in Paris then completed in Shanghai the following year, Liu Haisu's 1931 oil "Female Nude" 裸女 shares similarities with the Fauvist works by artists such as Matisse,⁵⁹ such as the use of striking colors and wild brush strokes. A well-balanced composition of light and dark, and figure and background, "Female Nude" features the frank gaze of a nude woman posing in front of a dark green, black and brown geometrically zigzagging background that starkly contrasts with the nude body's luminous and sinewy limbs and the folds of the crumpled white sheet she is lying on. Liu Haisu draws attention to the pubic area by making the lower half of the body larger in proportion than the head and upper torso, and by openly exposing the model's pubic hair. Compared to Chang Yu's nudes, Liu Haisu's "Female Nude" lacks the poetic lyricism and simplistic minimalism of Chang Yu's brushwork: the painting is frenzied in its composition and style, and the resulting mood is one of restrained chaos.

Pan Yuliang's subjects on the other hand seem to be sharing a sly, voyeuristic peek into the private space of the feminine. While her work draws on recognizable Western influences from Fauvism and Impressionism—even the theme itself of female bathers or the *baigneuse* follows in the tradition of Courbet, Degas, and Manet—Pan Yuliang's early undated oil painting titled "Spring Song" (Chun zhi ge 春之歌) for example, demonstrates her affinity for the idyllic lyricism of traditional Chinese painting despite the subject matter of six nude women enjoying the scenery of a beautiful lake landscape. But compared with Chang Yu's Expressionist nudes, in which a particular mood or spirit is defined as the main force behind each work, Liu Haisu and Pan Yuliang's post-Impressionist works are more invested in formal elements like capturing light and realistic color, using lines to define the anatomical parts of the female body,

aesthetic concerns that Chang Yu completely overthrows in his visual language.

The most dramatic difference, however, between Chang Yu's nudes and those of his colleagues is that the latter depict for the most part Chinese female bodies. While Liu Haisu's "Female Nude" and Xu Beihong's "Back View of a Female Nude" both depict Western, non-Chinese models, they are exceptions in their larger bodies of work. Pan Yuliang's nudes are always based on Chinese models, sometimes even in her own image, and similarly, Lin Fengmian's nude paintings almost always feature Chinese models as well. Although most of Chang Yu's nudes have physical characteristics that define them as non-Chinese, most noticeably hair and eye color, a substantial number of pieces, such as "Reclining Nude," de-emphasize physical, bodily detail altogether. This point of distinction further sets Chang Yu's nudes apart from those of his colleagues in China, and it seems to reinforce the notion that for Chang Yu the depiction of the female body was in part a foray into the unfamiliar or the illicit. However, the mood achieved by his nude paintings is one that is less dramatic. The women depicted may be non-Chinese but they seem quietly detached from the modern, urban milieu they are ostensibly plucked from and said to represent; in postures of inner repose and contemplation they seem to hint at another time, either far away in the past, or an imaginary day to come.

Chrysanthemums and the Challenges of Cultural Translation

In a unique piece of calligraphy, poetry and painting combined into one, Chang Yu observed wryly, "Autumn chrysanthemum are for poets to praise/ At the gatherings of the literati./ It's a pity that the chrysanthemum here/ Are only for the graves."⁶⁰ He signed the work not with his usual artist's insignia, the character *Yu* 玉 in his name enclosed in a square with "Sanyu" written below, but as a poet, "November 1st, Upon

looking at the chrysanthemums, Yu” (illus. 1). His simple and poignant words manage to be succinctly melancholic in conveying the poet’s homesickness, yet quietly appreciative of the irony in the starkly different roles that the chrysanthemum flower plays in Chinese and French cultures.⁶¹ He juxtaposes the chrysanthemum’s revered cultural status and rich historical significance in China with the ignorance of the French, who are only able to view the flower as appropriate for funereal décor.

Consisting of one unrhymed quatrain, each five-character line in the customary classical form is written in thick brushstrokes of black painted over a white oil background. This remarkable piece, written in Chinese calligraphy using the unique medium of oil on mirror, is uncharacteristic of Chang Yu’s extant oeuvre, both in form and medium. While he did study calligraphy early on in his career and some of his calligraphic works were even published in Japan during the late 1910s, only a handful of his paintings feature inscriptions on vases. And though he was known to be especially resourceful with art supplies during times of financial strain, the use of oil paint on mirror is nearly impossible to find in modern art. The contrast of black paint on a white paint background accentuates the brushwork even more than the expected ink on paper upon which Chinese poetry traditionally is written. If the viewer follows his brushwork as one would view a performance, Chang Yu’s strokes seem hurried and spirited, and the composition of the characters makes the poem appear spontaneous with an improvisational quality.

But actually the subject matter was a familiar one for Chang Yu: not only do many of his oil paintings feature chrysanthemum flowers, usually potted in a vase, but the image of the chrysanthemum is ubiquitous in classical Chinese poetry, particularly in

association with the reclusive life of the hermit-poet Tao Qian,⁶² for whose translated works in French Chang Yu was commissioned to provide accompanying illustrations in 1930.⁶³ Having devoted much of his career to depicting the flower in still-lives, and to thinking about the poetry of Tao Qian, there is no doubt that Chang Yu had thoroughly and repeatedly reflected on the symbolic significance of the chrysanthemum, perhaps explaining why there is no hesitation in the energy of his brushwork.

If the female nude is commonly interpreted as the quintessential image of the modern, it may initially appear that chrysanthemums as a subject matter fall on the other side of the spectrum, given their cultural legacy in Chinese art history, and the larger tradition of flower-and-vase paintings in Chinese art. However, I would argue that in Chang Yu's work the two motifs allow him to not only entirely subvert audience expectations of the nude and still-life genres, but moreover both motifs serve as the ideal vehicle for Chang Yu's expressive play with ink, in which he forgoes pure outward representation for inner aesthetic experience. This is especially obvious in his renderings of chrysanthemums, which in the West would simply be classified under the category of still-life paintings with its reliance on allegorical symbolism, composition and color, but in the Chinese context present him the additional opportunity to challenge long-standing conventions of representation, morality, and purity.⁶⁴

In classical Chinese painting, "bird and flower painting" is the category that requires the most attention to detail (following respectively, landscape painting and figure painting). The chrysanthemum in particular, cherished by classical poets such as Tao Qian,⁶⁵ has a rich history in Chinese painting. The thirteen-book canonical painting instruction manual *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* [Jieziyuan huazhuan 芥子

園畫傳] appeared between 1679 and 1701 during the rise of the Qing dynasty. Intended as a guide for beginning painters, the manual included sections devoted to each of the “four gentlemen,” popular painting motifs in Song literati culture, including the chrysanthemum, which was renowned for being “defiant of frost and triumphant in autumn”⁶⁶ and also celebrated for its lingering fragrance and the endurance of its numerous petals. The manual informs readers that, “The chrysanthemum is a flower of proud disposition; its color is beautiful, its fragrance lingers. To paint it, one must hold in his heart a conception of the flower whole and complete. Only in this way can that mysterious essence be transmitted in a painting.”⁶⁷ Following pages of principles and rules to be memorized on painting stems, flowers, leaves, and buds, accompanying detailed illustrations and diagrams of multiple views depict flowers in various stages of blossom.

Nor would the significance of the chrysanthemum in Chinese culture have been entirely lost on Western audiences: for example, *The Decorator and Furnisher*, a late-19th century American monthly publication based in New York featured an article titled “The Chrysanthemum in Chinese Art,” in which the unnamed author informs readers of the flower’s fabled power in China “to have the power of conferring immortality.”⁶⁸ The author ends the article with the plea,

We must subtract the legendary element generously and recognize [sic] a true love of natural beauty in the great attachment which the Chinese have for the peony, the plum-flower, and the China aster, which have been all favorites for fourteen hundred years or more. This is one of the main sources of the development of modern Chinese painting, in which these flowers have had as much attention as baskets of fruit among the painters of Holland.

In this passage the author differentiates between the “legendary” and the “natural,”

suggesting that the more scientific appreciation is the primary reason for the development of Chinese painting.

Chang Yu's paintings manage to appreciate the legendary flower's symbolic meaning, at the same time experiment with the still-life genre. For his oil paintings of chrysanthemums Chang Yu adopted the Western convention of grounding his flowers in a vase, unlike blossoms depicted in the classical tradition, which typically appear on the branch as if in nature. For example in the traditional chrysanthemum ink and wash paintings of 16th century Ming painter Xu Wei (徐渭 1521–1593), "Chrysanthemums and Bamboo," or Qing-dynasty painter Xu Gu's (虚谷 1823–1896) "Chrysanthemums, A Leaf" from "An Album of Various Subjects," each petal and leaf is well defined, the stems orderly. Xu Wei's *shuimo* version features a strong main stem, supple and curving, yet strong in the foreground, flanked by a swaying bamboo to the left and grass in the foreground accentuating the chrysanthemum's dignified, noble presence. In Xu Gu's work the flowers are painted the requisite golden yellow and he also dutifully follows the rules by adding grasses around the base. By removing the flowers from their natural environment, Chang Yu seems to be playing with the mythological notion that the blossoms are somehow immune from decay and the passage of time. Yet the flowers remain a subject for intense contemplation, placed squarely in the center of his paintings atop a flat surface. In three of his 1930s oil paintings, "Chrysanthemums in a White Vase," "White Chrysanthemums," and "Chrysanthemums in a Black Vase,"⁶⁹ Chang Yu additionally challenges the conventions of painting with his experimental, minimalist use of line and color.

In "Chrysanthemums in a White Vase" (illus. 5), the white vase, outlined in heavy

black strokes, is the main attraction, leaving the white and pink flowers to blend almost seamlessly into the pink and white background. Chang Yu defies the viewer's expectations of attention to detail in the still-life genre, in which the subject matter is seemingly magnified. Blossoms and leaves gather in a tangled configuration, in contrast with the strong vertical calligraphic lines of the stems and the vase, echoed in the dry, muted line that divides the right one-fourth of the painting—presumably a white wall—with the rest of the painting. The painting's flatness derives from the blue-gray plane that serves as a tabletop at the bottom of the work, a rectangular platform on which the vase has been squarely placed. Chang Yu's highly visible brush strokes do not attempt to blend the colors smoothly but instead show the subtle variations of pink, black, white and blue. Although the varying lengths and heights of the stems seem to suggest disarray and maybe even a wildness, the bold and firm lines of the wall and table constrict the flowers from limitless possibility, sharing with the viewer instead a sense of lonely civility and refinement.

“White Chrysanthemums” (illus. 6), which employs some of these same techniques, presents another unusual approach prevalent in his other paintings of flowers in vases, a sort of negative relief in which white blossoms are sometimes outlined in black, but in this case share the same pink color outline as the background, resulting in a confusing, opaque arrangement of flowers and leaves. Instead of assigning the vase any particular surface color, Chang Yu reveals its ambiguity by simply outlining the vase's outer shape with a thick white line and leaving the vase's surface color the same as the pink in the background. The flatness of the vase is accentuated by the flatness of the blossoms, and slightly offset by the lightest undulation of the table surface, atop which

we can see heavy strokes in various shades of black. The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the dark surface of the table, a solid block of black mass at the bottom of the painting, and the flowers with white petals and white leaves are once again made barely central to the painting, although compositionally they occupy a prime position. Again the painting expresses a mood of quiet, tamed serenity, as the viewer is left to ponder the tenuous relationship between surface, foreground and background.

Chang Yu aims for the opposite of subtlety in the last of the three chrysanthemum paintings. Painted on masonite, a smoother surface than canvas, "Chrysanthemums in a Black Vase" (illus. 7) features a bright yellow vertical tabletop that recedes to the light blue background. Three pinkish-white chrysanthemum blossoms rest on a small gathering of dark similarly-shaped green leaves, and with the slightest glimmer of a reflection on the curvature of the vase, this painting comes closest among the trio to any semblance of realism in its regard for perspectival space. Still, the layering of color most obvious in the background and on the table emphasizes the brush's erratic, unregulated movement on the masonite, at the same time contrasting it with the assured outlines defining the vase and table. Although the vibrant colors of this oil painting give it more vitality than the previous two chrysanthemum paintings, the sense of drama is surprisingly derived from the table and the background—not the blossoms, leaves or stems of the actual plant. The three flowers, highlighted in brighter white and accentuated by light pink strokes, instead provide the work with its mood of relaxed tranquility; they blend hazily into the white background, forcing the viewer to make out their forms from the blank space. Chang Yu's chrysanthemum paintings, unlike his nudes, lack the playfulness characteristic of his other works. Jonathan Hay observes,

“Sanyu’s paintings of this kind from the nineteen-thirties, so evocative of domesticity, whim, and quotidian celebration, are at the same time curiously formal; they manage the balancing act of inviting us nonchalantly into a life, only reveal themselves as icons of decorum.”⁷⁰ This sense of decorum links his flower paintings to both *wenren* and *xihua* traditions of floral still-lives, but his innovation is the dynamism that he manages to achieve by way of such sparse rendering and use of color.

Chang Yu’s repeated efforts to depict the flower prized for its golden color, symbolic of the “center,” the sun, indicate his inner aesthetic sensibility, his refusal to turn away definitively from literati tradition for modernist trends, his interest in and attentiveness to exploring the flower’s potential once the rules of “what to avoid” have been discarded. In all three paintings, there is a sense of constriction and artificiality, an illusion of perfection suggested in the truncation of the flowers, the constricting and obstruction of the stems around the tight neck of a vase, a loneliness or quietude, not altogether desolate but certainly fragile and isolated, far from the vigor and vitality defined in the *Mustard Seed Painting Manual*: “Brush should be pure and noble, and one should be careful to avoid too few leaves with too many flowers, vigorous stalks on a weak main stem, flowers not properly attached to stems, petals without peduncles, a clumsy brush, dead color, a confused conception and thus an obstruction (of mind and brush, heart and hand).”⁷¹ Chang Yu’s paintings demonstrate that “a confused conception,” or what may be misinterpreted as an obstruction, actually might constitute a cleaner, clearer vision of the essence of things.

Finally, the chrysanthemum paintings are a reminder of the incommensurability of two cultures. Reminiscent of Chang Yu’s concern, which he eloquently and succinctly

expressed in his poem, the solemnity and disregard with which the French culture understood the very flower honored by Chinese culture reveals a crucial challenge in the project of cultural translation. In his chrysanthemum paintings he juxtaposes the funereal decorum of the French context with the symbolic meanings attributed to the flower in the literati tradition, resulting in a stark, minimalist mode of representation that surprisingly does not require the blending of two meanings into one. Chang Yu's chrysanthemums quietly demand the viewer's attention and reflection without any visual gimmicks; they seem to almost recede into the background, and by doing so, draw the viewer further in. Compared to the vibrant to the point of being dizzying still-life compositions of an artist like Matisse, Chang Yu's chrysanthemums appear subdued and muted. Similarly, compared to the still-life paintings of his Chinese contemporary Lin Fengmian, Chang Yu's paintings are much more contemplative and expressionistic.⁷² Although Chang Yu explicitly acknowledges Western conventions of composition, his unusual choice of color and space result in a very different finished product than those of both his Western and Chinese counterparts.

Chang Yu, Xu Beihong, and the Painting Societies

Given the unfortunate shortage of written material published by Chang Yu, another possible way in which we can better understand his career and the concept of *wenren xihua* is through his involvement with Xu Beihong's painting association, the Heavenly Dog Society [Tiangouhui 天狗會], also a failure of sorts in the history of modern painting societies. In his survey of modern Chinese art, art historian Michael Sullivan writes enigmatically of the contentious relationship between two of its most celebrated painters, "The rivalry between Liu Haisu and Xu Beihong stretched back to

the early 1920s, when, after Liu founded the Heavenly Horse Painting Society in Shanghai, Xu Beihong in Paris launched the Heavenly Dog Society in Paris, on the principle that Dog eats Horse. (It was short-lived.)⁷³ Liu Haisu, a Western- and Japan-educated painter, and arguably the most famous member of the Heavenly Horse Society, was best known as the head of the Shanghai Art Academy, hence Xu Beihong's bitterest rival after losing to Xu Beihong in the competition for the position of head of the Beijing Academy in 1927. The involvement of Xu Beihong, one of the foremost advocates of mimetic realism and eventual frontrunner of Soviet realism who likewise studied in Japan and the West, in the Heavenly Dog Society, a satirical take on Tianmahui, perhaps the greatest modern Chinese painting association, remains a puzzle.

In order to discuss the significance of Tiangouhui, it is first necessary to understand the role of Tianmahui in the context of modern Chinese painting, and more broadly, the role of painting societies in the context of 1920s Shanghai. Tianmahui was founded in Shanghai in 1919 by six artists: Jiang Xin (江新), Ding Song (丁悚 1891–1972), Liu Yanong (劉亞農), Zhang Chenbo (張辰泊), Yang Qingqing (楊清磬 1893–1957), and Chen Xiaojiang (陳曉江).⁷⁴ With the flying horse as their emblem, symbolizing the freedom and strength of new Westernized Chinese art, the society managed to consolidate numerous incipient painting groups into one coherent organization with the aim of promoting oil painting. Inspired by Tokyo's White Horse Society (Shibakai), a modernist Japanese art group that lasted from its founding in 1896 to 1915, these six young Chinese artists were all familiar with the Japanese art scene, and many may well have exhibited in the Shibakai annual shows themselves.⁷⁵ Following in

the footsteps of Shibakai, Tianmahui organized a total of eight annual Tianmahui exhibitions, beginning with the first, which was held in Shanghai in late October 1919, as well as published its own newsletter.

Andrews's work on Tianmahui has been helpful in revealing that the camps of *guohua* and *xihua* were not always as polemical as historians typically set them up to be: "The group never set up Chinese-style ink painting and modernist oil paintings as contending forces in a live-or-die battle, as some leftist revolutionaries urged, but instead situated the two as complementary trends in the contemporary art world."⁷⁶ In fact, crucial to their inclusion of both types of artists in their annual exhibits was their strong belief in pluralism and the importance of conducting "research on how Chinese painting and Western painting might be combined."⁷⁷ If the goal of Tianmahui was to rebel against "conservative art, and imitative art" and "treating art with a frivolous attitude"⁷⁸ for the sake of a stronger China, Tiangouhui did exactly the opposite in that it reveled in having no credo.

Thus the most significant difference between the two associations is that Tianmahui voiced a clear stance on the role that the art world would play in the project of national salvation, whereas Tiangouhui refrained from advocating any one political position and having an agenda, both factors resulting in its short lifespan. Chang Yu's participation in Tiangouhui can therefore be seen as evidence of his alliance to literati culture, since informal painting associations made up a crucial component of literati culture as early as in the Song period (960–1279). Susan Bush explains that whereas "self-expression in the West is often seen in romantic terms as the solitary struggle of the artist with his material," Song scholars' painting "was a form of expression in which the

personality of the maker was revealed, but the work of art was often created in the company of friends at a drinking party.”⁷⁹

All accounts point to the fact that Tiangouhui was in fact one extended dinner party. Rita Wong writes that Chang Yu and Sun Peicang (孫佩蒼 1890–1942) visited Xu Beihong and Jiang Biwei (蔣碧微 1899–1978) when the couple moved to Berlin in the summer of 1921, “ostensibly to show solidarity with the Heavenly Dog Society but apparently just to have a rollicking good time.”⁸⁰ According to Andrews, the society was “devoted primarily to dinner parties, as a good-natured joke.”⁸¹ In one of the very few published written accounts of Tiangouhui by Jiang Biwei, Xu Beihong’s wife recalls that, “instead of promoting art, they formed a culinary club, gathering daily to plan and prepare elaborate dishes typical of their various hometowns. Jiang commented that Sanyu always showed up late and never stayed long enough to help clean up.”⁸² Reading Tiangouhui as a traditional painting society rather than the mere scoffing of Tianmahui’s attempt at a more revolutionary Westernized aesthetic project makes sense of Chang Yu’s participation, which is also to say that a dinner party is not at all worthless from a point of scholarship.

Although there is little extant material about Tiangouhui outside of anecdotal evidence, its existence from approximately 1921 to 1925 is still remarkable for a number of reasons. Most obviously, it demonstrates the active exchange of intellectual thought and the fluidity of dialogue taking place between the cultural capitals of Paris and Shanghai. The painting society, in addition to members Xu Beihong and Chang Yu, boasted a relatively diverse membership, including novelist Shao Xunmei (邵洵美 1906–

1968), China's envoy to the Vatican Xie Shoukang (謝壽康 1894–1967), eventual Taiwan administrators Liu Jiwen (劉紀文 1890–1957) and Zhang Daofan (張道藩 1897–1968), Sun Peicang and additional Chinese artists and writers living in Europe during the early 1920s.

Moreover, Tiangouhui's membership is a telling indication that national alliances and geographical location could easily override aesthetic agenda, specifically the debates over *guohua* versus *xihua*, and *xieshi* versus *xieyi*. The recorded instance of Shao Xunmei and Sheng Peiyu's (盛佩玉 1927–1989) December 1927 wedding celebration reveals the overlapping and intersection of societal circles and geographic location: "Many other guests at the celebration were faculty or close associates of Shanghai Art School, including director Liu Haisu, faculty members Wang Yachen, Wang Jiyuan, and Zhang Guangyu, along with a British-educated art enthusiast, the romantic poet Xu Zhimo. Among the guests, Liu Haisu, Wang Yachen and Wang Jiyuan were organizers or key members of the Heavenly Horse Society."⁸³ Thus we know that Chang Yu and Shao Xunmei, both members of Tiangouhui, were circulating in the same social sphere as members of their rival painting association. Although Chang Yu only remained in Shanghai for a short period, he still managed to keep in touch with former colleagues that he had studied abroad with in France. Like in the literati painting circles, the motivating force for these artists to get together was for social pleasure and enjoyment, not necessarily one unifying aesthetic style or philosophy.

Not only did Tiangouhui members socialize freely alongside Tianmahui members at the same relatively intimate events, but artists like Chang Yu were not excluded from

participating in Tianmahui events just because of their association with Tiangouhui:

Many of the founding members of the Heavenly Horse Society had very parallel travel experiences to those of Sanyu, and it is not surprising that their Shanghai network and Sanyu's soon overlapped. . . It is highly likely, although not certain, that the paths of the Tianmahui artists and Sanyu crossed during those years in Paris. In any case, the satirical stance of the Heavenly Dog Society seems to have been accepted by the Heavenly Horse group with good humor.⁸⁴

We do know for certain that Chang Yu exhibited his work at the eighth Tianmahui exhibit in 1927.⁸⁵

Finally Tiangouhui can be helpful in revealing the divergent paths of the Shanghai-Paris art world of the 1920s and the 1930s. Although Xu Beihong was Chang Yu's close friend and colleague, and indeed a major reason why Chang Yu went to Paris and Berlin, they are usually depicted as somewhat of an odd couple, the most telling distinction being Chang Yu's expatriate status in Paris and Xu Beihong's subsequent transformation from overseas student to national patriot back in China. Often called the father of Chinese modern realist painting, Xu Beihong was born in Jiangsu province in 1895 and lived to 1953, eventually becoming the president of Beijing Academy, one of the major art schools in China. After studying briefly in Japan, he traveled to Paris by way of England in 1919. Unlike Chang Yu who consorted openly with his avant-garde contemporaries, Xu Beihong was infamous for ignoring everything outside the realm of academic realism: "when he came to the West at the age of twenty-four his eyes were closed to the all European painters after about 1880, and he never opened them again. Living in the Paris of Picasso and Matisse, he seemed totally indifferent to them, while to anything more avant-garde he was even more hostile."⁸⁶

The heated debate between realism and modernism came to a head in the wake of

the Nationalist party-sponsored opening of the First National Exhibition of Art in Shanghai in April 1929 in the well-publicized battle between Xu Beihong and poet Xu Zhimo.⁸⁷ Featuring 1,300 *guohua* paintings and 600 Western-style oil paintings, the high-profile show was opened by Cai Yuanpei, and its exhibition catalogue included Xu Beihong's famous inflammatory essay titled "Doubts" [Huo 惑], in which he denounced "shameless" and "despicable" commercial painters like Cezanne, Matisse, Bonnard, Manet, and Renoir.⁸⁸ Condemning fans of the French School of Paris for not possessing the eyes, ears or intelligence to discern the "excremental juice's dirt and filth" created by its artists, Xu Beihong liberally name-dropped the leading French modernist painters of the time and boldly blamed the infiltration of contemporary Western art for the decline of the once-glorious Chinese art tradition, yearning instead for the work of 19th century painters like Romantic artist Delacroix and his rival, the Neoclassicist historical painter Ingres. His visceral outburst prompted Xu Zhimo to respond with his pointed, satirical essay titled "I, too, have doubts,"⁸⁹ in which he argued against assigning a morality to the line between truth and falsehood in art, and defended artists like Cezanne against Xu Beihong's ad hominem attacks.

This series of debates certainly warrants a more in-depth study at another time, as the language used by both the painter and the poet reflect the national concerns about imperialism plaguing China's leading cultural figures. For my purposes, I am interested in what it shows about Xu Beihong's career trajectory, as he was eventually adopted as the forerunner for Soviet realism in modern Chinese painting in the PRC legacy. Around 1928 as he readied for his new teaching position in Nanjing, Xu Beihong's image evolved from "transplanted bohemian" to national patriot, while on the other hand, Chang

Yu's permanent "transplanted bohemian" state is often cited as the reason for his failure as a modern Chinese artist. Upon his initial return to China after studying abroad in Paris in 1927, Xu Beihong was an obvious mark: "It was easy to see where had been. The long hair, velvet coat and flowing tie and his detached languid manners, as well as his excellent French, suggested the Latin Quarter."⁹⁰ But Van der Meyden continues, "Two years later Xu Beihong had abandoned all that; he was dressed in a long Chinese gown and painting in a new and largely Chinese manner,"⁹¹ presumably in preparation for his 1928 move to Nanjing. This drastic change has also been observed in artists like Liu Haisu, and art historian David Clarke suggests that newly returned artists "faced the difficult task of adapting what they had learnt there [abroad] to the Chinese context, of producing works with specifically Chinese meanings."⁹² In the case of Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu, this meant going back to the medium of ink painting in addition to continuing to produce oil paintings, which Clarke reads as an indication of their "lack of willingness to commit completely to the Western-inspired artistic languages they had made so much effort to develop."⁹³

Xu Beihong returned to depicting monumental events in Chinese history and mythology,⁹⁴ but he also became widely known for his majestic horse *shuimo* ink paintings. Whether we read these artists's dualism as the reluctance to renounce their aesthetic heritage or wariness for Western technique as Clarke argues, or simply as a mode of adaptation and survival in the cultural-political climate of the late 1920s, most artists in both China and in the West in the 1920s believed strongly that aesthetic revolution was a tool for social and political revolution. The Western-trained artists who came home to China to take up teaching posts in national art institutions, like Liu Haisu,

Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong indeed adapted their Western training with their traditional Chinese training, as Chang Yu did, but to participate in the establishment of new national art institutions required participation in the discourse of national revolution, unlike Chang Yu who remained in voluntary exile.⁹⁵

Conclusion: Foujita and the Art of Marketing

To return to the group of non-French artists categorized under the *École de Paris*, I wish to point out one last figure for comparison. Rather than approaching Chang Yu solely from the context of Chinese artists, it may be useful to mention here by way of conclusion one additional artist whose name is sometimes mentioned in conjunction with Chang Yu's: Asian darling of the Parisian art world, Japanese painter Foujita (Léonard Tsugouharu Foujita 1886–1968) who arrived in Montparnasse in 1913, giving him a legitimate place in the *École de Paris*. André Warnod appointed him a special position, naming him as the sole figure conceived out of the “chaos” of the community of international art students flocking to Paris: “Foujita as the one exception to the practice of imitation, uses his own eyes and paints according to his own character/disposition, without worrying about other people's opinions. He came to Paris, more attracted to its possibilities than to its painters...”⁹⁶ Warnod applauded Foujita for his individuality, for not following in the footsteps of his compatriots and blindly imitating the Western masters, and technically, he was praised by Warnod for his ability to convey the “sincere emotions of an artist” and the spirit of the “living flesh” of the subjects in his portraits.

Like Chang Yu, Foujita was also best known for his paintings of female nudes, but similarities between the two may end there. Foujita was concerned with the precision of his line, and his paintings have a flat quality that defies all senses of volume and

perspective. In his most famous painting, *Nu à la toile de Jouy* (1922), the muse of Montparnasse, model Kiki poses nude in a reclining position channeling the masterpieces of Manet's *Olympia* and Ingrès's *Odalisque*. When French art critics like Michel Vaucaire commended Foujita on his blending of Western and Japanese painting, they noted his knack for "taking from each [tradition] what touched him the most, until he succeeded in creating a completely personal art, of which, if there may be imitators, had no precursors."⁹⁷ Yet he was praised for his allusions to ancient Japanese art, which seemed to provide evidence of his truly Japanese identity: "[I]f he has accepted a way of painting that is not of his country, he has nonetheless remained purely Japanese."⁹⁸ Chang Yu on the other hand, was once described as painting "neither in French nor Chinese."⁹⁹ His allusions to Western and Chinese art were not as easily identifiable as Foujita's, and Chang Yu was less "tricky" than him. A review in *The New Yorker* of Foujita's show in the U.S. put it most bluntly in 1930:

Foujita, with his cats and his bangs, makes up the show at the Reinhardt Galleries. The artist himself has been at most of the séances, to add a personal touch at the proceedings. Foujita has had many followers. He is a facile worker and brings to Western subjects the inborn sense of design that goes with the Oriental. This always produces a salable object, or one that catches the eye of the Westerner. We, however, have never been much moved by the stuff, thinking it workmanlike and tricky, but not very deep.¹⁰⁰

The "personal touch" that both Vaucaire and *The New Yorker* say Foujita brings to his art is what makes his art unique: if Chang Yu's art is intimate, it is not personal and actually reveals very little about himself in the Western sense. Chang Yu obscured himself in his paintings, and for Chang Yu the self was the one thing that was not for sale, and not for

any political agenda. In this sense he was a private artist, and his art work the way by which viewers get to peek into his private world of dreams.

The New Yorker review also raises the point that often what is “salable” is equated with what “catches the eye of the Westerner.” The most notable difference between the impact of Chang Yu’s work and Fougita’s was that Fougita was considered a critical and financial success during his time in Paris. He may have been “tricky,” but he was effective at marketing himself in a way that Chang Yu was not, or did not want to be. Warnod described enthusiastically in 1925, “Success has come, dazzling. Fougita is not only among the best artists of the so-called ‘École de Paris,’ but moreover fortune smiles upon him. Collectors of all kinds are fighting over his paintings.”¹⁰¹ Financial success came much delayed for Chang Yu. At a Christie’s auction in Hong Kong in November 2010, his painting “Potted Chrysanthemum in a Blue and White Jardinière” sold for an artist record of \$6.7M U.S. For an artist who struggled during almost his entire career to afford art supplies and sometimes even food, the prices at which his pieces have been selling on the contemporary art auction market are ironic to the point of being tragic. In recent years the contemporary Chinese art market has exploded on the international level, and it is interesting to reflect on how the evolving role of China in the cultural and economic spheres will ultimately influence the rewriting of the canon-driven modern Chinese art historiography. The growing popularity of Chang Yu’s expatriate successors, such as Gao Xingjian and Zao Wou-Ki (趙無極 b. 1921) for instance, both much better known in the West than Chang Yu, as well as more recent contemporary Chinese artists such as Zhang Xiaogang (張曉剛 b. 1958), Ai Weiwei (艾未未 b. 1957) and Cai Guo-

Qiang (蔡國強 b. 1957)—all favored by Western collectors—have led to a revival of earlier-era Chinese painting, including the rediscovery of forgotten painters with international cachet such as Chang Yu.

Meanwhile, compared to the well-established canon of European modernism, the canon of modern Chinese art is still in its early stages of development. Art historian Aida Yuen has pointed out, with some controversy, that what sets the Chinese canon apart from its Western European counterpart is that “Modern Chinese art history is more a story of master than of masterpieces,”¹⁰² and she faults the Chinese art canon for being too biographically-driven. In this chapter, I hope to show how the still-forming canon of modern Chinese art can benefit by expanding its purview to include literary studies and, vice versa, how literary studies can be enriched by a closer look at visual language. Li Jinfu’s poetry of intoxication and Chang Yu’s art of the imagination were not created for the masses, nor were they created for the revolutionary cause, although both the poet and the artist hoped that their work would inspire and produce drastic change. The social and historical conditions under which they created their work, in particular their experiences as young Chinese travelers in France and the increasingly politicized cultural climate in China, influenced both men to diverge from the more mainstream leftist path, and as a result their stories have been largely dismissed. Furthermore, the study of modern art in the West can also benefit from a re-examination of the role that non-Western artists played in the formation of modernist art in the West. Instead of perpetuating the rosy myth that Paris warmly welcomed all its visitors, providing endless aesthetic and cultural inspiration and monetary opportunity, more studies on the works of neglected non-French artists that nonetheless resided and worked in France can reveal how foreign travelers

became residents, and how they contributed to the growth and development of the artistic movements of the time.

To reflect on Chang Yu's failure—both in financial terms and in terms of Western and Chinese art historiography—is to go beyond speculating about why most Western audiences could not accept him as a French artist nor could Chinese artists accept him as Chinese, and to consider instead in a historical context why the concept of *wenren xihua* was not suited for the political and social climate of the 1920s and 1930s. Rather than fitting squarely within the literati tradition of painting to express one's pure and noble spirit, or the surrealist notion of social change through the subconscious creative power, Chang Yu's aesthetic philosophy might best be summed up in the words of Ni Zan (倪瓚 1301–1374): “What I call painting is no more than free brushwork done sketchily; it does not aim at formal likeness and is merely done for my own amusement.”¹⁰³ Chang Yu's culturally synthetic paintings in the 1920s and 1930s, unlike those of his more successful colleagues, not only disengaged from the prevailing national discourse of realism in China, but his adaptation of non-realist technique as inspired by the literati tradition and Western modernism did not claim any allegiance with the popular national movements of the time. His unique position as a Chinese painter residing in Paris gave him the freedom and flexibility to work outside the state institutions, to reconfigure modern Chinese visual language from afar as he wished, celebrating the potential of human imagination.

¹ André Warnod, *Comoedia* (pub. 27 jan 1925), reprinted as introduction in Oct 1925, “Avant-Propos” in *Les Berceaux de le jeune peinture: Montmartre, Montparnasse* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1925), “L’École de Paris,” 7.

² Warnod, “L’École de Paris,” 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴ Pierre Joffroy, “San-Yu: peintre chinois de Montparnasse, ne peint ni en français ni en chinois,” *Parisien Libéré*, Dec. 25, 1946.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Rita Wong, *Sanyu Catalogue Raisonné: Oil Paintings*, 63. See in context of endnote 5. From here I refer to this abbreviated as *SCR*.

⁷ Paul Valéry, “Préface” in Tao Qian, *Les poèmes de T’ao Ts’ien*, trans. Liang Tsong-tai (Paris: Lemarquet, 1930) Janvier 1929, 24–25; 13.

⁸ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 12–13.

⁹ Chang Yu invented the sport ping-tennis, a game in which “players used rackets much like badminton rackets to hit a larger-sized ping-pong ball across a net following tennis rules,” and hoped that he would be able to make money from promoting the sport in Germany and France. Despite a mention in the French newspaper *Le Parisien Libéré*, the sport never took off. Rita Wong reads the “hybrid sport” as a metaphor for Chang Yu’s art: “it was recognized and appreciated for its originality and creativity, but being misplaced and mistimed, it did not have a lasting impact and could not be sustained.” See *SCR*, 61–63.

¹⁰ Eugene Y. Wang, “Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency” in Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith, eds., *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 151–154.

¹¹ *China-Paris: Seven Chinese Painters Who Studied in France, 1918–1960*, 105.

¹² See for example: “Ling Feng-mien’s contribution is widely known, while Chang Yu was just a ‘lonely artist’ in Paris, and an outsider to the Chinese art world. There is little information about him, and he deserves more attention and recognition. . . Chang Yu did not become famous probably because of his undisciplined life. His friend, Hsi Te-chin, said, ‘Chang Yu almost became famous in his early years,’ while another friend, Hsuing Ping-ming said, “Chang Yu is very easy going and enjoys life” (*China-Paris: Seven Chinese Painters Who Studied in France 1918–1960*, 105)

¹³ Gu Yue 顧躍, *Avant-garde Decadent: San Yu and the Study of Modern Chinese Art of Alternative Perspectives* [Xianfeng tuifei: Chang Yu yu Zhongguo meishu xiandai xing yanjiu de linglei shijiao 先鋒，頹廢：常玉與中國美術現代性研究的另類視角] (Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009) is one of two Chinese-language scholarly works devoted entirely to Chang Yu. See also Chen Yanfeng, *San Yu* (Taipei: Yishujia chubanshe, 1995).

¹⁴ Letter to Johan Franco, Nov. 18, 1931, all letters quoted by Rita Wong in *SCR*.

¹⁵ Review of Gu Yue’s book by Du Dakai 杜大愷 in “Theory Space” [Boshi luntan 博士論壇] National Art Museum of China Journal 中國美術館 (May, 2009), 80–87.

¹⁶ Letter to Johan Franco, Jan. 26, 1932.

¹⁷ Letter to Johan Franco, Feb. 18, 1932.

¹⁸ Liang Tsong-tai, *Les poèmes de T'ao Ts'ien*, 24–25. Curiously but perhaps not coincidentally, Liang Zongdai's language (the simple, the natural, the “perfectly spontaneous”) echoes that of Valéry's in discussing trends in modern art, see p. 2–3.

¹⁹ Excerpt from Xu Beihong, “Views on the reform of Chinese painting” [Zhongguo hua gailang lun] first published in the first issue of *Painting Magazine* [Huixue zazhi], 1920, subsequently collected in Yao Yuxiang 姚漁湘, ed., *Anthology of Essays on Chinese Painting* [Zhongguo hua taolun ji 中國畫討論集] (Beijing, 1932), 109–114.

²⁰ For instance, the French writer and artist Max Jacob complimented Chang Yu on his “precision and purity,” intelligence, and technique. See *SCR*, 49n32. See also, collector Johan Franco on his friend Chang Yu: “His present work is therefore completely Chinese with a minor European influence. He knows how to depict the essence and often the humor of things with astonishingly little means” (*SCR*, 57).

²¹ See for example: “Chinese activists found that European museums admired the novelty of Chinese ink paintings but had far less interest in their efforts in Western formats and mediums. Against this background, the Chinese art shows in Europe organized by Liu Haisu and Xu Beihong in 1934 and 1935 were exhibitions of *guohua*.” In Julia Andrews's “Art Under Mao, ‘Cao Guoqiang’s Maskimov Collection,’ and China’s Twentieth Century,” Josh Yiu, ed., *Writing Modern Chinese Art: Historiographic Explorations* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009), 57.

²² Lin Fengmian, “The Future of Oriental and Occidental Art”: 23:10 May 16, 1926, 97–104 in Mayching Kao, ed. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 107. Two additional voices to consider are *guohua* revival movement leader Chen Shizeng and Lingnan School painter Gao Jianfu, both of whom also tried to use literati painting but in order to adapt it to the movement of national salvation.

²³ Mayching Kao, “The Quest for New Art” in *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, 132.

²⁴ *SCR*, 25–26.

²⁵ However, Susan Bush points out that “despite its elitist origin, it gradually gained ground until, by late Ming, the styles, practices, and views of the literati were the accepted modes of art and thought.” See Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 181.

²⁶ James Cahill, *Chinese Painting* (Switzerland: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1960), 89–91.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁸ Mayching Kao explains in her Foreword that, “Paintings in the Chinese style and medium have been given the name *guohua* to distinguish them from Western and Western-style painting since the early years of this century. This term carries an additional meaning of ‘national painting’; it is probably an abbreviation of ‘painting of national essence’ (*guocui hua*) under the influence of the Movement to Preserve National Essence (*baocun guocui yundong*) initiated at about the same time” (*Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, xxi).

²⁹ Kang Youwei 康有為, *Travels in Eleven European Countries* [Ouzhou shiyi guo youji erzong 歐洲十一國遊記二種] (Changsha shi: Yuelu shushe: Hunan sheng Xinhua shudian faxing, 1985), quoted in Lawrence Wu, “Kang Youwei and the Westernisation of Modern Chinese Art,” *Orientations* (March 1990), 47–48.

³⁰ Rita Chang, “The Essence of Chinese Art Reformation in the Early Twentieth Century” in *China-Paris: Seven Chinese Painters Who Studied in France, 1918–1960*, 50–51.

³¹ The Four Wangs tradition refers to the School of Four Wangs consisting of Qing-dynasty literati painters Wang Shimin, Wang Jian, Wang Hui, and Wang Yuanqi. All four were influenced by the Ming painter Dong Qichang and heavily criticized for merely imitating the works of traditional painters without exhibiting any creativity of their own. They are usually discussed in contrast to the “monk painters” of the same period such as Shi Tao 石濤 that famously rebelled against imitation.

³² See for example Julia F. Andrews’s discussion of Japan’s art education reforms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in “Sanyu and the Shanghai Modernists” in Jean-Paul Desroches and Alessandra Chioetto, *Sanyu: l’écriture du corps* (Milan: Skira, 2004), 78.

³³ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 36.

³⁴ Qingli Wan, “Fundamental Changes in the Study of Chinese Painting: 1796–1948” in *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, 38.

³⁵ Quoted by Michael Sullivan in *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 25–26.

³⁶ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, eds., *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 6; cited in Wen C. Fong, “Reflections on Chinese Art History,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 142, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), 58.

³⁷ Wen C. Fong, “Reflections on Chinese Art History,” 58.

³⁸ Kim Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts: Theory and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51.

³⁹ Sanyu, “Opinions d’un peintre chinois sur Picasso,” reproduced in *SCR*, 64.

⁴⁰ This recalls Apollinaire’s “L’Esprit Nouveau et les poètes” (*Mercure de France*, no. 130 (December 1, 1918), 385–396 in which “new realism” is a new reality and the role of the modern poet as prophet and creator comes to fruition in the age of invention (ie, myth of flying men). The imaginings of a poet become reality.

⁴¹ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, trans. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 26.

⁴² Eugene Wang, “Sanyu: a Chinese Surrealist in Paris,” in *Sanyu: L’écriture du corps*, 64. See for example Breton writes in “The Automatic Message” that automatic, mechanical or unconscious writing, “in contrast with the spiritualist’s aim of dissociating the medium’s psychological personality, the Surrealists’ aim is nothing less than to unify that personality. Which means that for us the question of externality of...the voice does not even arise.” See André Breton, *The Automatic Message*, Antony Melville, trans. (London: Atlas Press, 1997), 25.

⁴³ Eugene Wang, “Sanyu: A Chinese Surrealist in Paris,” p. 64. See also Eugene Wang, “Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency,” in *Chinese Art, Modern Expressions*, 102–161.

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- ⁴⁴ André Breton, “Manifeste du surréalisme,” *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris 1988), I:328. Breton writes, “Why should I not grant the dream what I refuse reality, maybe even that value of certainty in itself, that, in its time, is not at all exposed to my disavowal? Why should I not expect from the sign of the dream more than I expect from a daily more elevated consciousness? Can the dream itself not be applied to the resolution of the fundamental questions of life? Are these questions the same in one instance as in another, and are these questions already there in the dream? Is the dream less heavy with sanctions than the rest?” For Breton, dreams have the power to become reality.
- ⁴⁵ Sanyu, “Opinions d’un peintre chinois sur Picasso.”
- ⁴⁶ Sophie Krebs, “Sanyu and the ‘Ecole de Paris,’” in *Sanyu l’écriture du corps*, 31–38.
- ⁴⁷ “Chang Yu (1900–1966) The Lonely Artist in Contemporary Chinese Painting” in *China-Paris: Seven Chinese Painters Who Studied in France, 1918–1960*, 105.
- ⁴⁸ Reproduced in Antoine Chen, *San Yu: Overseas Chinese Fine Arts Series* (Taipei: Artist Publishing Company, 1995), 62, 66.
- ⁴⁹ Wen C. Fong, “Reflections on Chinese Art History,” 54–58.
- ⁵⁰ See Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 68–69.
- ⁵¹ Mi Fu 米芾, “The History of Painting” [Hua shi 畫史], in Wang shi hua yuán 王氏畫苑 in Wang Shih-chen 王世貞, ed., *The Paintings of Wang Shi* [Wang-shih shu-hua yuán 王氏書畫苑] (Shanghai: T’ai-tung T’u-shu Chü, 1922).
- ⁵² Tang Hou 湯垕, Hua lun 畫論, in Meishu congshu 美術叢書 (Series III.7.1A) 3a–3b, compiled by Teng Shih 鄧實 (Shanghai: Shen-chou Kuo-kuang She, 1923), translated in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 127.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 127–128.
- ⁵⁴ Reproduced in *San Yu: Overseas Chinese Fine Art Series*, 116–117; and *SCR*, 107.
- ⁵⁵ Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People* (New York: Halcyon House, 1939 ed.), 149–150.
- ⁵⁶ Leslie Jones, “Sanyu: Chinese Painter of Montparnasse,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 35, Intercultural China (Spring, 1999), 226. See also Scott Minick and Jiao Ping, *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990).
- ⁵⁷ John Hay, “The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?” in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow, eds., *Body, Subject and Power in China* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 42–77.
- ⁵⁸ The most famous female artist that studied in Paris during this same time, Pan Yuliang studied at the Shanghai Art Academy, eventually becoming Liu Haisu’s student. In 1921 she traveled to Lyon, Paris and Rome, and after briefly returning to Shanghai, settled permanently in Paris in 1937. Her vibrantly colored nudes, usually depicting female bathers in positions of repose and relaxation, created much controversy in 1930s Shanghai, and she was renowned for being her own model. Her mysterious, sometimes glamorous life has been the subject of much speculation, especially in recent years. See for example Huang Shuqin’s 1994 film adaptation of Shih Nan’s synonymously titled novel *Hua hun* 畫魂 starring Gong Li, based on Pan Yuliang’s life and Jennifer Cody

Epstein's 2008 historical fiction novel *The Painter From Shanghai* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008).

⁵⁹ Cai Yuanpei likened Liu Haisu's work to that of the post-Impressionists, in particular Gauguin and Van Gogh. See *China-Paris: Seven Chinese Painters Who Studied in France, 1918–1960*, 87.

⁶⁰ Chang Yu, "An Autumn Poem," not dated. [秋菊詩人賞、文人對酒杯、可憐此間菊、只供作人墳, signed 十一月一日見菊有感, 玉] Reproduced in *SCR*, 384, plate 257. English translation provided by Rita Wong. Wong translates the second line to "At the gatherings of literati" but literally translated the second line reads, "Literati in front of their cups of wine," an even more direct reference to Tao Qian and his drinking poems.

⁶¹ According to French social custom, the chrysanthemum is known as "la fleur de mort" for its association with funerals and mourning.

⁶² See for example Tao Qian [Tao Yuanming]'s "Returning Home" [Guiqulai xi ci 歸去來兮] prose poem about retiring from public office to his private farm. For more on chrysanthemums in Chinese art, see for example Susan E. Nelson's "Revisiting the Eastern Fence: Tao Qian's Chrysanthemums" in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (Sept., 2001), p. 437–406.

⁶³ The limited edition of *Les Poèmes de T'ao Ts'ien* had a run of 306 copies.

⁶⁴ In traditional Chinese painting, flowers in a vase are usually relatively sparse, carefully composed arrangements. Jonathan Hay observes, "Unlike the female nude, which had no Chinese counterpart, the still life in this form converges with a long Chinese tradition of depicting vases or baskets of flowers. The homeland connection is made all the more compelling by his [Chang Yu's] choice of flowers, dominated by chrysanthemums, peonies, lotuses, and plum blossom." ("Sanyu" in *Sanyu l'écriture du corps*, accessed online <http://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/sanyu/hay.html>.)

⁶⁵ In Poem 5 of the "Drinking Wine" 飲酒 series Tao Qian writes his immortal lines, "Picking chrysanthemums at my east fence, I see South Mountain/ far off: air lovely at dusk, birds in flight/ going home. All this means something,/ something absolute: whenever I start/ to explain it, I forget words altogether." Translated by David Hinton in *Classical Chinese Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 117.

⁶⁶ Quotes from the manual are taken from Mai-Mai Sze, ed. and trans. *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (New York: Bollingen Series and Princeton University Press, 1956), 435.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 436.

⁶⁸ "The Chrysanthemum in Chinese Art," *The Decorator and Furnisher*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Oct., 1889), 22.

⁶⁹ Reproduced in *SCR*, 184, 185, 190, respectively.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Hay, "Sanyu," *Sanyu l'écriture du corps*.

⁷¹ *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, 440–441.

⁷² See for example, Henri Matisse's "Still Life with Anemones" (1924) and "Still Life with Three Bowls" (1933). For comparison to Lin Fengmian, see for example "Still Life with Flower" (1938) and "Chrysanthemum" (undated).

⁷³ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 73.

⁷⁴ For an extensive history of Tianmahui, see Julia F. Andrews, “The Heavenly Horse Society (Tianmahui) and Chinese Landscape Painting,” 556–591.

⁷⁵ Andrews, “Sanyu and the Shanghai Modernists,” 79.

⁷⁶ Andrews, “The Heavenly Horse Society (Tianmahui) and Chinese Landscape Painting,” 567.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 567.

⁷⁸ Andrews translates the five aims of the society codified in 1923 as follows: 1. Develop humankind’s special characteristics, and preserve its aesthetic sensibility. 2. Research art in keeping with the progress of time. 3. With an “attitude of beauty” create art and develop an artistic society; implement beauty in human life. 4. Oppose conservative art, and imitative art. 5. Oppose treating art with a frivolous attitude. (*Ibid.*, 585.)

⁷⁹ Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 7.

⁸⁰ *SCR*, 41.

⁸¹ Andrews, “Sanyu and the Shanghai Modernists,” 79.

⁸² *SCR*, p. 41. See also Jiang Biwei 蔣碧微, *Memoirs of Jiang Biwei: Me and Beihong* [Wo yu Beihong: Jiang Biwei huiyilu 蔣碧微回憶錄：我與悲鴻] (Taiyuan shi: Shuhai chubanshe, 2006).

⁸³ Andrews, “Sanyu and the Shanghai Modernists,” 79.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸⁵ Andrews writes on p. 79 that, “Sanyu’s work [was] shown in the eighth (and last) Tianmahui annual exhibition, which opened on November 5, 1927. When the Tianmahui exhibition was reviewed in *Shanghai huabao*, a Sanyu sketch was mentioned prominently in the review of the Western painting section.”

⁸⁶ Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 72. Despite these marked differences between the two painters, it is interesting to note that like Chang Yu, Xu Beihong also participated in the local Parisian salon community, and for example contributed his painting “The Old Lady” for the Salon des artistes français exhibition in 1922.

⁸⁷ All articles in this debate appeared in *Meizhan huikan* (Art Exhibition Report), the National Exhibition’s supplementary journal under Xu Zhimo’s editorship: Xu Beihong, “Huo,” No. 5 (22 April 1929), 1–2; Xu Zhimo, “Wo ye ‘huo,’” No. 6 (25 April 1929), 1–4; Li Yishi, “Wo bu ‘huo,’” No. 8 (1 May 1929), 1–2; Xu Beihong, “Huo zhi bu jie,” No. 9 (4 May 1929), 1–4. See also David Der-Wei Wang’s essay “In the Name of the Real” in *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions*.

⁸⁸ Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻, “Doubts” [Huo 惑], reproduced in Wang Zhen 王震, ed., *Collected Works of Xu Beihong* [Xu Beihong wenji 徐悲鴻文集] (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao chubanshe, 2005), 22–23.

⁸⁹ Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, “I, too have doubts” [We ye ‘huo’ 我也‘惑’], *Meizhan huikan*, No. 6 (25 April 1929), 1–4.

⁹⁰ Hans van der Meyden, “Submerged in a melting-pot International Art Chinese Painters and The School of Paris: 1920–1950,” in *China-Paris: Seven Chinese Painters Who Studied in France, 1918–1960*, 40. See also Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-*

Century China, 69 on Dagny Carter, “Modern Chinese Painting,” *Asia* 34, no. 4 (April 1934): 228.

⁹¹ Hans van der Meyden, “Submerged in a melting-pot International Art Chinese Painters and The School of Paris,” 40.

⁹² David Clarke, *Modern Chinese Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 23–25. Likewise, Mayching Kao observes, “By the late 1920s, the participants in the New Art Movement, especially those returning from abroad, were conscientiously relating their Western experience to their native environment and finding a secure position in the Chinese art scene. At about the same time, we see them one by one taking up their Chinese brushes again to experiment in the Chinese manner. They were by no means giving up their oils and canvases. Rather, these artists were adopting a parallel usage of both Chinese and Western materials and techniques, thus developing a kind of dual artistic personality that is one of the most unusual features of twentieth-century art.” (Mayching Kao, “The Quest for New Art,” 131).

⁹⁴ Some of his best-known works include the 1930 oil on canvas *Tian Heng and his Five Hundred Retainers* [田橫五百士] and in 1940 the ink and color on paper *The Foolish Man Who Removed the Mountains* [愚公移山].

⁹⁵ After briefly returning to Shanghai in 1926–1927, Chang Yu married a French woman Marcelle Charlotte Guyot de la Hardrouyère; the couple divorced after three years of marriage in 1931. Although he struggled financially for the remainder of his life, Chang Yu made no attempts to leave Paris except for a short trip to Berlin in 1936, a visit to China in 1936, a trip to New York in 1948, and a failed attempt to travel to Taiwan for a proposed exhibition at the National Museum of History in 1964. He died in his studio in Paris on August 12, 1966 due to a gas leak.

⁹⁶ Warnod, “L’École de Paris,” 262. Warnod’s commentary suggests that perhaps there was only room for one Asian artist in the Paris art community: did Foujita satisfy the quota for the exotic? Foujita’s career trajectory is also worthy of a longer note, and as a point of comparison with artists like Xu Beihong, demonstrates the fluctuating relationship between art and wartime politics. After a brief stint in South America, Foujita returned to Japan in the 1930s and began working as an artist producing military propaganda for the pro-war effort. After the war he returned to France, having been charged as a war criminal by the Japanese. See for instance Phyllis Birnbaum’s biography of Foujita, *Glory in a Line: A Life of Foujita—the Artist Caught Between East and West* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006).

⁹⁷ Michel G. Vaucaire, *Foujita* (Paris: Les Éditions G. Crès et Cie, 192-?), p. 5.

⁹⁸ Vaucaire, *Foujita*, 7.

⁹⁹ Pierre Joffroy, “San-Yu: peintre chinois de Montparnasse, ne peint ni en français ni en chinois.”

¹⁰⁰ Pemberton, Murdock, “The Art Galleries,” *The New Yorker* (Nov. 22, 1930), 60.

¹⁰¹ Warnod, “L’École de Paris,” 263.

¹⁰² Aida Yuen, “What Is a Masterpiece? Historiographical Anxieties and Classifications of Painting in Modern China” in Josh Yiu, ed. *Writing Modern Chinese Art: Historiographic Explorations*, p. 95. She continues, “Any work of an acknowledged

master is representative, such that one of Wu Changshi's 吳昌石 (1844–1927) *Flowers and Rocks* can easily substitute for another, and the same can be said about the horses of Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 (1895–1953) and the landscapes of Fu Baoshi 傅抱石.”

¹⁰³ From Ni Zan 倪瓚, *Ch'ing-pi-ko chi* 清閼閣集 (*Ch'ang-chou hsien-che i-shu* 常州先哲遺書, comp. Sheng Hsüan-huai 盛宣懷, Wu-chin [Kiangsu], Privately printed by the Sheng family, 1899), 10.5a. Translated and excerpted in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 134–135.

CHAPTER 4

China From a Distance: Fu Lei's Travels and Cultural Translation

“In Paris, crumbling structures stand alongside brand-new buildings...the new, the old, the ugly, the beautiful, things to see and things to hear...”¹ Enumerating the gritty and glittery attractions of 1930s Paris, the twenty-three year old Fu Lei painted a frenetic yet charming portrait of his painter friend Pang Xunqin, swept up in the glamour and excitement of urban nightlife. His stream of consciousness narration ranges from mentions of the city's diverse and seductive populace to specific buildings and places such as Montparnasse, the Eiffel Tower, and the secondhand book stalls along the Seine – “all of this spinning and spinning around in the whirlwind in his [Pang Xunqin's] mind. He, in his black velvet jacket, hat at a half-slant, both hands hidden inside his pants pockets, from morning to night, in a half-conscious daze, subsumed by this huge vortex of a world.”² Published as “Xunqin's Dream” [Xunqin de meng 薰琴的夢], a promotional essay for Pang Xunqin's 1932 solo exhibition in Shanghai that Fu Lei curated, Fu Lei's piece of art criticism is a curious blend of montage, aesthetic philosophy, social commentary, and personal admiration.

In this chapter, I turn from the detached, depoliticized cultural production of Li Jinfa and Chang Yu to the much more ambiguous space of Fu Lei's art criticism and travel writing; that is, unlike Li Jinfa and Chang Yu's self-conscious distancing from the discourse of national reform and salvation, Fu Lei was very much engaged in the political discussion of China's uncertain future. As a student at Datong University in Shanghai he

participated in the labor and anti-imperialist demonstrations of the May Thirtieth Movement in 1925 and was deeply moved by the victory of the Northern Expedition in 1926. Yet as a cultural translator, he always positioned himself as once removed from the mainstream ideology of modernization and progress and the May Fourth agenda of Western science and democracy as panacea. As a figure of aesthetic revolution, what makes him particularly unique in the history of modern literature, and exceptionally fitting for my study on writers and artists, is his role as a critic and theorist of modern Chinese art. There is no other well-known modern Chinese writer who has written so prolifically on both Western and Chinese literature and art, and rather than promote the more accepted forms of patriotism such as the essay or even fiction, Fu Lei chose to champion the cause of modern art, an astounding move for someone who was not an artist himself. Unlike Chang Yu who incorporated traditional literati aesthetic into Western modernism for art's sake, Fu Lei did so in the name of national salvation, believing that China could recapture its glorious past not by completely dismissing that same past but by incorporating elements of Western modernism.

This chapter begins with Fu Lei's depiction of the ideal artist in "Xunqin's Dream," a figure that stands amidst the turmoil of urban modernity, able to perceive reality only because of his remove from reality. Fu Lei returns to the themes of dream and detachment in his 1931 essay, "The Crisis in Modern Chinese Art," an explanation of the differences between Western and Chinese art, as well as a critique of the shortcomings of modern Chinese artists. In these two pieces of art criticism, Fu Lei, like the modern Chinese artists Pang Xunqin and Liu Haisu he writes about, functions as a cultural translator trying to address very real socio-political concerns in China by way of

Western culture and the medium of modern Chinese art. In the second half of the chapter I move to his travel writing dating from 1928; *Going to France by Letter* [Faxing tongxin 法行通信], his published letters written during his sea journey to France and in the first few days of stay in Europe, reveals his conflicted notions as a young Chinese student traveling abroad for the first time. In his ruminations about national salvation, female sexuality, and masculinity, his anxieties about the fate of China and his guilt as someone who has temporarily escaped the country come to the surface.

I argue in this chapter that although Fu Lei writes as an art critic that the ideal position for the artist is to stay physically removed or at a distance from reality—in effect to be a dreamer—his experiences as a student abroad reveal that travel as a mode of physical detachment does not guarantee spiritual or emotional detachment. Despite Fu Lei's repeated attempts to distance himself from guilty thoughts of the crisis in China, the turning back to one's "national soul," in his own words, is necessary in the work of a true artist. Choosing to retreat to the alternative space of dreams, Fu Lei did not eschew having a political voice, only prioritized above all else upholding his aesthetic integrity. His distance from reality thus resulted not so much in a pointed detachment from revolutionary politics as in the case of Chang Yu and Li Jinfa but rather a complicated engagement with the political discourse of the post-May Fourth movement and the aesthetics of Western modernism. Although compared to the other travelers in my dissertation he is the most effusive in his initial praise of Paris, he is also the most observant in recording the difficulties and challenges that Chinese travelers encountered while abroad. This may well be because in Fu Lei's social commentary on France his unshakable sense of civic responsibility is never far, causing him to feel incessantly

guilty about leaving China. As a traveler to the West, he has a responsibility to educate his readers, to address “real” concerns from a seemingly outside, detached viewpoint. But in the end, it seems clear that he never really left China in spirit.

His colleague for over thirty years, the Chinese film theorist, literary critic and playwright Ke Ling (柯靈 1909–2000), wrote after Fu Lei’s untimely death, “He was stubborn to a fault; being a bookworm his whole life caused him to be seriously out of touch with reality. Regarding his views on political issues and societal problems, he believed that he was being fair [中正] but in reality he could not avoid being biased.”³ Comparing Fu Lei to “a red-crowned crane from heaven, holding his head up high, never lowering his head to glance at the mud at his feet,” Ke Ling’s rather harsh criticism nonetheless explains why Fu Lei’s concerns for China did not successfully translate into the revolutionary zeal prescribed by the CCP: the problem was not that Fu Lei did not have strong views on political and societal issues, but rather that he was perceived as being “out of touch with reality.” Ke Ling paints a portrait of Fu Lei in his “commemoration” as an unrelenting elitist and in this chapter, I present Fu Lei indeed as stubborn, but full of youthful idealism at the beginning of his burgeoning career.

Fu Lei was born in Jiangsu on April 7, 1908 and primarily raised by his mother. Educated mainly in Shanghai, he traveled to study art theory and art criticism in France from 1928 to 1932. He was labeled a rightist after returning to China, and along with his wife, committed suicide at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. In the literary canon, Fu Lei is best remembered for his two roles as ideal father figure and linguistic translator, although his expertise and interests also include classical music and art. His

Family Letters [Fu Lei jia shu 傅雷家書], the bestselling compilation consisting of over two hundred letters he wrote to his son Fu Cong (傅聰 b. 1934) between 1954 and 1966, share advice and impart knowledge on topics like music, literature, and romantic and familial relationships.

He is likewise celebrated for his prolific work as a linguistic translator, especially for his beloved translation of Romain Rolland's revolutionary novel *Jean-Christophe*. His theory of translation, as he presented it in his 1951 preface to the second edition of his translation of Balzac's *Le père Goriot*, was a drastic break from his predecessor Yan Fu's (嚴復 1854-1921) "three principles" (xin, da, ya, 信達雅 or "fidelity, clarity and elegance"): Fu Lei argued for the importance of *shensi* 神似, or likeness in spirit/spiritual resemblance to the original,⁴ an aesthetic philosophy rooted in traditional painting: "As far as its effects are concerned, translation should be like copying a painting. What is aimed for is not affinity in shape but likeness in spirit." Today, the annual Fu Lei Translation Award, inaugurated in 2009 and established by the French embassy to China, continues to commemorate his contributions to the field of translation by recognizing the best works that have been translated from French into Chinese.

Fu Lei, A Critic in Crisis and the Role of the Modern Artist

Fu Lei first began translating French short stories while he was abroad. Attending lectures on art and literature at the Louvre and the Sorbonne, he also served as Liu Haisu's personal translator and lived in the suburbs with another young Chinese artist, the painter Liu Kang (劉抗 1911–2004). The time he spent in France had a profound impact on his career, and not only in the sense that it introduced him to the latest artistic and

literary movements in the West; in fact, Fu Lei credited studying Western art at the Louvre with single-handedly inspiring his love for Chinese painting.⁵ As a young student in Paris, Fu Lei certainly experienced for himself the exuberance of city life that he describes in “Xunqin’s Dream.” The modern painter Pang Xunqin, like Chang Yu, traveled to Paris to study art at the young age of nineteen, but he quickly returned to Shanghai in 1929 with the hopes of creating a modernist art salon in the Parisian style, and subsequently cofounded the Storm Society [Juelanshe 決瀾社] in 1931 with the help of the writer Ni Yide (倪貽德 1901-1970) who had just returned Tokyo. In 1932, the society’s manifesto was published in *L’Art* [Yishu xunkan 藝術旬刊] (1931-1932), Ni Yide’s short-lived magazine for the arts group Muse [Moshe] whose members included Liu Haisu and Pang Xunqin. The society’s *Manifesto* employs the crisis discourse characteristic of its time: “Whither has gone our ancient creative talent, our glorious history? Our whole art world today is decrepit and feeble.”

We can no longer be at ease in this atmosphere of compromise. We cannot tolerate this feeble breathing to await our death. Release the disturbing power of Realism! Let us arise! Summon up the passion of wild beasts, the will of steel, to create an integrated world with color, line and form! We recognize that art is certainly not the imitation of nature, nor is it the inflexible repetition of objective form. We must devote our whole lives to the undisguised expression of our fierce emotion!...⁶

In the climate of national crisis, this group of like-minded artists, many of whom had been educated abroad in Japan or France, wholeheartedly believed in the potentially revolutionary power of visual art. The legacy of Chinese art had reached an all-time low point and Western modernism was called upon to rejuvenate it.

The Storm Society was the first to attempt at a modernist, *salon*-style art

association in China, with an emphasis on the avant-garde. The same year that its Manifesto was published, Pang Xunqin's solo exhibit in Shanghai was curated by Fu Lei, who also published the essay "Xunqin's Dream" in Moshe's journal *L'Art*, from which the first passage describing Pang Xunqin in Paris was taken. Ralph Croizier describes the precarious position of artists associated with the Storm Society as neither leftist nor completely socially unconcerned by addressing the controversy over one of Pang Xunqin's oil paintings, which depicted the countryside victims of a drought near Shanghai. The painting was criticized by some as resembling too closely leftist socialist art: "they rejected the idea that painting should serve politics by doing pictures that the broad masses could easily recognize. But that did not mean that the artists were at all satisfied with the status quo. They were promoting a revolution in art, one that would promote a revolution in consciousness, but most of them were not active in political causes during these years."⁷ If Pang Xunqin did not wholeheartedly embrace the art for art's sake credo, neither did he agree with the leftist philosophy of art for life's sake.

Thus as much as "Xunqin's Dream" can be read as a celebration of the "exuberance of Paris," it is at the same time about the distance and detachment required of an artist, or the ideal position of an artist in modern society. Fu Lei introduces the painter by claiming that, "From childhood to adulthood, he is the same as all young people; he has dreamed many innocent, magical dreams. His silent disposition, his fanciful sense of humor, cause him to drift further away from reality each day."⁸ The artist's tendency to drift away from reality rather than toward it is applauded by Fu Lei, not viewed as a fault, surely a point worth mentioning when taking into account the leftist realist aesthetic of their contemporaries.

For Fu Lei, the metaphor of human life as a dream is just a starting point from which to discuss art. If all of human existence is a dream, and “every time someone dreams he is in the midst of another dream; after he dreams comes another dream, from this dream turning to the next, one dream turns into another, always forever dreaming on,” Fu Lei believes that it is impossible to wake up from the dream; “to wake up is to commit suicide,”⁹ in his words and the only option is to keep dreaming. If waking up from the dream is equated with suicide then Pang Xunqin’s dream is a survival tactic, perhaps less innocent and fanciful than his silent disposition lets on.

For among the various kinds of dreams—Fu Lei mentions dreams of wealth, vanity, and lust among others—Xunqin’s dream in particular is the dream of art, which is spiritual in nature (藝術的夢，精神的夢). While other types of dreams “are subject to the control of the environment,” what distinguishes the dream of art is its ability to control the environment; therefore it is “creative and has consciousness.” Unlike the other kinds of dreams, which seem to be self-serving to a baser purpose, the spiritual dream of art serves a higher cause and holds the potential to instigate societal and cultural change. For Fu Lei, “the innocent enthusiasm of an artist makes him firmly believe his dream is a true dream, that it is the [verité].” This belief in the dream as real is the powerful, creative force behind artistic production, and it is also what sets apart the artist from the rest of society. The dreamer must be fully subsumed by his dream to fully believe in himself. Fu Lei explains, “Since Xunqin’s dream is so distant from reality, a discussion of [our] times is out of the question. Even so, in this surrealistic dream, there is still a looking forward to reality, a reflection of reality. In general we see ourselves as fully-awake conscious beings, but actually this is a confusion of reality, a material

deception; it would be better to be a dreamer, standing outside of reality in order to better recognize reality.” In every dream there is always a semblance of reality, but the dream-quality of Pang Xunqin’s artistic vision affords him the luxury to stay free of any direct involvement in politics. For Fu Lei, being awake is self-deceptive, and the artist as dreamer is actually in the preferable position: to be outside of reality, or detached from reality, is to truly recognize reality.

Fu Lei’s concludes his essay with the Chinese saying, “One fails to see the mountain’s true face when he is standing in the middle of the mountain” [不識廬山真面目，只緣身在此山中] and applauds Pang Xunqin for his dream: “‘Xunqin’s Dream’ is perfectly situated outside the mountain. This is like Rodin’s so-called ‘human paradise.’ Xunqin, you are so blessed!” Being situated outside the mountain or detached from the social reality of crisis allows Pang Xunqin to view that crisis more clearly; again the position of detachment is one that leads to a clearer, more perceptive vision of reality. What makes this passage so remarkable is the combination of elements that Fu Lei fuses together: the traditional maxim juxtaposed with presumably a reference to the French modernist sculptor’s work in bronze depicting scenes from Dante, to talk about avant-garde Chinese art.

In the summer of 1931, the same year as Pang Xunqin’s exhibit, Fu Lei’s article “La Crise de l’art chinois moderne” was published in the Paris magazine *L’Art Vivant*.¹⁰ Solicited by the magazine’s editor Florent Fels to write about the state of Chinese modern art, Fu Lei explained to readers about the challenges China faced upon being inundated with “the tremendous tidal surge from the West”: “In today’s China, where people have lived for many thousands of years following wisdom, harmony and the Golden Mean, in

the face of Western mechanisation, industrialisation, science and the temptations of material society, it is increasingly difficult, to hold onto a dream-like world of knowing quietude.”¹¹ Here the “dream-like world” is a nostalgic reference to an idyllic past of “knowing quietude.” As in “Xunqin’s Dream,” dream is used in relationship to knowledge, yet in this case also being removed or detached from the material world of science, industry (another kind of “knowing”). If good artists are dreamers they must successfully continue to live and create in their dreams, without succumbing to the modern temptations of the West.

The modern material world is presented in the essay as alluring but ultimately inadequate, ineffectual and shallow. “To appreciate the causes of the present crisis, be it in the realm of politics or art, it is necessary to look beyond the surface.”¹² Fu Lei contrasts the work of late-Qing literati master painter Wu Changshi (吳昌碩 1844-1928), which “allows the viewer to apprehend a realm well beyond the material and imbues the paintings with a quality that has the appearance of being simple and unsophisticated (*gupu*)” with both blindly following imitators and the latest newcomers: “Many young people, however, crave all that is ‘new’ and ‘Western’, moving too far from their own time and place.” If dreaming is essential, just as important is the quality of staying close to home in the dream, that is, the artist’s dream is only potent or useful in the creative sense if it is applied to one’s own “time and place,” in this case, the socio-political turmoil surrounding Japanese imperialism and the Civil War in China.

Which is certainly not to say that the West had nothing to offer modern Chinese art. Fu Lei’s friend Liu Haisu was in his opinion a superior artist because like Pang Xunqin he turned back to Chinese culture after receiving Western education and

influence. “After only a short period of time researching the history of European painting, he started to become interested in and attuned to his national soul and individual identity.”¹³ As I stated earlier, Fu Lei emphasized the experience of his own “discovery” of Chinese painting while studying Western art in Paris. Unlike trendy youngsters caught up in the latest but not concerned with the national crisis in China, Liu Haisu used Western culture to address the state of affairs in China. Fu Lei devotes a considerable portion of his essay to plead the case of Liu Haisu. Describing the controversies in the Shanghai art world beginning in 1918, when Liu Haisu first began using nude models in class, to the 1924 public battle with moralists that resulted in the official approval of the use of nude models for research purposes and Liu Haisu’s first public exhibit of ink-brush paintings in the same year, Fu Lei chronicles the painter’s transformation from “Traitor to [Chinese] Art” [藝術叛徒] to practitioner of art “inspired by...the Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties...and by Western techniques.”¹⁴ Thus what was seen by many initially as an act of betrayal to the entire tradition of Chinese art was only rectified by the artist’s public return to that very same tradition.

Fu Lei’s explanation of why there are no nudes in Chinese art raises the concept of detachment as well: “This is not because naked figures were regarded as being obscene, but because in Chinese aesthetics, and in particular in philosophy, the naked body is associated with the ‘vulgar and the common’. According to Chinese thought, human beings are not regarded as being higher life forms than other sentient beings... Compared to humanity, nature is boundless in its diversity, less fixed in its form, and more capable of inducing spiritual detachment—not a detachment resulting from a sense of superiority, but a detachment that comes from being outside all things.”¹⁵ Again, Fu

Lei emphasizes the importance of striving toward detachment, which he defines as a consequence of “being outside all things,” something that only nature can truly accomplish.

To return to “Xunqin’s Dream,” Pang Xunqin is the ideal figure of detachment. He is an outsider of society in the sense that modern artists have always been depicted as figures of alienation. Moreover, he stands as a solitary Chinese male against a dizzying cityscape of Western female sexuality. As Fu Lei enumerates the wonders of Paris—its diverse population, landmarks, extraordinary sights, nightlife, all of which envelop its inhabitants in a wild whirlwind of sensation—something dreamlike and unreal emerges from his montage about city life, and it is always in a feminized space: he mentions the “pretty and seductive demon-women [妖艷的魔女],” “dancing girls,” “*poule*” [floozy], and “charming and elegant maidservants, disgusting landladies” [俊俏的侍女，可厭的女房東], all circulating amidst an urban space that is half modern half ancient, “all of the new, the old, the ugly, the beautiful, every sight, every sound, the historical remains of an ancient culture, the passion of a new culture.”¹⁶ Like the city itself, its women are portrayed as a contradiction: young and old, repulsive and attractive. But if Pang Xunqin the artistic dreamer can stay detached, it is not as easy for Fu Lei the didactic traveler.

Views of China from Paris: Fu Lei’s Travel Writing

Leo Ou-fan Lee explains in his essay “The Solitary Traveler” that the traditional genre of travel writing or *you ji* 遊記 has ties with both poetry and prose, and “is a flexible form which reflects man’s closeness to nature.”¹⁷ As in traditional landscape painting, the primary emphasis nature does not preclude all expression of personal feeling

but rather the self is revealed through the artist or traveler's description of nature. In his discussion of the "aimless wandering" in Yu Dafu's (郁達夫 1896–1945) travel stories, Lee explains that, "the May Fourth generation of writers (with a few exceptions) often asserted their individual personalities and life-styles externally against an environment they found both confusing and alienating. While this externalization of the self had its romantic appeal, there was a spiritual void under the veneer of radical antitraditionalism."¹⁸ Lee argues that by the 1930s (when Fu Lei was writing his travel accounts), this "exaltation of the self" had shifted focus, due to the socio-political atmosphere, from depicting the author's subjectivity to more pressing concerns of social reality as represented by characters and landscapes.

Fu Lei wrote the letters that make up *Going to France by Letter* on his way from Shanghai to Marseilles and Paris in 1928, and the letters, a total of fifteen pages, first appeared serially from January 2 to February 9 in the first issues of *Contribution Daily* [*Gongxian xunkan* 貢獻旬刊], a journal that was published once every ten days edited by brothers Sun Fuxi (孫福熙 1898–1962) and Sun Fuyuan (孫福園 1894–1966) with the backing of literary figure Cao Juren (曹聚仁 1900–1972). Fu Lei's letters to curious readers in China relay the experience of overseas travel and include his pointed opinions and observations about food and meals aboard the ship, ship passengers, seabirds, and his lamentations about missing his beloved mother and friends. Unlike the travel accounts of similar voyages made by Fu Lei's literary contemporaries Xu Zhimo and Ba Jin, in which the writers focus more on imparting the details of their trip and their new surroundings than their own personal reflection or practical application of that experience. For

instance, in Ba Jin's *Random Notes from Traveling Abroad* [Haixing zaji 海行雜記] about his trip to France in 1927, he describes coming to shore in Marseilles and provides a transcript-like account of going through customs.¹⁹ And in Xu Zhimo's unabashed celebration of Paris published as part of his collection of essays titled *Fragments from Paris* [Bali de linzhao 巴黎的鱗爪] the same year, he begins, "Oh those who have been to Paris could never have a care for heaven, and those who have tasted Paris, to be honest, don't even want to go to hell anymore."²⁰ In contrast to the traditional genre of travel literature that Leo Lee describes in which natural details of the new surroundings reveal or serve as an indication of the traveler's inner state of being, the details that Fu Lei shares with his readers serve a more practical purpose. As part of the educational process, Fu Lei is concerned with civic duty and social responsibility. If his conscience does not necessarily serve the revolutionary cause of enlightening the masses, Fu Lei is nonetheless more broadly speaking devoted to the project of self-improvement, both as an individual and as a nation. His goal in writing his letters is always to educate his readers.

Although his focus for the most part is indeed on the "crisis" in China, Fu Lei's concern with the social reality of his surroundings, particularly his consciousness about class and female sexuality, take the most striking form in his discussion of foreign women, a point worth re-examining in the next chapter in Xu Xu's depiction of Western women, specifically French women. In the second installment of a lengthy piece titled "Traveling Companions," Fu Lei focuses his derisory attention on two French women. First he tells his readers that prior to leaving China he was warned that "female passengers generally travel in the first two classes because third class is not convenient:

only military wives or those improper women [不十分正當的婦人] travel in third class.”²¹ He presents this secondhand information as if it is factual, passing it on to his readers like an insider’s precautionary advice. What are his readers supposed to do with this warning? Instead of steering clear from third class passengers and taking his own advice, Fu Lei spends a substantial amount of time observing two “improper” French women.

Angrily ridiculing the physical appearance and boorish manners of the two unnamed women as if to prove the veracity of the warning, he simply refers to one as “the skinny one” and the other as “the fat one.” He likens the first woman to her pug dog, only “not as good looking.” The second woman he calls “completely stupid and ridiculous” and “exceedingly stupid,” calling her a “fat pig.” Aside from his disgust at their physical attributes, Fu Lei is positively horrified by what he perceives as their lack of manners—their boisterous laughter, their sidelong glances, even the way they eat their fruit. Seen in another light, he is offended by the way they seem to be enjoying themselves on the ship. While the episode and description may be intended to be purely comical, it also serves as a lesson to his readers. Fu Lei’s letters are in fact all accounts of what he has learned on his travels, and at the same time, advice he imparts on his readers. He uses the case of these two women in order to illustrate how accurate the information given to him prior to his trip was: they confirm his worst fears about class, gender, and race. Western women are depicted as low-class, ignorant, hypersexualized (“the sound of her boisterous laughter revealed her lascivious frivolity”), animalistic, immoral, physically unattractive, and unhealthy. While the two Western women may seem far from being exotic objects of desire for the young Chinese man, there is still

something strangely seductive about them. As Fu Lei points out in “Xunqin’s Dream,” the dancing girls, the prostitutes, and the demon-women are interchangeable. The female body is always both sexually enticing and repugnant.

For comparison purposes the eighth installment seems fitting because Fu Lei’s discomfort toward semicolonialism is brought to the surface. Titled “Traveling Companions” (1) [Lu ban 旅伴] written the same evening of January 21 Fu Lei recounts an encounter with a rubber businessman from Hangzhou who warns his fellow travelers about the dangers of unlicensed scam boats in Hong Kong. Upon arriving in Singapore, the businessman, along with the other passengers, were promptly suspended by British officials and taken to a mountain where they were quarantined and given a daily sulfur disinfectant bath [硫磺浴] for one full month, during which the Chinese man truly experienced the hardship of being a slave to a [Western] foreigner [西崽]. The story itself is not particularly remarkable—one can easily imagine stories about scam artists tricking naive travelers being quite common in any circumstance—but Fu Lei’s response reveals his horror at the inhumane treatment the travelers received from British officials, one of the rare mentions of colonialism in his travel account. And as with all of his letters from abroad, every incident is a pedagogical tool. So the lesson here may equally be about the danger of trusting Westerners as it is about the danger of unsavory business practices.

First, Fu Lei’s immediate response to the anecdote is a matter-of-fact, almost sarcastic quip: “This is called being buried under the mountain: anyone going on an unlicensed boat [yiejichuan 野雞船] gets buried like this!”²² But at the very end of the

“letter” Fu Lei confesses that he has forgotten the better half of what the businessman told him, reminding readers of his own unreliability, but the impression the Hangzhou businessman made on him is the Chinese aphorism, loosely translated, “One conversation with a wise man is more valuable than ten years of studying” [聽君一席話，勝讀十年書]. Moreover, even of greater significance he argues, Fu Lei has learned from his shipmate how to be an ideal traveler: experienced, friendly, attentive, compassionate, earnest and sincere to others. In other words, what Fu Lei takes from the man’s anecdote is less about the imminent dangers of travel, which seem like a trite funny thing—you get what you deserve—but more as a pedagogical tool of how to carry oneself in the world.

Compared to the episode of the two French women, this is ostensibly about an older, more experienced Chinese man helping out his fellow Chinese traveler. The character study of the businessman seems like an afterthought; rather the focus is on the lesson he imparts to the young man, which Fu Lei is then eager to impart to his readers. Clearly the anxiety about colonialism—here in the form of the inhumane treatment by British officials—is more veiled in the story of the two women. But in this second more disturbing story of the scam boat, Fu Lei tries to repackage the narrative into a more presentable form for his readers. His admission of his own unreliability is an attempt to dismiss the first half of the story about the violence enacted upon the businessman and his companions; and the moral of the lesson ends up not being related at all to the businessman’s experience, but the Hangzhou man’s personal character.

For Fu Lei the social concerns that are raised during his journey aboard the ship all serve as reminders for the most pressing concern, the state of affairs in China. Beginning in Part 3 of “Traveling Companions,” written the following afternoon on

January 22, he confronts head-on his concerns about home, exclaiming, “Departing from my China, how far away it is! No matter what, when I was back at home I cursed China every day; however since leaving I long for her daily, thinking back nostalgically and cherishing my memory of her: ah my China!”²³ Expressing the paradox of traveling at such a young age during a time of enormous political and social upheaval, Fu Lei feels a sense of guilt in leaving. Here instead of physical distance leading to a state of enlightened detachment, it has the opposite result. His dream of China becomes a romantic nostalgic memory, becoming unreal rather than more real.

In many ways his initial descriptions of Paris are just as unreal in their idealism. If his descriptions of his surroundings are any indication of his inner state one would assume that he would be experiencing a state of bliss or at the very least contentment. In fact Fu Lei himself believes this to be true. Of the fifteen installments, only the last two are written after Fu Lei has arrived in Paris proper. The first is titled “Letters to Friends After Arriving in Paris” [到巴黎後寄諸友], written on February 6, 1928. Fu Lei writes to his readers, “Not much to report after two days in Paris, except that everywhere there is a kind of peaceful, happy atmosphere; plucked out of a seething, terrified China, I feel myself in an extraordinarily peaceful, leisurely mood.”²⁴ Once Fu Lei gets to Paris all he can do is compare Paris with Shanghai and talk about how inferior Shanghai is, to the point that there is something almost unreal about the perfection of Paris. He points out mostly material things, such as the wealth necessary in a culture and society where people pay not only for food but also use of public bathrooms. He likes the regularity, the order of Paris, in contrast to the chaos of Shanghai: “There are specific rules too, no one cuts in line, so even though Paris is a hundred times more lively and uproarious than

Shanghai it still feels more comfortable and pleasing than Shanghai... The streets are less dangerous too, and when you go shopping you are less likely to be taken advantage of than in Shanghai.” No longer homesick, his memory of China is like a painful scar that he tries to cover up with his new impressions of the French capital. If there is any turning back to his “national soul,” it is temporarily free from any feelings of nostalgia or idealism for China but instead has heightened the sense of crisis plaguing his home country.

This orderly portrait of Paris is interesting because rewritten in “Xunqin’s Dream” the Paris there is the exact opposite in its exciting chaos and confusing fluidity. In order to explain this discrepancy the genre of travel literature is crucial. Here in the letter Fu Lei is trying to educate his readers, whereas in his art criticism he is trying to promote Pang Xunqin’s work. For Fu Lei, the allure and superiority of Paris reaches beyond physical attributes into the realm of spiritual manifestations. He enthusiastically characterizes the entire French civilization as “an extravagant, flourishing appearance singing spiritedly of their intellectual/spiritual civilization, and the unreality that one Chinese person could never dream of.” The success of the French nation is so great that Fu Lei believes the average Chinese is incapable of even dreaming about it, and he attributes their spiritual strength to the marriage of law and order with revolutionary spirit: “The night before last, I passed by a police station—the top office in all of Paris responsible for the supervision of public security—and there was a carving on the wall: ‘According to the law of 21 July 1881’! Seeing this you can really understand where their spirit comes from!” The irony of a national institution—the police force—acting as an agent of revolution does not seem to faze Fu Lei in his pure admiration.

He is the perceptive observer in the last letter, titled “Disappointed at the Luxembourg Gardens” [在盧森堡花園悵惘] and written three days later from the Hotel Voltaire. Here the physical space of the park provides him with a fresh outlook with which he uses immediately to glance backward to China. In this letter, Fu Lei focuses entirely on the shortcomings of China in contrast to the vitality of France, and the reader is left with the ironic impression that he is unable to enjoy the very space he claims is most enjoyable. From spending time in one of the city’s largest public spaces, he comes to the conclusion that there is something very wrong with the way space is arranged in China. “In Paris every two or three districts there is a large park, Luxembourg is only among one of many. Within each district there are three or four large grassy areas, in which there are many trees and flowers, beautifully carved stone sculptures, chairs for resting, places for young children to stroll and play after school hours for a change of atmosphere. Outside Paris in the suburbs there are even more wooded forests, all for the use of the city dwellers. So Paris, whose industry flourishes hundreds of times greater than Shanghai’s, is actually far cleaner and more sanitary than Shanghai. Oh, have some consideration for our China!”²⁵ Like his earlier comment about how Paris is a busier city than Shanghai but cleaner here he uses industrial production as a gauge to criticize China and compliment Paris. Of course in attributing the difference between Chinese and French health and state of mind to difference in physical spaces, he has conveniently chosen a sumptuous, formally royal park space, by no means representative of the city as a whole, to compare it to. To be fair, he is at the same time lamenting the lack of public park spaces in general in China.

Everything he sees in Paris reminds him about something at home. As he muses about the children playing in the park, he thinks back to the youth of China: “The children back at home in China during this cold harsh winter are traditionally prohibited to leave the house; not many of the most loving protective mothers will even allow a little recreation in the courtyard, and I do truly feel the true love of those mothers.”²⁶ But faced with the “lively, strong and healthy” French children, Fu Lei admits feeling “a sense of disappointment” at the thought of China’s “frail and delicate” youth. One cannot help but think of his own mother, whom surely Fu Lei implicates in his category of the “most loving protective mothers.”²⁷ He is quick to point out his appreciation of Chinese maternal care yet in the process cannot help but fault the generation of women who have raised such a frail and delicate younger generation. Like the artists he applauds, he observes his new surroundings and turns back to addressing the national crisis in China.

But he never quite succeeds as the artistic dreamer, detached from the material world. In his endless effort to educate his readers, he must explain the historical background and context of child rearing in China. The realization he arrives at is that, “Frailty and daintiness, adjectives formerly used to describe the demeanor and expression of gentle cultivation of a traditional literati scholar has eventually brought about the family’s eldest child pathetic transformation into a sickly invalid! Our children of the rising sun, who until now are still being forced to hold back their radiant splendor.” One wonders if he includes himself in the category, considering his educational background. Even though he did not receive a formal classical training, Fu Lei was an avid reader and writer, and well versed in the classics. His experience observing French children at play

here leads to the realization that there is something anachronistic about the way Chinese parents are raising their children, holding them up to expectations and a social code that used to make sense in another context, not the contemporary modern one.

Fu Lei's tone takes on one of urgent patriotism, and although the causal relationship he draws between an individual's physical health and the strength of a nation appears flawed, the pathologizing of China is nothing new. In typical May Fourth fashion China is seen as the "sick man of Asia," in contrast to the healthy and strong west. In the fiction of prominent May Fourth writers such as Yu Dafu and Lu Xun, sickly or weak protagonists are known to represent the condition of the ailing nation. But for Fu Lei the vitality of the French youth at the park is more than allegorical: his concern for the well-being of Chinese youth is imbued with an overwhelming sense of nostalgia and homesickness mixed with envy and disillusionment. Despite his own leaning toward traditional literati morals and aesthetics he is still critical about the consequences of the qualities of frailty and delicateness or being a gentleman. For him the question seems to be about balance, or how to maintain the literati aesthetic without its physically handicapping consequences. It is also important to remember that all of Fu Lei's complaints about China are more than just an indication of his dissatisfaction or inferiority complex. Instead, I would argue that this is the form that his guilt takes while he is abroad. Every time he complains about something in Shanghai, he is reminding himself of the turmoil there from which he has managed to escape briefly. Every time it seems like he is insulting China and blindly embracing the West he is actually telling his readers that he is sympathetic to their plight, that he has not forgotten his home.

Perhaps the most interesting parts of his travel accounts are when his idealism turns into realism, as he observes in “Letters to Friends After Arriving in France”: “There are a few hundred Chinese students, whom you can often bump into in the streets (those that are for sure not Japanese). But the study-abroad situation is not ideal: those that are actually studying make up only ten percent!” Although he does not specify why the study abroad situation is not ideal, he seems to imply that only a minority of the Chinese students is doing what they are supposed to be doing in Paris. His pointed comment about Japanese students is both a self-conscious effort to distinguish the Chinese abroad from other Asian students, as well as an uncomfortable reminder of the growing Sino-Japanese conflict back home.

This letter ends with the Tang dynasty poet Zhang Gu’s famous proverb about monks as Fu Lei questions his position as a Chinese student studying abroad in Paris. Fu Lei finally realizes the city’s inherent contradiction; at the same time celebrating Paris for its cosmopolitan status he finally consciously acknowledges its paradoxical relationship with wealth, class, and race. He laments, “To live a peaceful life is not easy; moreover in world-famous Paris how is an impoverished student to find paradise?” [長安居，大不易；何況名聞世界的巴黎怎是窮學生的樂土呢？]. If it is already difficult enough for mankind to live a peaceful existence, surely the cultural capital of the Western world poses an even greater challenge for a young student from China—someone who is lacking in not only age and experience, but also money and social status as a complete outsider. Fu Lei seems to be asking, in a city famed for its revolutionary spirit, is there any room for a student like himself?

Conclusion

In Dai Sijie's 2000 novel *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, contraband copies of Fu Lei's translations of French classics forever alter the lives of two sent-down youths in the countryside and their fellow villagers. In a scene near the end of the novel, the protagonist exchanges handwritten copies of Balzac's *Ursule Mirouët* and Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* for a medical favor; upon reading the text, written on the leather of a sheepskin jacket, the doctor murmurs, "The translation is obviously by Fu Lei...I can tell from the style. He's suffered the same fate as your father, poor man: he's been labeled a class enemy." The protagonist is reduced to tears by the doctor's observation: "It was not the Little Seamstress's predicament that was making me weep, I think, nor was it relief at having come this far in my efforts to save her. It was hearing the name of Fu Lei, Balzac's translator—someone I had never even met. It is hard to imagine a more moving tribute to the gift bestowed by an intellectual on mankind."²⁸

Albeit a fictional account of the impact that Fu Lei's translation had during the Cultural Revolution, it seems to me that Fu Lei's contribution as a cultural translator was just as meaningful as his work as a literary translator. The importance he placed in his translation theory on the highest significance of a work's "spirit" can be linked with his belief that the artist's dream is a spiritual one, and that the highest state one can strive to achieve is that of spiritual detachment. In his multiple acts of cultural translation—translating the avant-garde work of artist Pang Xunqin, the crisis of modern Chinese art, and the experiences of a young Chinese student abroad for the very first time in Paris—Fu Lei remains all but detached.

In Fu Lei's twelfth letter, "A Peaceful Journey, Destination France" [一路平安抵法], he returns to the motif of human life as eternal dream, complaining that life is too

long: “It turns out that human life is just one vast dream, but I still suspect it to be too long, too slow; if I could just shrink it into my nightly dream, whatever far distance into one short moment, then it would be tolerable. However many decades the rise and fall of great events, however many hours of sleep in the middle of dreaming it takes to experience, I shall be cheerful! I truly hope that human life could be shortened! Just hurry up!”²⁹ Despite Fu Lei’s endless exaltations about France, the reader gets the impression that he is restless in his new surroundings. Although he conceded to the eternal nature of dreams in “Xunqin’s Dream,” and proposed that to wake up would be equal to death, here he seems impatient to arrive at his final destination.

And if earlier in “Xunqin’s Dream” the cityscape of Paris is the unreal, dream-like world surrounding the artist, in Fu Lei’s travel letters it can also serve as a sort of reverse travel in which the home becomes the dream for the nostalgic homesick traveler. Here the dream can represent a return home (or a return to one’s “national soul” in his words), the act of seeing “reality” from a new perspective. For example in “A Peaceful Journey” he writes: “Last night I also dreamt that I was back at home, and people were asking me if I was going to go to France or not. I said why not, I was leaving in two days; at the moment I had left to go see you guys. Ah, friends, ah! Ah, mother! Every night my spirit dreams to fly home and share in your conversation! I don’t know if you ever have the same dream as I do? If we have the same dream at the same time, I wonder whether you also ever feel comfort or not?”³⁰ Seeking camaraderie, Fu Lei addresses his readers as friends and they are shown his tortured conflicted attitude about leaving China, a sense of disquiet that follows him even after having arrived in France. For the young traveler

alone for the first time, the *dream* of home is a source of comfort, a way he can travel metaphysically.

The concept of home—be it in the form of national soul or a distant dream—is always in Fu Lei’s consciousness. In this chapter, I began by looking at two early works of Fu Lei’s art criticism in which he demonstrated the importance of modern Chinese artists on the one hand to stay detached enough to view reality from afar and on the other to never stray far from their roots. During the Republican era as many young Chinese traveled to the West to study abroad, it was crucial that this next generation return home with their newfound knowledge and experience to address the ongoing national crisis. Fu Lei’s support of the still relatively unknown Pang Xunqin in the early 1930s was a decisive move to support an alternative revolution, one that did not side with the growing leftist movement but was still socially-conscientious and hoping to instill change. Using the motif of dream, Fu Lei, like Pang Xunqin, truly believed in the creative power of dream, in the possibility that the power of an aesthetic movement could potentially reshape Chinese society and culture. In his commentary on the national crisis from abroad, Fu Lei as an art critic blamed various parties in China for the dire state of modern Chinese art compared to its glorious past and insisted that to save China would require some degree of turning back to elements in traditional Chinese culture.

As a traveler however, Fu Lei idealized revolutionary Paris to the point of questioning that very same traditional culture. In his *Going to France by Letter* written on his overseas trip to France and upon landing in the West, he continues to operate as a cultural translator for his readers. Instead of promoting the work of modern Chinese artists, he attempts to promote the West at the same time accounting for some of the

shortcomings of Western culture, such as the limits of material gain, something he seems to waver ambivalently about. While his anxiety about Western colonialism is apparent in some of his travel accounts, and he questions the inherent contradiction between the cosmopolitanism of Paris and its inability to accommodate outsiders such as himself, he stops short of trying to propose any kind of societal solution. His ideal of being outside reality in order to better view reality, or being a dreamer, can never be fully realized, as he cannot detach himself from what C.T. Hsia calls an “obsession with China.” Instead, he is seriously consumed with the crisis of China, to the point that he is unable to enjoy himself. Everything that is not directly applicable to the situation back in China seems frivolous. This is most evident in his demeaning description of two French women aboard the ship headed for Marseilles, an episode that reveals Fu Lei’s discomfort with exotic female sexuality. Again, this will serve as a telling point of contrast in the next chapter when the discussion turns to Xu Xu, whose traveler on the other hand uses his wry sense of humor to critique both China and France, and is sexually desirable and charming to Western women precisely because he is aware of the West’s shortcomings.

The nature of Fu Lei’s own death continues to haunt his writings on dreams, detachment, and death. Although he and his wife committed suicide, they were in effect driven to this desperate act like many intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Their son Fou Min (傅敏 b. 1937) described hearing the conditions of his parents final days: “I heard afterwards that people dragged them outside and made them kneel on the ground, forcing them to take turns publicly denouncing themselves, for three days and three nights, until this aged couple was persecuted to death.”³¹ In his youth, Fu Lei believed that his idealism, his refusal to compromise aesthetic integrity, was for the good

of the people. But by the time he realized that the political tide had turned and he was caught on the other side, he realized both that the dream of idealism was over, and that it was time to detach himself even more from the mundane matters of everyday life. Fou Min recalled his father's philosophy in his last years, paternal advice replete with Buddhist references: "Do not be scared my son, I am already older than fifty, worldly affairs no longer hold any importance, and in nature there is a detached side of all things."³² He also told his son, "When it is time to cast off [this life] I will give no thought to life and death." Repeatedly using the word "tuo" [脱] to convey the physical act of shaking off or shedding this life, Fu Lei may have been trying to comfort his son more than anything else. In other letters to his colleagues and friends, he was still struggling with the minutiae of daily living, and he was clearly not as detached as he hoped to be. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, in October 1965, he wrote to his confidant Shi Ximin (石西民 1912–1987),

My body has gone prematurely senile, my brain has become dull and sluggish... With increasing intensity, not only does the quality of my work fail to give me any satisfaction but I can only produce only one-third of what I was doing ten years ago. On top of that, the price of making copies, the abolishment of author royalties, leading to the sudden decrease in income—even before that my work was already getting slow. Every year I have not been able to make ends meet. With all of these kinds of factors, in the future it will be difficult to safeguard our very existence.³³

On this dismal note, Fu Lei reveals just how far he had strayed from his ideal of the artistic dreamer: without the power to dream, his creative ability had been completely extinguished, along with his will to survive.

¹ Fu Lei, “Xunqin’s Dream” [Xunqin de meng 薰琴的夢], Sept. 1932 in *Yishu xunkan* 藝術旬刊 No. 1 Vol. 3, Reproduced in *Fu Lei’s Selected Essays* [Fu Lei san wen 傅雷散文] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2000), 95. For an example of Pang Xunqin’s work, see Appendix, illus. 8.

² Fu Lei, “Xunqin’s Dream,” 95-96.

³ Ke Ling 柯靈 “Cherishing Fu Lei” 懷傅雷 written Sept. 1978, published originally in Hong Kong *Xin wan bao* 新晚報 Oct. 15, 1978, reprinted in Jin Shenghua 金聖華, ed., *Fu Lei yu ta de shijie* 傅雷與他的世界 (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xin zhi sanlian shudian, 1996), 5.

⁴ See a historical overview of trends in Chinese translation in Mary Snell-Hornby, Zuzana Jettmarová, Klaus Kaindl, eds., *Translation as Intercultural Communication: Selected Papers from the EST Congress, Prague 1995* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1997), 61; and Tak-hung Leo Chan, *Twentieth-Century Chinese Translation Theory: Modes, Issues and Debates* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004). For more on Fu Lei’s translation theory and his preface, see Fu Lei, *Fu Lei yiwenji* 傅雷譯文集 [Essays on Fu Lei’s Translations] (Hefei: Anhui People’s Press, 1981); and *Fu Lei yu ta de shijie*.

⁵ Shi Jianbang 石建邦, “Fu Lei and Huang Binhong: The Pursuit of an Innovative Chinese Painting Tradition” [Fou Lei yu Huang Binhong: Zhongguo huihua chuantong chuanguxin zhuanhua de zhuixun 傅雷與黃賓虹: 中國繪畫傳統創新傳畫的追尋], *Duo Yun* 朵雲 44 (1995):111.

⁶ Sullivan, p. 62. For more on the Storm Society, see Ralph Croizier, “Post-Impressionists in Pre-War Shanghai: The Juelanshe (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China” in John Clark, *Modernity in Asian Art* (Canberra, Australia: Wild Peony, 1993), 135-154. For more on Pang Xunqin, see Chang Renxia 常任俠, Shao Dazhen 邵大箴, and Michael Sullivan, *The Collected paintings of Pang Xunqin* [Pang Xunqin huaji 龐薰琴畫集], (Beijing: Remin yishu chubanshe, 1998); Pang Xunqin 龐薰琴, *Arts and Crafts Design* [Gongyi meishu sheji 工藝美術設計] (Beijing: Remin yishu chubanshe, 1999); Pang Tao, ed., *The Storm Society and Post-Storm Art Phenomenon* (Taipei: Chin Show Publishing Company, 1997).

⁷ Ralph Croizier, “Post-Impressionists in Pre-War Shanghai: The Juelanshe (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China,” 146–147.

⁸ Fu Lei, “Xunqin’s Dream,” 95.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰ English translation by Claire Roberts, *Friendship in Art: Fou Lei and Huang Binhong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 40–44. Chinese version published in *Yishi xunkan* 1(4)(1932). Original French version Fou-Nou En, ‘La Crise de L’Art Chinois Moderne’, *L’Art Vivant: En Chine* (152) 1931: 467-8.

¹¹ Roberts, *Friendship in Art*, 44.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40. The word *gupu* [古樸] refers to architecture or art that is unadorned.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

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- ¹⁴ Ibid., 42.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 44, emphasis mine.
- ¹⁶ Fu Lei, “Xunqin’s Dream,” 95–96.
- ¹⁷ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “The Solitary Traveler: Images of the Self in Modern Chinese Literature” in Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney, eds. *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 282–307.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 294.
- ¹⁹ Ba Jin 巴金, *Random Notes from Traveling Abroad* [Haixing zaji 海行雜記] (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1941), reproduced in *Ba Jin’s Collected Works* [Ba Jin wenji 巴金文集] (Shanghai: Chunming shudian, 1948) Vol. 11, “Arriving in France” [Daole faguo 到了法國], 67-69.
- ²⁰ Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, *Fragments from Paris* [Bali de linzhao 巴黎的鱗爪] (Shanghai: Xinyue shudian, 1927), 1-2.
- ²¹ *Going to France by Letter* reprinted in *Fu Lei’s Selected Essays*, 36.
- ²² Ibid, 33-34.
- ²³ Ibid., 41.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 67-68.
- ²⁵ *Fu Lei’s Selected Essays*, 71-72.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, Ina Rilke trans. (New York: Random House, 2001), 172.
- ²⁹ *Fu Lei’s Selected Essays*, 57.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 57.
- ³¹ Fou Min 傅敏, “Remembering my Father” [Huiyi wo de baba 回憶我的爸爸] published originally in *Shu lin* 書林 1979 Issue 1, reproduced in *Fu Lei and his World*, 59.
- ³² Fou Min, “Remembering my Father,” 58.
- ³³ Jin Mei 金梅, *Fu Lei zhuan* 傅雷傳 (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 320.

CHAPTER 5

The Uncertain Interpreter in Xu Xu's Travel Essays

In his "Foreword" to *Sentiments from Abroad*, the poet-novelist Xu Xu confesses to his readers,

Me, I am but the son of a farmer,
Who knows not how to raise his head toward the sky,
And can only stand in the midst of the rice paddy fields
Gazing at the moon's reflection.

So, please listen quietly to my stories,
As you lie on your sickbed or at night when you have insomnia.
There may be some muddled truth in there,
But it is definitely not a reliable, true account.¹

In the first stanza, Xu Xu's first-person narrator speaks from the perspective of a simple farmer's son, who is inspired by the *reflection* of the iconic moon of classical Chinese poetry. This lyrical depiction shifts abruptly in the second stanza, which introduces a pervasive element of uncertainty, both on the part of the reader, who is described as being in a state of confusion and illness, as well as on the narrator, whose tales are only partial-truths. The narrator's inability to go to the original source of inspiration is not the result of a conscious decision but rather due to a lack of know-how, and the ensuing essays, like the moon's reflection, should be read as filtered down versions of reality. Instead of taking up the conventional position of writer as authority, Xu Xu emphasizes the importance of a good story over personal expertise or reliability.

Thus begins a collection of diverse essays inspired by Xu Xu's time spent abroad in Europe, including a satirical treatise on the reasons for marriage and a story titled "London's Fog." Xu Xu's pointed social criticism failed to attract a wide readership in

the war climate of the late-1930s and early-1940s, unlike his bestselling novels like *In Love With a Ghost* (1937) and *The Rusting Wind* (1944), and as a result, literary historians generally categorize Xu Xu as an apolitical writer.² In this chapter, I show how the *xiaopin wen* or familiar essays compiled in *Fragments from Abroad* (1940) and *Sentiments from Abroad* (1941) challenge the myths of Western modernity as progress and the dominant of the modern individual as champion of free will. I contrast his wavering stance of uncertainty to that of his more successful counterpart, mentor, and colleague, Lin Yutang, the “bridge of East and West,” arguing that during this period of intense political turmoil, marked in particular by the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and WWII (1939–1945), Xu Xu’s humorous pessimism about human psychology and the role of the modern writer set him apart from his contemporaries in both the West and in China.

Xu Xu was born in 1908 in Cixi, Zhejiang province and graduated from Beijing University in 1931 with a degree in philosophy then continued to study psychology until 1933, when he moved to Shanghai. In the early 1930s he was known mainly for his association with the then already-established Lin Yutang, the cultural critic for whom he worked as an editor at the Analects School publications *The Analects Fortnightly* [Lunyu banyuekan 論語半月刊] and *The Human World* [Renjian shi 人間世]. While purportedly of a humorous bent detached from politics, these publications nonetheless promoted the work of a range of socially conscious writers like Lao She and Xie Bingying. By the fall of 1936 Xu Xu decided to travel abroad to Paris, where he earned his doctorate in philosophy. He quickly returned to Shanghai in 1938 after the outbreak of the war, and eventually lived in the U.S. and Singapore before settling down in Hong

Kong. Most literary studies today in both the West and in China focus on his more popular works, in particular his two famous novels, *In Love With a Ghost* [Gui lian 鬼戀] and *The Rustling Wind* [Feng xiaoxiao 風蕭蕭].³ Although his time abroad did not last long, the experience certainly played a role in the formative years leading up to the writing of his bestselling novels. For instance, *In Love With a Ghost* was serialized in *Cosmic Wind* [Yuzhou feng 宇宙風] while Xu Xu was still in Paris in 1937.⁴ Written around the same time and in the following few years, his early *xiaopin wen* also reflect Xu Xu's ceaseless fascination with human psychology, but furthermore reveal his pressing concern with the proper civic role of the modern individual, in particular the writer-traveler. In comparison with the protagonist in *The Rustling Wind*, Xu the detective that has been described as a “perfect example of the *flâneur*”⁵ with a “dandyish confidence and unbridled charm,”⁶ the narrators of his travel essays may be sexually confident with Western European women, but otherwise seem to share little with the typical detached voyeur of the modern cityscape.

This chapter begins with a contextualization of the genre of *xiaopin wen* and the literary origins of the word “humor,” and its Chinese transliteration *youmo*, both of whose places in modern Chinese literature are almost inextricable from the figure of Lin Yutang. I then use Xu Xu's criticism of French society under German occupation as a starting point to trace his disillusionment with the decline of the West, in particular the revolutionary ideals of a mythic France. I explore two main themes in his semi-fictional travel essays: the passing of time and the unreliability of human psychology. In these sketches, humor and dreams serve as alternative spaces for Xu Xu to critique and

question society, and to express uncertainty. His narrators are not only disillusioned but frequently vacillate between states of consciousness and unconsciousness, awake and dreaming.⁷ The act of dreaming further serves to undermine the philosophy that literature can accurately depict reality. In my conclusion I look at the reception of Lin Yutang's *My Country My People* in order to explain why readers found his book comforting and appealing in the late-1930s. Although the scope of their work seems rather different, both writers hoped to achieve a similar goal of conveying the essence of one culture to another. Xu Xu may have simply been too honest about the unlikelihood of ever succeeding in such a lofty project.

The Golden Age of the Essay

In order to investigate the implications of Xu Xu's *xiaopin wen* on the literary landscape, it is necessary to understand first the literary and historical context of the late-1930s, and the role of Lin Yutang and his Analects group. In the aftermath of the May Fourth movement, the Chinese literary landscape flourished with the publication of literary magazines like *Short Story Monthly* (Xiaoshuo yuebao), edited by Zhou Zuoren's Literary Association (Wenxue janjiu hui), and *Creation Quarterly* (Chuangzao jikan), the publication of Guo Moruo's Creation Society (Chuangzao she). By the late-1920s Communist writers in groups like the Sun Society (Taiyang she), led by Qu Qiubai, were determined to make revolutionary literature the dominant mode. Joining the fray, the Creation Society, which had previously been the forum for May Fourth romantic writers like Yu Dafu, realigned with the revolutionary cause. While the Literary Association, Xu Zhimo's Crescent Moon Society, and Zhou Zuoren and Lu Xun's Spinner of Words (Yusi she) argued among themselves about the proper relationship between political

revolution and literature, the Communist writers, supported by Lu Xun and Mao Dun, eventually united to form the League of Left-wing Writers (Zuojia zuoyi lianmeng) in 1930, cementing the status of leftist literature.

Literary societies like Du Heng's Xiandai group, which edited the journal *Les contemporains*, struggled in the climate of decreasing literary freedom in their position as members of the "third group" of writers. C.T. Hsia describes this group as "writers who wished to pursue their craft seriously but were no longer able to do so during the present struggle for dominance between liberal and leftist doctrinaires."⁸ It was in the midst of this heated literary battlefield that Lin Yutang started his *Analects* publication. Lin Yutang went to study at Harvard in 1919, and like Xu Xu, also studied abroad briefly in France, then Germany to earn his PhD in linguistics before returning to teach at Tsinghua in Beijing. His column "The Little Critic" in the English-language magazine *The China Critic* (1928–1945) was his first foray into publishing. The magazine featured editorials on various topics and current events; but it was not until he debuted *The Analects Fortnightly* in 1932 with the help of his colleagues from *The China Critic* that he began publishing in Chinese in the witty, humorous style he became renowned for.

In 1936, in response to the growing Japanese aggression against China, the League of Left-wing Writers disbanded in order to refashion itself as a more inclusive organization in the name of patriotism, and following the objective of the newly formed United Front that called for a temporary break in the Chinese Civil War between the CCP and Nationalist Party (KMT). When the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, the CCP led by Mao Zedong (毛澤東 1893–1976) garnered more power in the cultural sphere. Mao urged his followers in 1938 to abandon the practice of Western-based Chinese

literature for a “fresh and vivid Chinese style and manner, of which the Chinese masses are fond,”⁹ voicing the need for a new form of revolutionary propaganda literature. Edward Gunn’s *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-1945*, which focuses on the literature that was written in wartime Shanghai and Beijing, sets up a contrast between what Gunn calls “antiromanticism,” designating writers such as Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang 張愛玲 1920–1995) and Qian Zhongshu (錢鍾書 1910–1998), characterized by their ironic and cynical attitude, and the traditionalists and May Fourth romantics. Gunn argues that these three groups differed in their notion of the self: for traditionalists like Zhou Zuoren the self was inextricable from the idea of the individual’s role in society, and related to this, the romantics believed that society’s salvation could be achieved through self-affirmation. The antiromantics however were skeptical about individualism and concerned about self-delusion.¹⁰ At the time that Xu Xu’s familiar essays appeared in Shanghai, the predominant mode of writing was still in the Communist vein, although Shanghai in particular remained a place where ostensibly the “noncollaborationist writer was under much less pressure to conform and was able to explore himself and the world around him with comparatively greater freedom.”¹¹ Chinese readers may indeed have been tired of patriotic war stories by 1941,¹² but that did not necessarily mean that they were ready to embrace Xu Xu’s essays about the foibles of human nature or the uncertain fate of the world.

The familiar essay and its counterpart, the preferred medium of the revolutionaries, the topical essay or *zawen*, are two genres of modern Chinese literature that have frequently been overlooked in literary studies, which usually focus on fiction or poetry, although the 1920s and 1930s have been called the “golden age of the essay.”¹³

Whereas both *xiaopin wen* and *zawen* are used to convey the author's personal reflections on a variety of subjects, the topical essay, as represented most notably by Lu Xun, serves as a "vehicle for argument,"¹⁴ and the familiar essay "for the display of wit, humor, insight, erudition, intimate sentiments, personal quirks, and prejudices."¹⁵ Of course the difference between the two kinds of essays could not have been as clear-cut as Lu Xun wished to believe, even in his own essays,¹⁶ and for many writers, it was possible to switch between one and the other.

As an essay form, *xiaopin wen*, which translates literally to "little product" essays and refers to the genre of short, familiar essays, became the chosen medium of the Analects group to promote their *youno* style. Charles Laughlin has aptly described this style as an "important premodern counterdiscourse" that "eschewed direct confrontation and instead deliberately turned its attention away from the subjects of writing upon which everyone seemed to be insisting."¹⁷ Laughlin views *xiaopin wen* as both a genre of writing and a lifestyle, both as stemming from the "'literature of leisure' (*xianqing wenxue*)" that emerged in the 1920s, although he locates the belief that literature could serve more than a political aim to as early as the beginning of the 17th century.¹⁸ Echoing *xiaopin wen*'s traditional connotations, C.T. Hsia credits the familiar essay with satisfying a "personal necessity" of authors in the 1930s, noting that even in the work of "progressive" (leftist) writers like Guo Moruo and Ba Jin readers can find the "odd persistence of traditional moral feelings and aesthetic preferences...a nostalgia for home and childhood, a fondness for flowers and pets, and a deep-seated Confucian or Taoist piety, which are completely alien presences in their world of revolutionary action."¹⁹ Promoted by prominent literary figures such as Zhou Zuoren and Lin Yutang

in their respective publications starting in 1932, 1934 was even called “the year of the magazine” or the “year of the xiaopin.” Lin Yutang proclaimed in *The Human World*, “The only success in fourteen years of modern Chinese literature is that of *xiaopin wen*. Though in the creation of fiction there have been some good works, they have also come out of the training provided by *xiaopin* essays. *Xiaopin wen*...centers upon the individual, takes a leisurely tone, and differs from other forms; it [exhibits] what Westerners call ‘personal style.’”²⁰ In devoting their literary attention to seemingly mundane topics like smoking or other subjects that could fall under the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and the glorification of sensual enjoyment, the writers of the Analects group, including Xu Xu, purposely distanced themselves from the mainstream agenda of literature that would mobilize the masses. Although Lin Yutang highlighted its progressive, Western characteristics (individualism, personal style) the genre seemed unable to fully dislodge itself from an earlier context.

The Year of Humor

Contemporary literary scholars Christopher G. Rea and Nicolai Volland have argued that, “Comedy is also a powerful rhetorical discourse that Chinese artists have turned to in order to sanction, critique, subvert, and transform established patterns of thought and expression...Joke telling, as Chinese politicians and cultural icons alike have recognized, is a way to assert authority and accrue cultural capital...Comedy, then, is a discourse that has appreciably influenced modern China’s social and political power structures.”²¹ For Xu Xu, maintaining a wry sense of humor was one way of reacting to the disillusionment he experienced while traveling abroad. As a close colleague of Lin Yutang, he was certainly aware of the popular appeal of literary humor, as well as the

criticism that a writer would face if he misused the literary device. The humor that comes across in Xu Xu's writing is subtler than Lin Yutang's obvious satire; in fact it often appears as pointed social criticism, except that it almost always eventually calls into question the narrator's own shortcomings.

Recalling Zhou Zuoren's call for literature to possess the qualities of *quwei* (interest, flavor, fascination 趣味) and *bense* (true color 本色),²² the Western-educated Lin Yutang added a third element of *youmo* 幽默, or humor, explaining the transliterated term he coined as, "The more 'hidden' and 'silent' humor is, the more exquisite it is."²³ The term *youmo*, Lin Yutang's transliteration of the English "humor" was first introduced to *Beijing Morning News Supplement* readers in 1924,²⁴ and gradually became such a phenomenon throughout China that 1933 was declared the Year of Humor.²⁵ In Diran John Sohigian's essay, "Contagion of Laughter: The Rise of the Humor Phenomenon in Shanghai in the 1930s," he explains the term's progressive, modernist connotations, "Lin Yutang and others assigned rich values to *youmo* on the grounds that the Chinese word of ancient origin, *huaji* (滑稽), was inadequate in modern times. According to Lin, *huaji* meant merely 'trying to be funny,' whereas the more subtle humor evoked "thoughtful laughter."²⁶ Qian Suoqiao in his study of Lin Yutang traces his definition of humor to the Daoist detachment [*daguan* 達觀] and transcendence embodied by Tao Qian, combined with the Confucian emphasis on humanity, Lin Yutang's "spirit of reasonableness" [*qingli* 情理].²⁷

But the concept of *youmo* was not without its detractors. For instance, Sohigian quotes the leftist writer Wu Zuxiang (吳組緝 1908–1994): "I'm from the countryside,"

he wrote, ‘and the life I see is extremely grim; humor is a game among the contemporary urban set that I won’t play.’”²⁸ Humor’s modernist connotations may not have been up for debate, but questions about its cultural and social validity during this time of political turmoil quickly arose among the literary set of the 1930s. Lu Xun argued that the slope from satire to humor was a slippery one. Calling *youmo* a mere fad in 1933, he argued that the satirist was a danger to society, and complained, “I’m afraid this situation won’t last for long, since *youmo* is not a domestic product, the Chinese people are not ‘humorous’ people, and honestly these are difficult times for humor. Consequently, although humor can’t help but change its appearance, satire that does not address society will degenerate the tradition into ‘joke-telling’ and ‘cheap tricks.’”²⁹ For Lu Xun, humor not directed at society was completely pointless and meaningless, if not dangerous. He believed that humor did not belong in China since it was an imported concept; in other words, humor according to Lu Xun was culturally-specific and did not fit with these “difficult times.” Lu Xun also seems to be asking an underlying question about the status of humor: What is humor’s power? Is it to affect the masses, or to be directed at a select few?

Other cultural critics, such as Lin Yutang’s contemporary Qian Zhongshu, clearly believed in the latter option. Taking offense at the way that Lin Yutang and his followers promoted *youmo* literature, Qian Zhongshu criticized Lin Yutang’s movement for removing the spontaneity from the concept of humor.³⁰ In 1939 Qian Zhongshu compared the literary practice to what was called “selling laughter” [*mai xiao* 賣笑] in the cultural context of prostitutes and courtesans, and warned against the mass production of humor for fear of counterfeiters, or what he called “writing clowns” [無數弄筆墨的小

花臉] that would surely “infiltrate the literary sphere” and bring about the reduction of half of literature and art becoming pure entertainment [游藝].³¹ Distinguishing the humor of clowns that makes people laugh *at* them from those with “true humor” *with* whom we laugh, Qian Zhongshu also reminded his readers of the English word’s Latin etymology, meaning “fluid,” and argued that “To treat humor as a consistent doctrine... is to make a liquid into solid mass, to freeze a living being into a specimen.” His elitist concerns reflect the longer historical trajectory of comedy’s place in Chinese literature and culture. For instance, the term *huaji* [滑稽], the general word for “funny” or “amusing,” appeared as early as in the Han dynasty in writings by Sima Qian (司馬遷 135–86 BCE) on court jesters and performance.³² Its “slippery” nature was criticized from the beginning by Confucian traditionalists for its “indirection and subversion of jokes and riddles,” characterized as “wandering and devious.” Karin Myhre writes, “[traditional] Comic literature presents a persistent problem precisely because its most important message is not expressed directly.”³³ She traces the conception of comic literature as transgressive in nature to “the notion that inappropriately indirect use of language was common or inferior, a form of expression suitable only to casual occasions or to people of lower social standing.” Other words that were frequently associated with *huaji* included “play” [*youxi* 遊戲], “joke” [*xiaohua* 笑話] and the more serious-minded “satire” [*fengci* 諷刺], but by the late-Qing and the early 20th century, editors and authors began subdividing genres of fiction and drama for marketing purposes, and as a result, writers like Lin Yutang were forced to make the distinction between high-minded *youmo* and lower classes of comedy in the early 1920s.³⁴

By 1937, Lin Yutang was arguing in his book *The Importance of Living*, “I doubt whether the importance of humor has been fully appreciated, or the possibility of its use in changing the quality and character of our entire cultural life—the place of humor in politics, humor in scholarship, and humor in life. Because its function is chemical, rather than physical, it alters the basic texture of our thought and experience. Its importance in national life we can take for granted.”³⁵ He emphasized the “chemical function” of humor: “to change the character of our thought”³⁶ and believed in its ability to reveal contradictions in society, as a result of the humorist’s “constant contact with reality.”³⁷ Lin Yutang quoted George Meredith (1828–1909) in his introduction to George Kao’s *Chinese Wit and Humor* (1946): “One excellent test of the civilization of a country I take to be the flourishing of the comic idea and comedy...and the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.”³⁸ As Rea has pointed out, “Implicit in these polemics was a bias toward a ‘progressive’ Western value defined against a ‘backward’ native foil.”³⁹ Granted, for Lin Yutang, humor in literature had to prove itself as serving a national purpose in order to be legitimate for his naysayers. As he recounts in the same introduction, “The communists, especially, were howling that Lin Yutang, by preaching humor, was ‘ruining the country.’ I could not convince them that humor had a proper role in literature and life by referring them to ancient Chinese sources, including Confucius himself, for the leftists held all Chinese literature in utter Marxist contempt. In desperation, I had to show them that humor was something considered quite proper by foreigners, and therefore ‘modern.’ I pointed out that Charles Lamb did not ruin England and that *The Golden Calf* did not ruin their beloved postrevolutionary Soviet Russia. And they quietly shut up, although they are still unconvinced.”⁴⁰ Like in the case of the

xiaopin wen form, Lin Yutang again relied on humor's Western and modern origins to promote its legitimacy to Chinese readers.

Xu Xu himself wrote about *youmo*, though much later, in his essay “Laughter and Humor” [Xiao yu youmo 笑與幽默].⁴¹ An essay replete with allusions to numerous other literary texts—both Chinese and Western—“Laughter and Humor” is strongly reminiscent of Lin Yutang's writings on humor. But instead of celebrating the performative aspect of humor, Xu Xu could not disagree more with Lin Yutang's categorization of “Chinese humor... consist[ing] in compliance with outward form and... total disregard of the substance in actuality.”⁴² Xu Xu recalls that Bertrand Russell, in his discussion about the “callous nature” of the Chinese people, cited an instance where he saw a woman slipping in the street and numerous male bystanders standing at the side of the street howling with laughter. Comparing this anecdote to a recent incident when Xu Xu was waiting for the bus and saw a van overturned on the overpass, he expresses his horror at seeing a group of young people at the bus stop witnessing the accident and laughing uproariously, screaming “That's great!” “I heard this and felt very uncomfortable, thinking back to that how many decades ago Russell's thinking, I thought, after all are Chinese people so truly callous by nature?”⁴³ On the topic of sympathy, Xu Xu does agree with Lin Yutang, that humor requires a kind of understanding (“a humorous laugh is a knowing laugh”), that consequently, “people that are not sympathetic should generally be called people ‘without a sense of humor’.”

Xu Xu also comments on Lu Xun's essay on satire, and disagrees with him that the two can be easily distinguished from one another. As to whether there can be harmless laughter, as Lu Xun claims, Xu Xu says that it is difficult to differentiate

between satire and harmless laughter, to tell whether you are offending someone. Most importantly Xu Xu explains why it is difficult for famous people to have a sense of humor: “a sense of humor still has to come from a place of modesty and introspection.”⁴⁴ This recalls his belief that the declarations of famous figures are unreliable: famous people lack the ability to be self-critical and cannot be counted on to accurately represent reality. He talks about reading some of the Japanese emperor Hirohito’s speeches from WWII and writes half-jokingly, “We know that the emperor is a microbiologist; his chilly sense of humor must come from his scientific training.”⁴⁵ Citing three examples of Hirohito’s cold-hearted humor, Xu Xu draws the conclusion that “Although a sense of humor can lead people to laugh, laughter isn’t necessarily an indication of a sense of humor.” Finally, Xu Xu concludes the essay by returning to Russell’s example of the woman falling in the street: “This is the kind of laughter of the people with the least sense of humor. Because having a sense of humor requires the ability for self-introspection, to put oneself in another’s position and think for awhile, you would never laugh at another person’s misery.” For Xu Xu a sense of humor is equal to sympathy and understanding, not about being malicious. Humor is as much self-awareness and a connection with others (what he calls modesty and self-introspection) as an overall consciousness about the world. Alone, the witty objective representation of reality is deficient and lacking in human understanding.

In his travel sketches, the most obvious instances of Xu Xu’s humor are moments of gentle critique. In Chapter 7 of “The Duel,” the story ends with a letter from the female love interest C to her French suitor F: “Dear F, This matter of letting God choose between two men who cannot coexist is a story from an outdated novel. So I choose with

my own hands; the spirit of 20th century France is fraternity, peace and liberty [liberté, égalité, fraternité]; I actually put it into practice, F. I will accompany Z on X day and X month and will have already arrived in England by the afternoon. C.”⁴⁶ As C points out, she “chooses” her man and by doing so, she envisions herself as living evidence of the ideals of love and liberty. The two men vying for her affections are far from ideal as well, and all three characters are humorously but sympathetically depicted in the story. Xu Xu’s disillusionment with the French revolutionary ideal takes the form of a critique of outdated notions of chivalry, romance, and honor, as well as a light mockery of French hypocrisy. The code of liberty, equality and love has become an empty motto at this low point in French history.

Xu Xu does not take full advantage of the element of playful satire in these essays, like Lin Yutang does in his essay “My Turn at Quitting Smoking.” Instead of referring to cigarettes as the temptation, Lin Yutang wittily reverses the reader’s expectations by calling the act of quitting an act of foolishness: “I swore that never again would I allow myself to become so dispirited or so lacking in self-control, and that hereafter I would be a faithful believer in smoking until the day I reached senility... as long as I am in possession of my faculties and am still able to tell right from wrong, I will never again submit to this kind of temptation.”⁴⁷ Nor does Xu Xu’s humor rely on the comical convention of juxtaposing two seemingly incongruous subjects, in contrast to Zhou Zuoren’s 1936 essay “Reading on the Toilet,” in which the reader delights in the disparity between Buddhist monks and Ouyang Xiu’s poetry to the act of shitting.⁴⁸ The humor that is scattered throughout Xu Xu’s travel essays is more a subtle criticism of human psychology, pointing out human foibles, especially the impossibility or futility of

literary authenticity, the limitations of representation. In the next two sections I will discuss how Xu Xu uses humor to address the themes of time and the unreliability of literary representation.

The Passing of Time

Strolling through an impoverished neighborhood in Paris one evening, Xu Xu noticed the pathetic attempts of the poor to make their shabby surroundings more pleasing to the eye: “They use floor wax to shine the ruined worn out floor boards; a flowered cloth hides the raggedy windows.”⁴⁹ For all their efforts, he complained, “Late at night, under the dark and gloomy streetlight, the buildings appear even more decrepit...I walk here from a bustling crowded neighborhood, and all the world’s loneliness and desolation feels more obvious.” As he ruminates on the decaying architecture and living conditions that surround the common Parisian inhabitant, the narrator expresses his feelings of frustration and isolation. Away from the hustle and bustle of the urban center, the cityscape seems to transform in the dark into a sinister nightmare, revealing its true nature. The speaker’s heart is overcome with an “indescribable melancholy,” and he responds by crying out the following song, which he composes on the spot:

In the middle of the night, under the lamplight of a deserted alleyway,
 without a single person wandering around,
 only a small curly haired dog wagging its tail,
 shuddering in this cold air,
 So I rest here and kick this pathetic animal,
 I don't mind if it bites me
 or howls wildly at me,
 On this street in the middle of the night, I get a little angry,
 it brings out the deathly silence of this cold and stillness.

This solitary figure's desolation seems out of place in Xu Xu's essay "Paris Chitchat" [Manhua Bali 漫話巴黎], an otherwise seemingly straightforward piece of travel writing with a socio-political bent. But upon closer inspection, Xu Xu's traveler is far from the modern flaneur that revels in the crowd as a detached voyeur, and his lonely observer shares with the rest of Xu Xu's essay in its lament of and disillusionment with the current state of affairs in France. I suggest that this pessimistic verse demonstrates Xu Xu's realization that the race to catch up to Western modernity may very well be futile. The modern myth of Paris as the ultimate example of a technologically advanced society is bluntly revealed to be an illusion.

If the May Fourth movement was based on the "haste to modernize,"⁵⁰ then Xu Xu's travel essays demonstrate that this haste would not necessarily lead China to a more progressive, civilized society. In "Paris Chitchat," which was first published in September 1940 in *Western Wind* [Xifeng 西風], Xu Xu begins the essay with a lengthy passage of his own loose translation from the French historian Émile Saignes's (1878–?) 1925 *Toute la France*.⁵¹ But rather than admiring and commenting on the author's boastful claims of his nation's countless accomplishments that warrant its position at the center of the world, Xu Xu skips to a quote from author André Gide (1869–1951) that commends the industry of French workers, then immediately points out that the accounts written by Saignes and Gide belong to an outdated past that no longer exists. Instead, Xu Xu turns to a more telling, accurate representation of the current state of affairs in the nation's capital: the 1937 World Exposition. "We can see how sloppy and careless the French people [*mingzu*] have already become," he laments.⁵² In his discussion of each country's exhibit at the fair, Xu Xu contrasts for instance Germany's emphasis on its

workers and engineering projects and the Soviet Union's promotion of its advancements in manufacturing, with France's exhibit, which lacked a main objective and instead "bragged vaguely about everything...its beauty and its prosperity."⁵³

"Paris Chitchat" is a scathing critique of the decline of the renowned French revolutionary spirit. In the short span of fourteen pages, Xu Xu manages to cite three French writers: Sallens writing in the 1920s, André Gide, and Nicolas Boileau (1636–1711), 17th century poet and critic. Clearly placing himself in dialogue with some of the most prominent French intellectuals of the 20th century Xu Xu demonstrates more than the impressive ability to string together literary references about France's impressive past. By switching point of view to first-person and recounting the depressing but enlightening experience of walking through the dilapidated neighborhood, he subtly shifts the commentary from one of specific political urgency to a broader criticism of human psychology. Surely Xu Xu must have known about the well publicized debate in 1924 between his mentor Lin Yutang and their older colleague Lu Xun on "playing fair" in intellectual exchanges.⁵⁴ Whether this is Xu Xu's tongue-in-cheek reference to the debate or not, the narrator seems to have utter disregard for the repercussions of his actions, to the point of inviting retaliation. His poem is infused with a subtle sense of humor; with no one else to turn to, Xu Xu's narrator lashes out at a pathetic little creature that has nothing to do with his frustration. His bitterness becomes transformed into a facetious commentary on the human tendency to seek company from whoever is available, to the point of provocation. The author's message—that if you don't fight fair don't complain when you get bitten—is fueled by his compassion, and his frustration at his inability to change the dismal state of social inequity.

As Frederik Green has noted, by discussing the fall of Paris to Germany in 1940 Xu Xu draws an implicit connection between Shanghai and Paris: “After Paris was lost, France immediately bowed its knees and sued for peace. But if Paris had been turned into war-ravaged land, I trust that France could have continued its war of resistance.”⁵⁵ But his implicit critique of Shanghai is largely overshadowed by his pessimistic understanding of human nature. Xu Xu concludes “Paris Chitchat” with the question of what the future holds for Paris and the people of France but his hypothetical conjectures are a dismal prediction for the future of mankind. “If they can make a sacrifice, then the people’s will and determination will see no limit. But this is not possible, because the people, having lived so leisurely for many years, if they have to make any kind of sacrifice or work just a little bit more, they will not be able to endure it...They can only stand to increase their pleasure—they are unwilling to sacrifice their pleasure, unless they are under a moral leader, or an oppressive authority.”⁵⁶ In “Paris Chitchat,” Xu Xu’s apparent dissatisfaction with the pleasure-seeking hedonistic culture of Paris (and presumably also Shanghai) explains his sympathy for the city’s less fortunate dwellers, and the added element of humor in the form of an incongruously placed poem about dog kicking only accentuates the futility of the situation, while simultaneously highlighting Xu Xu’s awareness of his own inadequacies in affecting change.

His disappointment with the state of affairs in China and in France translates into a surreal, fictional account in his short story “One Night in Luxembourg” [Lusenbao de yixiu 盧森堡的一宿]. Written on November 14, 1936, a few days after Xu Xu’s arrival in Paris, the tale begins with the narrator hearing voices in his sleep one rainy evening. Having gone to bed after writing letters home, he is puzzled by the unidentified voices

and wonders if perhaps one could belong to the proprietress of the boarding house (who incidentally smiled at him earlier). He briefly worries if thieves could be trying to break in, if perhaps the hotel is linked to criminal activity (“Did this foreign country not live up to my expectations, were there still gangster-run restaurants in the 20th century?”).⁵⁷ As the two voices continue talking, we find out that one has just arrived the previous day from China, whereas the other speaker has been stuck in the same place his entire life. They complain about being in similar situations, such as the endlessness of time, the mundanity of their existences, the impossibility of ever getting rest, and the inability to see other people but knowing that they are always being watched—each thinks that he has it worse than the other. Eventually it is revealed that one voice belongs to the narrator’s watch and the other the landlady’s wall clock.

The story concludes with his musing on the past incident, and the narrator takes a humorous but bitter view, “The following day I left Luxembourg. Even now, whenever I think back to this episode of mental illness, I can’t help but laugh at myself. But in the middle of the night, when I really think about it, that fifty year-old clock and my twenty year-old watch, now they can finally rest for a long time, and I am still gasping trying to endure this endless lifetime. –The long, long night, I wish them all the happiness.”⁵⁸ Xu Xu’s commentary on the nature of time and time keeping, and the incessant dripping faucet of human existence, is worth pointing out for two reasons. First, in terms of how this allegorical tale is framed, instead of presenting a fictional account as straightforward narrative, the narrator intentionally doubts his own sanity in remembering the past and then retelling the story to the reader. Second, the conceit of a wristwatch and clock conversing with one another in the middle of the night, paired with a confused, insomniac

traveler eavesdropping on their complaints is also an example of Xu Xu's subtle sense of humor. These two reasons are actually interrelated; that is, Xu Xu's uses humor to express sympathy for the futility of the human race against time, and a humorous attitude is the only way to cope with the inescapable fate.

Xu Xu's obsession with time resurfaces in "Autumn in Louvain," a short piece from *Fragments from Abroad* about Xu Xu's stint in Belgium just before traveling to France, written in the first few days upon arriving in Paris. The narrator complains about the city's central clock tower:

Everyday is the same, endless, whether you are reading or writing, no matter what you are thinking about, no matter what you are discussing, no matter if you are at the library doing research, if you are at a hotel having an affair with your lover, it follows you, speaking in your ear, 'A quarter hour!' ... How horrible! Whenever I hear it, when I'm writing, my pen always gets cut off, when I'm reading, my book gets torn apart, I lose all interest in the work I'm doing, to the point that when I notice a good-looking girl, at the burst of the clock's deafening toll, I suddenly feel that girl has aged a bit; when I'm enjoying the view of a full moon, at the burst of the clock's deafening toll, I suddenly feel that the moon has become a bit thinner. But who can stop it, avoid it, it is a spirit, a ghost, following you, never leaving you, never letting you go for one step. It is truly terrifying! Or maybe because I never heard such a clock bell before, this was my first time, the fall season has come upon us once more!⁵⁹

Instead of romanticizing the university town's centerpiece, Xu Xu's traveler blames the clock tower for his own shortcomings, such as the inability to concentrate. Xu Xu finds humor in his melodramatic visualization of time passing, but ultimately the inescapable reminder of time passing is counterproductive and prevents the writer from writing.

The Unreliability of Human Psychology

If "Paris Chitchat" is a harsh critique of French politics and human morality that reveals Xu Xu's disillusionment with the supposed epitome of modern culture and his

alarm at the subjugation of the famed French revolutionary spirit, his *xiaopin wen* from *Sentiments from Abroad* reveal Xu Xu's disillusionment through the more palatable motif of dreams and the practice of storytelling, both of which attempt to recapture the past or capture the present reality, but inevitably failing to do so. As a storyteller, Xu Xu believes that it is the writer's responsibility to advertise his unreliability and dismantle the modern myth of individual subjectivity as a self-contained vehicle of free will. For instance, in the beginning of "Autumn in Louvain" he writes about the inaccuracy of the reasons he gives friends for going to Louvain and for leaving Louvain to go to Paris: "People's mentality toward explaining or interpreting a particular situation or a particular action, sometimes is not only deceptive, but is also self-deceptive. So I feel that the declarations of important figures, celebrity memoirs, love letters written by youths, as well as the speeches of orators, I cannot wholly believe in. Therefore my own psychology I sometimes feel is not very reliable."⁶⁰ Not only is it important to recognize the deception of other people, but Xu Xu stresses foremost the importance of realizing that he is guilty of deceiving himself: "When someone deceives the world, he also deceives himself at the same time." His acute self-awareness becomes a constant acknowledgement that his mood and his emotions, and his mental state of being, have a significant impact on his subjectivity and ultimately, his writing. As a traveler, this self-awareness translates most frequently into analysis about homesickness.

In "Autumn in Louvain," the narrator makes frequent references to the autumn poems (*shi ci*) of Song official-poet Ouyang Xiu (歐陽脩 1007–1072), and excuses his malaise by blaming his desolate surroundings, "In the midst of this kind of fall setting, for someone like me who has just gone abroad, naturally it is easy for me to feel

homesick, moreover for someone who has this sensitivity toward neurosis?”⁶¹ As the narrator refers to classical Chinese poetry, so does his travel account recall the genre of traditional travel literature, in which the protagonist’s natural environment—in this case fall season in the dreary university city of Louvain—serves as a reflection of the traveler’s inner spirit.

But the town of Louvain is not solely to blame, for in “The Duel,” the narrator called Z is struck with the flu, due to the rainy weather in Paris and his stuffy apartment. He complains, “I hadn’t been in Paris for long and didn’t have much contact with friends; when a person is faced with loneliness and boredom, feelings of homesickness intensify.” Xu Xu’s narrators are flawed themselves, and self-conscious about their faults. Z’s homesickness is augmented by his own inaction but at the same time this sentiment conveniently stirs up his literary production: “On my sickbed, feeling desolate, I couldn’t help but dream of my hometown while I was sleeping, and when I awoke, I couldn’t stop from humming a few lines of poetry. After sleeping for about a day, around dusk I wrote down a few lines on the wall next to my bed:

梧桐上新露一點綠， The top of the parasol tree newly reveals a bit of green
 綠，那是你耳朵上的翠； Green, like the emeralds on your ears
 於是那黃昏時候的雨， Like the rain at dusk,
 雨，那是我眼角上的淚。 Rain, like the tears at the corner of my eyes.⁶²

The lush green imagery in Z’s poem—the parasol tree and emeralds—is distinctly nostalgic and removed from the modern aesthetic of his current setting. His act of writing poetry is directly linked to the act of dreaming of home, and Z’s literary production is based on spontaneity, just as the narrator composed his verse in the heat of the moment in “Paris Chitchat.” (But here the process takes time, as he waits a whole

day to write down the lines.) For Xu Xu, the act of writing is a natural remedy for homesickness, just as the feeling of homesickness is a source of inspiration for creative output.

The composition of poetry as a result of homesickness also appears in the story titled “The Duel” [Juedou 決鬥], in which a Frenchman named “F” challenges narrator “Z” to a duel for the affections of Frenchwoman “C.” Beginning with F’s written invitation to duel, the story flashes back to the beginning of Z and C’s relationship, which is essentially based on writing: they first get acquainted because he gives her notes from a class they are both in; when she goes to his house to return his notes, she finds some pieces of writing on his desk and asks him what they are. “Poems,” Z tells her. She asks for clarification: “What do you mean by poems?” He responds, “Homesickness” [*xiangchou* 鄉愁].⁶³ When she asks him to translate some poems for her to hear, he explains to her that he wrote the poems the previous night, because he felt extremely homesick [*xiangsi* 鄉思].

The Frenchwoman’s desire for Z is based on both his poetic ability, as well as his literati approach to poetry. The day after Z falls sick she comes and sees his poems on the wall and asks him to read and translate them for her. When she asks him why he never told her he is a poet, he blames her not being able to read Chinese and denies being a poet. But she argues that his poems are “so exceptionally poetic.”⁶⁴ He replies, “the Chinese nation is a poetic nation, if we are to categorize poets, then everyone in China would be considered a poet.” For the protagonist, his amateur love of poetry is related to his understanding of “eastern sentiment” [*dongfang de qingdiao* 東方的情調]. Z

explains to C that to truly understand eastern sentiment one must understand Chinese landscape painting.⁶⁵ This becomes yet another way she falls in love with the narrator: their discussion of eastern sentiment leads to his showing her some art books his friends gave him as souvenirs when he left; he asks rhetorically, “Who knew that from this day on, she would fall in love with eastern sentiment and thus fall in love with me?” Z equates himself with eastern sentiment: he is the embodiment or essence of *qingdiao*. This is also an example of Xu Xu’s subtle sense of humor. In one move, he lightly brushes off Chinese literary tradition, his own poetic ability, and the Occidentalizing notion of Chinese poetics.

Whether Xu Xu is merely being modest about his own literary talent or he is being critical about the label of poet in general, he is always highly conscious about the author’s limitations as a storyteller. In “The Duel,” after the Frenchman F fails to show up to the park at the designated time for the duel, Z returns to his apartment delirious, having seen him with C and assumed they are plotting against him when she ignores him. He tries to sleep, but wakes up not knowing where he is, disoriented: “At first when I got up I thought I was still dreaming, or that I was hallucinating. I rubbed my eyes with my hands, and only then could I determine that this was real. Kaisaling [C] was kneeling at my bedside, eyes wide open and filled with tears.”⁶⁶ After a brief confrontation, C finally reveals that she was trying to protect Z since he is “a poet, not a fighter.” The Frenchman F is presented as a backwards, uncivilized brute in contrast to Z, the intellectual aesthete. But as much as the label of poet is what makes Z sexually desirable to C, his literary subjectivity, if we can assume that as a narrator Z’s duty is to interpret reality, is also construed as a shortcoming. The motif of dream reappears in the story during moments

of Z's weakness; dreams of home or the confusion over whether the present is an illusion occur during moments of Z's isolation.

For Xu Xu's disillusioned travelers, the longing for home is paired with feelings of alienation and loneliness. The relationship between Paris and dreams is not entirely foreign in modern Chinese literature, but unlike Xu Xu's narrators who waver uncertainly between the dream world and reality, earlier writers seemed more wholly captivated by the allure of Paris. For example, the poet Xu Zhimo attested to the evocative power of the city as he recounted a friend from Paris's visit one evening in *Fragments from Paris*. Engrossed to the point of forgetting to drink their tea and smoke their cigarettes, the two men chatted until dawn, at which point Xu Zhimo retired to his bed and was immediately transported back to Paris in his slumber: "This dream of Paris is truly intoxicating, it captures your heart, captures your will, captures your four limbs and your entire body; if you've never tasted its kiss how can you ever imagine it? Once I woke up I was still disoriented and couldn't remember where I was, just then a child entered my room and stood in front of my bed, smilingly inquiring, 'What were you dreaming of my friend, why are both of your eyes teary like you were just crying?' I reached out and felt my eyes; sure enough, tears and I couldn't help but laugh; yet like a poet once said, early morning dreams are all full of this desolate taste, I have no idea which dream this teardrop was shed for!"⁶⁷ Although Xu Zhimo's dream of Paris, the city where he briefly studied during his four-year stint in the West from 1918 to 1922, was much more romantic than that of writer and poet Xu Xu's, both men recognized the city's illusory and temporal appeal, and its relationship to the tension between fiction and realism, the imaginary and the real.⁶⁸

Using the whirlwind imagery reminiscent of Fu Lei describing the young Pang Xunqin swept up by the excitement in Paris, Xu Zhimo, in his effusive celebration of Paris, noted the city's tumultuous undercurrent, despite its seductive appearance of comfort (Paris is also a "down-filled mattress, leaving your whole body at ease, melting your rigid bones... so soft and plush!").⁶⁹ Paris in many ways is just like any other city, he admits, except for one major difference: "the flow of life there is more fierce, the whirlpool more turbulent, so there is a greater chance of getting swept up."⁷⁰ He concludes his introductory piece with a firsthand account of people watching in the city, continuing with his metaphor of the whirlpool,

Usually I just stand at the banks of the Seine, observing the crowds, which is not to say that I have never gone in the water myself; but even then I always stay close to the shore, never daring to go too far in the depths. From the spiraling, powerful path and strength of this whirlpool, one can see even more clearly than from standing far away on the shore.

The city's irresistible pull forces the self-conscious narrator to take a stance from afar. His fear is not only getting drawn in and swept away by the current, but he further implies that the greater consequence would be to see too clearly. From the banks of the city's famed river he can safely take the position of observer and he prefers to stay dreaming, for fear of experiencing any disillusionment.

"A Patriot With a Sense of Humor"

In 1976, *The New York Times* published an obituary for Lin Yutang. Explaining his popularity, the paper reported, "Few authors have enjoyed so nearly unanimous favorable reception, for Dr. Lin wrote generally from the realm of the 'unknown' to an audience waiting to be fascinated."⁷¹ At the same time, the obituary points out the three reasons why he was criticized by Chinese readers: his financial success, his "opportunistic" claim

that “all the world” was his home, and lastly, his analysis of Chinese weakness that was “too sharp—too blunt—for the Chinese mind steeped and schooled in public posture and private thought.” This disapproval is viewed as an affirmation of Lin Yutang’s designation as the ultimate “interpreter to Western minds of the customs, aspirations, fears and thoughts of his people and their country.” According to Qian Suoqiao, the reception of Lin Yutang’s work in the U.S. demonstrates that “a liberal cosmopolitan road that suggests a middling Chinese modernity, an alternative to the mainstream narratives of nationalism and revolutionary radicalism, is both possible and desirable.”⁷² Here I want to use Lin Yutang’s work as a way to highlight why Xu Xu’s travel essays are not desirable in China.

In *My Country My People*, Lin Yutang provides such insights about Chinese culture to English readers as the following paean to Western literature:

When two cultures meet, it is natural and logical that the richer one should give and the other should take. It is true, but it is sometimes hard to believe, that it is more blessed to give than to take. China has apparently gained much in the last thirty years in literature and thought which must be entirely credited to Western influence...Some fifty years ago the Chinese were impressed only by European gun-boats; some thirty years ago they were impressed by the Western political system; about twenty years ago they discovered that the West even had a very good literature, and now some people are making the slow discovery that the West has even a better social consciousness and better social manners.⁷³

In this passage, Lin Yutang adopts a seemingly impartial stance, using adjectives like “natural” and “logical” in his reasoning, yet his message is anything but. Writing in broad generalizations, his historical retelling of the chronology of Chinese-European interaction leaves little room for nuance, and it is not difficult to imagine why Western readers embraced his view of Chinese modernity. *My Country My People* was published

in 1935, two years before the Sino-Japanese War, with the encouragement of Pearl S. Buck (1892–1973), the American author best known for her novel *The Good Earth* (1931). Lin Yutang met Buck in Shanghai in 1933 where she was studying in China, and she supposedly encouraged him to write the first book written in English by a Chinese writer. *My Country My People*'s intended audience is neither Chinese “patriots”—Lin Yutang explains, “I have nothing to do with them, for their god is not my god, and their patriotism is not my patriotism”⁷⁴—nor “patriots of the West.” Instead he targets “the men of simple common sense, that simple common sense for which ancient China was so distinguished, but which is so rare today. My book can only be understood from this simple point of view. To these people who have not lost their sense of ultimate human values, to them alone I speak.”⁷⁵ But although he consciously distanced himself from the nationalistic label of “patriot,” some readers identified him as just that: “Dr. Lin is that too rare phenomenon, a patriot with a sense of humour.”⁷⁶ That is, readers in the West were satisfied with what they believed was a fair view of China: Lin Yutang was not overly boastful of his country, nor did he suffer from insecurity and try to hide China's faults.

Although Lin Yutang faced detractors in both China and in the West, he was for the most part successful in attracting critical and popular success. After the publication of *My Country My People*, his reputation as “interpreter of China to the West” was solidified with “a series of best sellers almost every other year,”⁷⁷ including *The Importance of Living* (1937) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1943). In as recent as 2007, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York presented an exhibition titled “Bridging East and West: The Chinese Diaspora and Lin Yutang,” featuring Chinese

artwork collected by Lin Yutang. That Lin Yutang is still seen as a relevant figure of the Chinese diaspora is a testament to his staying power, at least in the United States, where he lived for much of his life. At first glance it may seem that Xu Xu's *xiaopin wen*, written about his travel experiences in the West in Chinese for a Chinese audience, and Lin Yutang's manual for explaining Chinese culture to English-language readers have little in common. For one, the difference in language, in particular Lin Yutang's proficiency at writing English, gave him an obvious advantage. He was repeatedly praised "for his excellent English, certainly the very best any Chinese has ever written, which always holds a spell over his readers."⁷⁸ Another difference between the two writers is that Lin Yutang's winning formula relies on his linguistic ability, combined with his "insider" perspective. He is repeatedly held up in reviews of the book as the lone figure, the solitary exception that can write fluently in English while retaining his Chinese identity. For instance, one critic writes, "Some Chinese can master a foreign language even better than their mother tongue, but they are denationalised. The author, on the other hand, has the ability both to write good English and to digest Chinese culture."⁷⁹ Another echoes, "Dr. Lin Yutang is probably the only one able to see his country from the inside, with an unclouded eye, who would at the same time take the trouble to give the full picture to Westerners and who would, in addition, be able to do it in a clear, strong and frequently beautiful English prose."⁸⁰

Reviewers in the 1930s may have romanticized this insider perspective, as one critic applauds him for his ability to "consciously to put himself into line with the old thought ways of his country, where 'the True' is measured more by a knowledge in the heart than by an argument of the brain."⁸¹ Regardless of the Orientalist tendencies of

these reviews, they nonetheless reveal another crucial difference, perhaps what readers interpreted as a crucial flaw, in Xu Xu's travel essays. As an outsider in the West, Xu Xu never once tries to give his readers at home the impression that he has any particular allegiance to "his" China, nor that he has any insider information about the way things are outside of China. Lin Yutang's greatest accomplishment—over that of language and perhaps even of humor—is his certainty in the future, his ability to convince readers that things will be okay. "No problems are solved by this book, no constructive theories set forth; on the whole its tone is pessimistic, but it is the truth as seen by one who 'has not given up hope,' and is still confident that China 'will, as she always did, right herself again,'"⁸² one critic describes his positive attitude.

From another perspective though, the posture of confidence that Xu Xu refuses to adopt is a minor difference in the larger scheme of the two writers' work. If Lin Yutang "wrote generally from the realm of the 'unknown' to an audience waiting to be fascinated," one could easily make a similar statement about Xu Xu's travel essays and intended audience. That is, his readers, like Lin Yutang's in the U.S., are also "waiting to be fascinated," only in Xu Xu's case, from his travel accounts about the West, not from insider tips about China. And like Lin Yutang, Xu Xu is also writing from the realm of the unknown, only Xu Xu's narrators never claim that they are a reliable source of information—in fact, they seem to constantly remind the reader of their *lack* of reliability.

For Xu Xu, dreams are not a tool for escaping reality, but like travel, a way of viewing reality from a different perspective. In addition to writing fiction and prose Xu Xu was also a prolific poet.⁸³ In an undated poem titled "In a Dream, Out of a Dream"

[Mengnei mengwai 夢內夢外] Xu Xu writes, “You walk first into my dream,/ laughing at me reading in the night,/ or laughing at the depth of my homesickness./ You say if I can just get to bed earlier/ you can lead me back to my home village,/ my hometown’s spring scenery so magnificent,/ full of wild green swaths of rice shoots.”⁸⁴ He continues,

If suddenly I walk into a dream,
 I can’t see where you are,
 I can only hear you calling for me,
 Saying that you’ve already gone into the fields.
 Waiting to see my home country,
 Where the spring rice paddies in the field are already tall.
 I don’t see any sign of you,
 Only smell the fragrance of rice nearby.
 So I walk out of the dream
 Asking you if you are still in my dream
 You say I go into a dream, go out of a dream
 You are always amidst your own dream.

Directed at an unnamed presumably female love interest, this poem adopts a teasing tone for what otherwise appears to be a nostalgic, melancholic subject matter. The speaker reveals his feelings of homesickness, and his longing for an idyllic lush landscape. Sleep, specifically the act of dreaming, is the vehicle for returning home: the earlier he goes to bed, the earlier the dream can transport him home. For the speaker, the dream is like a doorway from which you can enter and exit, seemingly at will. But as the woman clarifies for him at the poem’s conclusion, there is little difference between the dream world and the real world. What he perceives to be agency, his free will of going in and out of a dream, is actually just that—only his perception.

I proposed in this chapter that by reading Xu Xu’s *xiaopin wen* written on the eve of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) we can examine how one Republican-era writer represented his travel experiences and disenchantment with the West, and why his

travel essays did not attract a wide readership among his contemporaries. For Xu Xu, traveling to France, the beloved birthplace of the revolution, served as a wake-up call that a rich cultural heritage was not infallible. His essays express a disconcerting level of cynicism about the uncertain political future of China and France during the war period, as well as toward the limitations of literary representation. Fu Lei's plea from the previous chapter expressed his sense of urgency and the need to rush through to get to the end: "I truly hope that human life could be shortened! Just hurry up!" Xu Xu's semi-fictional stories challenge the conventional discourses of Chinese modernity that push for the "haste to modernize" and the self as champion of individualism and free will. Finally, I have shown in this chapter that Xu Xu's travel writing uses *youmo* as a literary tool, in the sense that a sense of humor was one alternative mode of critiquing both Western and Chinese modern culture. Like dreams, which are positioned between the real and imaginary, humor occupies a middle ground between the serious and the inane. Sharing this quality of liminality, the literary device of humor and the motif of dreaming allow for Xu Xu's narrators to express their disillusionment with the decline of France and China, and an underlying uncertainty about the escalating war. Unlike Fu Lei who consciously tried to distance himself from thinking about the crisis in China (without much success), Xu Xu's narrators revel in their feelings of homesickness and nostalgia, using them as creative inspiration for his literature. Nor could his characters adopt the position of confident "interpreter" as represented by Lin Yutang. They may have been able to pass for the ideal native Chinese espoused by Lin Yutang—"the modern cosmopolitan Chinese who has re-discovered his Chinese-ness"⁸⁵—but their travels did not guarantee an enlightened return home.

“Thus our solitary traveler here is both detached from and attached to his society...He can afford to roam the natural landscape as a free spirit, while at the same time he drops in and out of the sociopolitical world through his wide-ranging connections. Despite the sad fate of his country, which he bemoans, he does not feel totally superfluous.”⁸⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee’s analysis of Liu E’s (劉鶚 1857–1909) fictional travel account *The Travels of Lao Ts’an* [Lao Can youji 老殘遊記] could be just as applicable to the narrators in Xu Xu’s travel sketches: at once “detached from” and “attached to” their modern surroundings, they resort to a literary existence of uncertainty, vacillating between dreams and disillusionment.

¹ Xu Xu 徐訐, *Sentiments from Abroad* [Haiwai de qingdiao 海外的情調] (Xianggang: Yechuang shuwu, 194-?), 103.

² See for example, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*, 229–230: “Despite his interest in psychology, Xu Xu does not indulge in the soul-searching or social analysis characteristic of May Fourth fiction...Like his associate Lin Yutang, Xu Xu has never been regarded as a major actor in literary circles, since detachment, wit and lightness of spirit have always been his preferred tone.”

³ For two relatively recent English-language sources on Xu Xu, see Frederik Green’s PhD dissertation “A Chinese Romantic’s Journey through Time and Space: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Nostalgia in the Work of Xu Xu (1908–1980), (Yale University, May 2009) and “The Making of a Chinese Romantic: Cosmopolitan Nationalism and Lyrical Exoticism in Xu Xu’s Early Travel Writings,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Fall 2011), p. 64–69; and Qin Chen’s MA thesis “Allegories and Appropriations of the ‘Ghost’: A Study of Xu Xu’s *Ghost Love* and Its Three Film Adaptations” (The Ohio State University, 2010).

⁴ Qin Chen, “Allegories and Appropriations of the ‘Ghost,’” 2.

⁵ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 226.

⁶ Frederik Green, “A Chinese Romantic’s Journey through Time and Space,” 94.

⁷ For more on Xu Xu and dreams see for example Ouyang Zhisheng’s MA thesis “Wavering between ‘dreaming’ and ‘crying’: a new way of understanding Xu Xu’s

novels” [Zai “meng” yu “ku” jian youyi: Xu Xu jiqi xiaoshuo de linglei jiedu 在“夢”與“哭”間游移—徐訏及其小說的另類解讀] (Hunan Normal University, 2010), which analyzes Xu Xu’s novels through the themes of dream and crying, both of which the author argues demonstrate a kind of “wavering.”

⁸ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 127.

⁹ Mao Zedong, “The Position of the Chinese Communist Party in the National Struggle” (1938), translated by C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 302.

¹⁰ Edward M. Gunn, Jr., *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 270–271.

¹¹ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 322.

¹² Edward M. Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 5.

¹³ Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, eds., *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), xxvii. See more on Lin Yutang, the *Analects* group, and the *xiaopin* genre also in Charles A. Laughlin, “The *Analects* Group and the Genre of *Xiaopin*” in Michel Hockx and Kirk A. Denton, eds., *Literary Societies of Republican China*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 207–240.

¹⁴ D.E. Pollard, “Translator’s Introduction: Four Contemporary *Zawen*,” *Renditions* 31 (Spring 1989): 148–150.

¹⁵ Lau and Goldblatt, *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, xxvii.

¹⁶ See for example “Introduction” in Lu Xun, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, trans. by William A. Lyell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), xxviii: “Terse, incisive, satirical in tone, and inimitably idiosyncratic, *zawen* flowed from his pen so rapidly and in such volume that they soon constituted the bulk of his creative work. Indeed, critics in the People’s Republic of China have often valued Lu Xun’s *zawen* over all his other writings, claiming that they contributed more not only to literature but also to the Revolution.” But Lu Xun did contribute to Lin Yutang’s *Analects* in 1933 and was the author behind humor essays such as “To Reach the Conclusion from Women’s Feet That Chinese People Do Not Follow the Golden Mean, and Thence Further to Conclude That Confucius Suffered from His Stomach.” See David E. Pollard, “Lu Xun’s *Zawen*” in Leo Ou-Fan Lee, ed., *Lu Xun and His Legacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 80.

¹⁷ Charles A. Laughlin, “The *Analects* Group and the Genre of *Xiaopin*,” 238. Laughlin argues that the primary appeal of the familiar essay to Lin Yutang and his group was “in irritating the personalities who vied to dominate the literary scene in the name of national salvation and revolution.”

¹⁸ Charles Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*, 1. Laughlin discusses Li Yu’s *Xianqing ouji* (Sketches of idle pleasures, 1671), in which leisurely writing is a matter of “attitude, tone, and subject matter—it is writing unconcerned with public affairs, moral cultivation, or the meaning and application of the orthodox Confucian classics.” He points out that the literature of leisure is not necessarily linked to social class, as one can enjoy the finer things in life without wealth (26). His broader

argument in the book is that *xiaopin wen* is a unique example of a literary form that straddled the two opposing categories of literature for art's sake and literature for life's sake.

¹⁹ C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 132.

²⁰ Lin Yutang 林語堂, "Fa kan ci," *Renjian shi* 1.1 (1934):1. Laughlin translation in *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*, 9.

²¹ Christopher G. Rea and Volland, Nicolai, "Comic Visions of Modern China: Introduction" *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 20.2 (Fall, 2008), ix.

²² See for example Susan Daruvala's discussion of "Counter-tradition: Quwei as a Poetics of Locality and Materiality" (132) and "Culture: Bense: Individual Integrity and the Relation to the Tradition (138) in *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2000), 113.

²³ Laughlin's translation, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*, 110, from Lin Yutang, *Zui zao tichang youmo de liangpian wenzhang*, 4.

²⁴ Charles A. Laughlin, "The Analects Group and the Genre of Xiaopin," 217.

²⁵ Diran John Sohigian, "The Rise of the Humor Phenomenon in Shanghai," *positions* 15:1 (Spring, 2007), 137. Citing Sun Junzheng 孫鈞政, *The Art World of Lao She* [Lao She de yishu shijie 老舍的藝術世界] (Beijing: Shiyue Wenyi Chubanshe, 1992), 191.

²⁶ Diran John Sohigian, "The Rise of the Humor Phenomenon in Shanghai," 139.

²⁷ Qian Suoqiao, *Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 154–157. Qian Suoqiao cites Lin Yutang's *The Importance of Living*, 423. Strangely enough the study does not include any mention of Xu Xu.

²⁸ Diran John Sohigian, "The Rise of the Humor Phenomenon in Shanghai," 139.

²⁹ Lu Xun 魯迅, "From Satire to Humor" [Cong fengci dao youmo 從諷刺到幽默], *Shanghai News* [Shenbao – ziyou tan 申報·自由談], March 7, 1933.

³⁰ Christopher G. Rea and Nicolai Volland, "Comic Visions of Modern China: Introduction," v.

³¹ Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, "On Laughter" [Shuo xiao 說笑], *Written in the Margins of Life* [Xie zai rensheng bian Shang 寫在人生邊上] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1990).

³² For a brief history of terms related to comedy, see Christopher G. Rea, "Comedy and Cultural Entrepreneurship in Xu Zhuodai's Huaji Shanghai," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 20.2 (Fall, 2008), 40–91. See also Karin Myhre's essay "Wit and Humor" in Victor H. Mair, *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 132–148.

³³ *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, 133–134.

³⁴ Christopher G. Rea, "Comedy and Cultural Entrepreneurship in Xu Zhuodai's Huaji Shanghai," 46–48.

³⁵ Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (New York: The John Day Company, 1940), 76.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 78–80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 82–83

³⁸ George Kao, *Chinese Wit and Humor* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1946), xxxiii.

³⁹ Christopher G. Rea, “Comedy and Cultural Entrepreneurship in Xu Zhuodai’s *Huaji Shanghai*,” 48.

⁴⁰ Lin Yutang, “Introduction” in *Chinese Wit and Humor*, xxxi.

⁴¹ Xu Xu, “Laughter and Humor” (Xiao yu youmo 笑與幽默) in *The Collected Works of Xu Xu* [Xu Xu wenji 徐訏文集], Vol. 11 (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 2008), 283–287. From here on abbreviated as *XXWJ*.

⁴² Lin Yutang, *My Country, My People*, 70. He writes, “Such is the Chinese farcical view of life. The Chinese language abounds in metaphors regarding the drama of human life... We really look upon life as a stage, and the kind of theatrical show we like best is always high comedy, whether that comedy be a new constitution, or a bill of rights, or an anti-opium bureau, or a disbandment conference. We always enjoy it, but I wish our people would sometimes be serious. Humor, above everything else, is ruining China. One can have too much of that silvery laughter, for it is again the laughter of the old rogue, at the touch of whose breath every flower of enthusiasm and idealism must wither and die” (71–72).

⁴³ Interestingly enough, Russell does not actually write of a woman slipping in the street, but, “If a dog is run over by an automobile and seriously hurt, nine out of ten passers-by will stop to laugh at the poor brute’s howls. The spectacle of suffering does not of itself rouse any sympathetic pain in the average Chinaman; in fact, he seems to find it mildly agreeable.” See Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China* (New York: The Century Co., 1922), 220–222.

⁴⁴ *XXWJ*, 286.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 286–287.

⁴⁶ Xu Xu, “The Duel,” *Sentiments from Abroad*, 161–162.

⁴⁷ Lin Yutang, “My Turn at Quitting Smoking,” translated by Nancy E. Chapman in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 632.

⁴⁸ Zhou Zuoren, “Reading on the Toilet,” translated by Don J. Cohn in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 627–631.

⁴⁹ From “Paris Chitchat” [Manhua Bali 漫話巴黎] from Xu Xu, *Fragments from Abroad* [Haiwai de linzhao 海外的鱗爪] (Shanghai: Yechuang shudian, 1940), 47.

⁵⁰ See for example, Shu-mei Shih’s chapter “Time, Modernism, and Cultural Power” in *The Lure of the Modern*, 55.

⁵¹ Émile Saillens, *Toute la France: sa terre, son peuple, ses travaux—les oeuvres de son génie* (Paris: Bibliothèque Larousse, 1925).

⁵² Xu Xu, “Paris Chitchat” 漫話巴黎 from *Fragments from Abroad*, 37.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁴ Sohigian cites the debate between Lin Yutang and Lu Xun on Zhou Zuoren’s call for “fair play” in the playground of Revolutionary-era intellectual discourse. While Lin Yutang argued for recognizing that all cursing is inherently subject to personal bias and believed in the Chinese idiom “Don’t beat a dog that has just fallen in the water,” Lu Xun on the other hand argued, “A dog in the water may—or rather should—be beaten... All dogs that bite should be beaten” (Lu Xun, “On Deferring ‘Fair Play’” [Lun feie polai

yinggai huanxing] (1925) in *Lu Xun: Selected Works*, 2:228–29.) Sohigian writes, “The dog-in-the-water or ‘fair play’ debate seemed to be about the nature of discourse. Was the text to be a savage battleground or a convivial forum for the exchange of ideas? Should discourse be an ongoing playful sparring game where none seemed to win (Lin Yutang) or a fight to the death in which a winner had the final word (Lu Xun)? Could both kinds of discourse coexist?” (Diran John Sohigian, “The Rise of the Humor Phenomenon in Shanghai,” 147).

⁵⁵ Frederik Green, *A Chinese Romantic’s Journey through Time and Space*, 65–67. See original in “Paris Chitchat,” 46.

⁵⁶ Xu Xu, “Paris Chitchat,” 47.

⁵⁷ Xu Xu, “One Night in Luxembourg,” 105.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁹ Xu Xu, “Autumn in Louvain” from *Fragments from Abroad*, 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

⁶² Xu Xu, “Paris Chitchat,” 147.

⁶³ Xu Xu, “The Duel,” from *Sentiments from Abroad*, 146.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁶⁷ Xu Zhimo, *Fragments of Paris* [Bali de linzhao 巴黎的鱗爪] (Shanghai: Xinyue shudian, 1927), 2–3.

⁶⁸ Charles Laughlin devotes a chapter to this topic in *Literature of Leisure*: see Chapter 5 “Dreaming: From the Crescent Moon Group to the Beijing School,” 139–167.

⁶⁹ Xu Zhimo, *Fragments of Paris*, 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5

⁷¹ “Lin Yutang, 80, Dies; Scholar, Philosopher,” *The New York Times* (Mar. 27, 1976), 28, column 1.

⁷² Qian Suoqiao, *Liberal Cosmopolitan*, 3.

⁷³ Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, 278–279.

⁷⁴ Lin Yutang, “Preface,” *My Country and My People*, xvii.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁷⁶ Untitled Review, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1937), 1125.

⁷⁷ Chan Wing-Tsit, “Lin Yutang, Critic and Interpreter,” *College English*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Jan., 1947), 2. According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art press release for the “Bridging East and West” exhibit, “*My Country and My People* (1935) went through seven printings within four months and was translated into several European languages. His third book, *The Importance of Living* (1937), topped The New York Times' bestseller list for 52 weeks and was the most widely sold book in the United States in that year.” (<http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/press-room/exhibitions/2007/bridging-east-and-west-the-chinese-diaspora-and-lin-yutang>)

⁷⁸ Chan Wing-Tsit, “Lin Yutang, Critic and Interpreter,” 2.

⁷⁹ T.W.Y., Untitled Review, *Geography*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Dec., 1936), 315.

⁸⁰ Charlotte Tyler, Untitled Review, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Jun., 1936), 271.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁸² Untitled Review, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, 1125–126.

⁸³ See *XXWJ*, Vols. 13–15 on poetry [shige 詩歌]. Most of his poetry was composed between 1942–1944 but as I have mentioned his verse also appears frequently in his fiction and prose writing. McDougall writes about the five short volumes of poetry published as *Poetry at Forty* (1948), “his achievement here is to write poetry in the vernacular within the rules of formal structure as strictly applied as in classical verse.” (*The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*, 229.)

⁸⁴ *XXWJ*, Vol. 14, 197–198.

⁸⁵ Qian Suoqiao, *Liberal Cosmopolitan*, 181, citing Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, 14: “He explores the beauties and glories of the West, but when he comes back to the East, his Oriental blood overcoming him when he is approaching forty.”

⁸⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “The Solitary Traveler” in *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*, 286.

CONCLUSION

Capturing the International Imagination: Discoveries New and Old in Chinese Literature

Produced by Boston public TV, the Annenberg Foundation's *Invitation to World Literature* is an impressive multimedia series that offers online viewers the opportunity to learn about thirteen texts, ranging from the ancient Sumerian poem *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1998).¹ Each title is accompanied by historical context in the form of a timeline and map, a video of excerpts being read aloud and brief background information, as well as a glossary, a note on the translation, and something called "Experts' View," which is a series of interpretations by literary scholars about one selected passage from the text.

The program's "Introduction to World Literature" web page begins with two epigraphs: one about the power of literature and the imagination by Salman Rushdie, and the second taken from Liesl Schillinger's review of Louise Erdrich's *The Red Convertible – Selected and New Stories 1978–2008* (2009) in *The New York Times Book Review*. Schillinger muses, "[I]s the capacity for the quiet use of leisure, something essential to reading, on the wane? Isolation and insularity can afflict any land. One of the best cures is to read the finest literature from as many places as possible. Louise Erdrich might call it 'life medicine.'"² Schillinger's original piece was written partially in response to the Swedish Academy's secretary Horace Engdahl's blunt criticism of American literature in the fall of 2008: "The U.S. is too isolated, too insular. They don't translate enough and don't really participate in the big dialogue of literature."³ Schillinger argues that American literature such as Erdrich's writing actually benefits from its "Americanness,"

that these very qualities make up its appeal and its persistent ability to captivate “the international imagination,” whatever that may be.

Ironic that isolation and insularity have become the universal, defining characteristics of contemporary readers in the era of globalization. Engdahl’s critique and Schillinger’s response raise two interrelated issues that I wish to address in my conclusion: the idea that world literature is about finding the best literature from around the world, and the role that literary translation plays in the circulation of literature. The lead advisor (and main commentator in the videos) of the *Invitation to World Literature* series is none other than David Damrosch, author of *What Is World Literature?* Damrosch has argued that “world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike.”⁴

To return to Haun Saussy’s point that Chinese literature is important today because China is important today, the canon (to use a contested term) of modern Chinese literature in the West is still in its formative stages. The market for Chinese literature has changed drastically, even in the last two decades. Mabel Lee, the English translator of Gao Xingjian’s *Soul Mountain*, recalls how hard it was to stir up interest in her translations of Yang Lian and Gao Xingjian: “It was [...] up to me to find publishers during the 1990s, and that was a time when publishers in the English-speaking world had no interest in publishing Chinese writings, and even less interest in publishing translations of it.”⁵ How do literary scholars and translators determine which works qualify as the “finest” in any culture, and in the case of an added difficulty for China,

given that the canon of modern Chinese literature in China is itself still in the process of rewriting after the Maoist era? While these issues may seem abstract and insurmountable, they also present themselves as the ideal conditions for a reexamination of previously neglected works, such as the poetry of Li Jinfu or the travel essays of Xu Xu.

I have shown in this dissertation that there is intellectual value in studying literature and art that has previously been forgotten, either deemed too experimental, too apolitical, not serious enough, or not Chinese enough. The “international imagination” can only be stimulated by works that are given an opportunity to circulate on the international level. Li Jinfu’s poetry, Chang Yu’s painting, and Fu Lei and Xu Xu’s prose pieces should be available to readers interested in Chinese art and literature, not just as curiosities or aberrations, but moreover to be studied in the larger context of the political upheaval, and social and aesthetic movements of the 20th century. Outside of Lu Xun, if even that, few American readers can name any modern Chinese writers. If the goal of world literature is exposure to both “established classics” as well as “new discoveries,” the challenge seems to rest in making the latter. Unfortunately, translation for non-native readers remains the only available vehicle for unearthing unfamiliar literature. When Goethe first wrote about world literature in the early 19th century, he conceived of world literature as a network of ideas, most immediately, the circulation of his own writing and how his work was received internationally (in Europe). He believed that, “Left to itself every literature will exhaust its vitality, if it is not refreshed by the interest and contributions of a foreign one. What naturalist does not take pleasure in the wonderful things that he sees produced by a reflection in a mirror?”⁶ His concept of

“mirroring” (*Spiegelung*), the reflection of the writer’s self through the foreign press, has been accurately interpreted by scholars like Damrosch as an issue of national pride, as Goethe searched for Germany in literary works outside of Germany: “The wide world, extensive as it is, is only an expanded fatherland, and will, if looked at alright, be able to give us no more than what our home soil can endow us with also.”⁷ For Goethe, the “wide world” of Europe outside of Germany would serve as an affirmation of German culture.

In a way, the four travelers in my dissertation looked to France as China’s “expanded fatherland,” hoping that they too could see something of themselves in the French culture they studied, and potentially return home using their experiences abroad to affect change in China. But unlike Goethe, these Chinese writers and painters could not necessarily count on their own writing to circulate in Europe. As we have seen, Fu Lei and Chang Yu certainly contributed articles to French publications, and Dai Wangshu as well, but these were rare exceptions, and for the most part, the circulation of their literary work was limited to China. As a permanent resident in France, Chang Yu’s artwork received exposure in the European art circuit via exhibitions and art publications. I argued in my introduction that these young men chose to retreat to alternative spaces outside of the mainstream revolutionary ideology, due to their disenchantment with their experiences in France. These alternative spaces did not merely consist of the figurative space of dreams, the imagination, and traditional aesthetics, but moreover, all four travelers participated in the restless physical movement of relocation: Li Jinfa traveled in Europe and Singapore, worked in the 1940s as a diplomat for the KMT in Iraq and Iran, and eventually immigrated to the U.S., where he resided until his death in New York;

Chang Yu traveled to Japan, Europe, and the U.S.; Fu Lei was the sole figure to return permanently to China but he met his untimely death in the form of suicide during the Cultural Revolution; and Xu Xu studied in Europe and Japan before moving to Hong Kong after the war.

Without the extensive translation of their work, however, none of the travelers that I discuss in my dissertation could participate in the contemporary category of world literature as defined by Damrosch. Unable to “move into the world at large,”⁸ these precedents of world literature were limited by language despite their bilingual capabilities. Yu Dafu described the imaginary musings of his protagonist in his best-known story “Sinking” (Chenlun 沈淪, 1921): “Sometimes, when the mood struck him, he would translate his own stories into some foreign language, employing the simple vocabulary at his command. In a word, he was more and more enveloped in a world of fantasy, and it was probably during this time that the seeds of his *hypochondria* were sown.”⁹ Discussions about the May Fourth movement and the widespread practice of translation in the Republican period have typically been limited to the one-way street of translation, and emphasize how voraciously Chinese intellectuals were consuming Western culture, especially Western literature and philosophy by way of translation, either directly from French or German, for example, into Chinese, or through the middleman of Japan. Yu Dafu’s protagonist, however, is a reminder that there was equally a desire to translate from Chinese to a non-Chinese reader or audience. But Chinese intellectuals in the first half of the 20th century also possessed the realization that this desire was purely a fantasy, recognizing the impossibility of achieving that kind of global recognition.

Today, in the 21st century, world literature is “*writing that gains in translation.*”¹⁰ By that definition, Chinese-born writers Gao Xingjian and Dai Sijie’s work certainly qualifies. Both writers eventually moved to France for creative freedom. Not only has their work been translated into countless languages, but they have also written works entirely in French. Echoing Stephen Owen’s (in)famous criticism of the English translation of Bei Dao’s collection of poetry *The August Sleepwalker* as “watered-down Western modernism”: “Is this Chinese literature, or literature that began in the Chinese language?”¹¹ What happens when Chinese literature does not even begin in Chinese? For contemporary writers like Ha Jin and Yiyun Li (born in China but now living, writing, and working at American universities), the simple solution seems to be to classify them as Asian American writers. But for Dai Sijie at least, the decision to write in French is not a voluntary one: “With some money over the last three years, I had a dream that I would be able to write and live in China, but it hasn’t worked out. The censors won’t accept my books, films or projects. My dream of writing in my own language has not been fulfilled. It is very sad.”¹² Here the dream trope seems to have traveled full circle. Physical movement may be easier and more common now, and some contemporary Chinese writers have overcome the language barrier in a sense, yet the problem of writing in Chinese arises anew. The dream is no longer of traveling to the West—that has already been realized—but of being able to stay in China.

The act of writing in French continues to suffer from its own set of controversies. In 2007, forty-four writers, including Dai Sijie, signed a manifesto titled “Pour une ‘littérature-monde’ en français” (Towards a World Literature in French), which was published in the French newspaper *Le Monde*.¹³ Written after five out of the country’s

seven major book award wins were dominated by foreign-born writers in the 2006 literary awards season (Jonthan Littell of New York; Alain Mabanckou of Congo; Nancy Huston of Canada; and Léonora Miano of Cameroon), this group of authors called for an end of “francophone” literature and the birth of world literature in French.¹⁴ They asserted, “Let’s be clear: the emergence of a consciously affirmed, transnational world literature in the French language, open to the world, signs the death certificate of so-called Francophone literature. No one speaks or writes ‘Francophone.’” Calling Francophone literature “a light from a dying star,” the writers wondered, “How could the world be concerned with the language of a virtual country? Yet it was the world that invited itself to the fall prize banquets, and we now understand that it was time for a revolution.” The manifesto’s primary concern was with the essentially racist inequality in distinction between French literature as written by white writers born in France versus Francophone literature by those born for the most part in France’s former colonies. This inequity most blatantly manifested itself in the placement of books in French bookstores. As one American blogger sums it up, this phenomenon can be verified by what she calls the “Fnac test” (named after the French bookstore chain):

you walk into a French bookstore – the Fnac, La Hune, your local bookseller, whatever – armed with a list of writers: Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Nancy Huston, Alain Mabanckou, Marie N’Diaye, Dany Laferrière. Pre-2007, you would find Beckett, Camus, and Huston in the ‘littérature française’ section, and Mabanckou, N’Diaye, and Laferrière in the ‘littérature francophone’ section. They all write in French. Camus was born in North Africa, but is considered French, not francophone. Beckett was born in Ireland, Huston in Canada; English is their native language. Both appear in ‘French literature’ because at a certain moment in their lives they began to write in French. If a writer is white, then, he can produce ‘French literature’. If not – he’s ‘francophone’.¹⁵

But although these contemporary French writers called for “revolution,” they could not entirely detach themselves from or dismiss the ubiquitous but flawed award system. Much has been made of Gao Xingjian’s nationality as a French citizen since the announcement of his Nobel Prize in 2000, and while he himself has declared that, “Literature transcends national boundaries—through translation it transcends languages and then specific social customs and inter-human relationships created by geographical location and history—to make profound revelations about the universality of human nature,”¹⁶ the inclusion of his work under the category of world literature makes him fodder for criticism such as the following: “[M]ost world literature is valued as such not on the basis of any specifically literary excellence, but because those who control the global status hierarchy (the well-positioned literature professors and book reviewers, and, overlapping with these, the judges and administrators of the major literary prizes) systematically conflate literary value with social values, literary greatness with presumed political heroism, a more multicultural canon with a more democratic or socialistic or egalitarian world. ‘World literature,’ from the standpoint of this critique, is all ‘world’ and no ‘literature.’”¹⁷

Indeed most scholarship has focused on the Western qualities of Gao Xingjian’s work. A description of the Nobel laureate’s literary background reads as follows:

Having read a story by the francophone writer Ilya Ehrenburg recounting his bohemian lifestyle in the Paris of the 1920s, Gao decided to take up French... In 1975 he was assigned to *La Chine en construction* (the French edition of *China Reconstructs*) which gave him the opportunity to come into contact with French “foreign experts” and recent French literature. It was in the late 1970s that he first read the modern French writers Prévert, Sartre, Camus, Gide, Beckett, Genet, Ionesco, Butor, Robbe-Grillet, Ponge, Michaux and Proust. In 1977 Gao was given the responsibility of ordering foreign literary works for the Writers’ Association, which gave

him unparalleled access to the external literary scene. In 1978 he accompanied Ba Jin on an official visit to France, and in 1980 Ai Qing. It was then that he first made the acquaintance of several French sinologists and his future French translator, the co-author of this article, Noël Dutrait.¹⁸

Given this narrative alone, one cannot help but wonder why Gao Xingjian's physical relocation to France seems less integral than the non-physical characteristics that seemed to have formed him prior to his settling down in Paris in 1988, and his eventual permanent relocation post-Tiananmen or "self-exile" to France. Did these early experiences with French literature predetermine him to such a fate, and are they just as integral to his career, and his formation as a writer, as the physical move of relocation itself? Although the cultural, historical, and political contexts of the post-Mao period differ in many significant ways, Gao Xingjian's story too is reminiscent of the factors that influenced travelers to the West half a century earlier, in particular the figures of my dissertation, many of whom were first introduced to French culture through reading Chinese translations of French literature and themselves translating French literature into Chinese.

Gao Xingjian's career trajectory may, in fact, appear to corroborate Pascale Casanova's bold assertion that "It is plain that translation into French, owing to Paris' unique power of consecration, occupies a special place in the literary world...the prestige of translation into French had been unquestioned since the eighteenth century...the fact remains that the greatest English authors enjoyed truly universal recognition during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries only through the translation of their writings into French."¹⁹ As Gao Xingjian revealed to an interviewer, "I had to pick a place to exile myself, and Paris is the ideal place for artists, writers and painters. I'm able to do theater;

I'm able to direct. And it's been very easy for me to sell my paintings."²⁰ But as my dissertation demonstrates, Paris' "unique power of consecration" was far from universal. Chang Yu's decision to remain in France has even been interpreted by some as the reason why he was forgotten by historians: "Chang could have become an important artistic influence in China ... By remaining in Paris, Chang was nearly forgotten in the history of modern Chinese art."²¹ For many Chinese travelers to Paris in the first half of the 20th century, France was not the revolutionary haven they envisioned, in either the aesthetic or political sense. For the Chinese intellectuals that were able to write in French, it was difficult if not altogether impossible to find a receptive readership.

Of course there is another difference between the case of Li Jinfa, Chang Yu, Fu Lei, and Xu Xu beyond that of historical time, which is that writers like Gao Xingjian and Dai Sijie have chosen to relocate to France for the political and literary freedom. Gao Xingjian calls himself an exile, and while Dai Sijie does not consider himself as such, he has been living in France and shoots his films in France since China does not give him permission to do so in China. What they do have in common is that their displacement can easily fit in with the postcolonial discourse of "redemptive possibilities of dislocation" that has been critiqued by scholars like Ali Bedhad and Caren Kaplan if we are not too careful to distinguish their experiences from those of the "proletarian class of immigrants" they may sometimes be viewed to represent.²² There is room for much more work on the intersections of Chinese laborers in France, the Chinese work-study experience, and the intellectual study abroad movement.

Furthermore, beyond linguistic translation, their work transcends the boundaries of the literary medium: Gao Xingjian is also a prolific painter and playwright, and Dai

Sijie began his career as a film director. Born in China, Dai Sijie permanently relocated to France in 1984 after he was forbidden by Chinese authorities to make his films in China. His novel *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* was originally written in French (*Balzac et la petite tailleuse*, 2000) and translated into English in 2001. American literature might be celebrated for its quirkiness but critics inevitably hold Chinese literature up to a different standard. It is impossible to forget the contentious marketing advice of W.J.F. Jenner to Chinese writers: “So please don’t write for us, but write for your primary readers, leaving us to choose (by criteria that may well seem quite absurd to you) what may be accessible to us ignorant Anglophones. And don’t worry in the least about what we think. Few Anglophone authors lose sleep over their standing in China, and that seems like a good example to follow. Take whatever you like from abroad, but only what you need for your own purposes. Blind imitation of foreign models is unlikely to bring foreign recognition. Only what works in your own culture has any chance of surviving the transition to another.”²³ Never mind that *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* did not “work” in Dai Sijie’s “own culture,” but the novel’s appeal in the West seemed to hang precariously on its relationship to the author’s authentic experience.

For instance, a book reviewer in *The New York Times* complained: “*Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is a worthwhile book, but in many ways an unsatisfactory one. Its problem is that the tale is more interesting than the telling. Dai has elected to present his story as a fable rather than a realistic novel, a perfectly respectable choice except that the descriptions of life in this strangest of times and places are so riveting that the reader longs for more. Dai’s decision to streamline his narrative...work against the very real power of his material.”²⁴ Western readers were not looking for the universal

humanistic experience that was the overriding message of the novel, but the actual, real lived experience. Dai Sijie on the other hand explained his emphasis on the universal appeal of literature: “It wasn’t that I touched the Cultural Revolution...They [Chinese authorities] did not accept that Western literature could change a Chinese girl. I explained that classical literature is a universal heritage, but to no avail.”²⁵ Whether this was just one writer’s argument to appease Chinese authorities or not, his novel is a vehement love letter to the universal resonance of Balzac.

Curiously, Dai Sijie’s film adaptation was more successful in fulfilling viewer’s expectations. One critic writes that *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is “sweet, funny, sad and profound—the sort of film that becomes more remarkable when you realize it's based on someone's real life [...] It's everything that life can be, all wrapped in a story beautifully told about a country that occupies the American imagination more than ever these days. That this film was banned in China tells you how much China has not changed since the days of Mao. As Dai has told it, Chinese authorities were upset that the characters in *Balzac* are transformed by European literature. Couldn't Dai have found Chinese novels instead? No. This intersection between Chinese and Western culture is one of the underlying themes of a movie that finds its own ways to comment on the growing effects of globalization.”²⁶ The film critic’s claims that China has a place of prominence in “the American imagination” today is juxtaposed with the conflicting view of China as stagnant. In other words, “the growing effects of globalization” are the result of a changing America, not a changing China. This kind of celebration recalls Yingjin Zhang’s observation that Gao Xingjian “may have benefited from his unfortunate

disfavor in China, because such political disfavor may have boosted his international cultural capital and consolidated his status in world literature.”²⁷

Whether comparative literature still has a valid role to play in the era of globalization continues to be debated. I have suggested some new ways of studying modern Chinese literature using a cross cultural, interdisciplinary, and intermedia approach. Even if literature and culture’s transnational dimensions have finally been “universally recognized,”²⁸ and the battle over comparative literature as a field’s legitimacy is over, the challenge remains for the discipline to stay relevant. Comparative literature, as Haun Saussy argued in the 2004 ACLA report, “is best known, not as the reading of literature but as reading literarily (with intensive textual scrutiny, defiance, and metatheoretical awareness) whatever there may be to read.” According to Saussy back in 2004 the best course of action was to focus on comparative literature’s advantages over other fields, specifically *metadisciplinarity* and “literariness,” an “openness to new objects and forms of inquiry,” expanding its scope to include work outside of written texts and canons.²⁹

A mere four years later in 2010 the less desirable outcome seemed to have won out. As president of ACLA, Saussy reminds members in a letter, “Comparative literature occupies a particularly risky position. If the humanities are at risk generally, so much more so are foreign languages and literatures, which reside, as their name indicates, outside the experience of much of the public. A field that makes its contribution to knowledge by bringing together many foreign literatures will therefore seem irredeemably exotic. The methods by which comparatists develop their arguments— analogies, contrasts, paradigms—are also hardly crowd pleasing.”³⁰ He cites a *New York*

Times op-ed series about the role of the humanities in the wake of SUNY-Albany's decision to shut down its programs in French, Italian, Russian, classics, and theater.³¹ Addressing the call to bring back the humanities in the traditional sense, Saussy argues that an academic setting that prioritizes the study of Plato and Shakespeare has little room left for comparative literature. Once again, the conception of French literature as *passé* comes to the forefront, now in the context of university budget cuts and the student preference for areas of study that lead to more profitable careers in technology and finance.

The future of French literature as it stands may not look promising, but the growing field of modern Chinese literature offers the discipline of comparative literature three significant opportunities, which I believe my dissertation has demonstrated. On the most superficial but also perhaps most wide-reaching level, Chinese literature may just be marketable enough to be deemed relevant, and to convince naysayers of comparative literature that literature and culture are inextricably tied to the global economy. Secondly, modern Chinese literature is a particularly rich source of investigative material, and it provides the comparative scholar an endless number of nooks and crannies for overturning and rediscovering new and old artists, writers, filmmakers, musicians, playwrights—fascinating figures that have slipped through the cracks in the brutal and oftentimes violent process of nation-building and canon-writing. Saussy and Damrosch's shared project to search outside the canon is a shared concern of both comparative literature and world literature, and the Nobel Prize has ultimately demonstrated that the literary prestige of an international award is limited. Lastly, my project hopes to renew the ongoing conversation on the importance of translation. Not only is its linguistic

practice crucial in the two previous opportunities, furthermore the travelers in my dissertation have shown how translation in its various forms has been omnipresent in the creative process. We may be living in a “globalized and highly digitized world”³² today, but writers that preceded Gao Xingjian by half a century have already shown their commitment to literary experimentation, exploration, and innovation. Mabel Lee urges contemporary writers to “actively access writings in other languages, either by learning other languages and reading the original works, or by reading translations.” To avoid the human fate of insularity and isolation, we intrepid readers need only to follow in their footsteps.

¹ It is interesting to compare the promotional video on the Annenberg Foundation’s website (<http://www.annenbergfoundation.org/video/invitation-world-literature>) with the promotional material online for the series itself (<http://www.learner.org/courses/worldlit/about.html>). The former features various (famous) literary personalities and actors reading lines from works like Homer’s *Odyssey* and talking about the transcendental quality of great literature and its universal appeal—reasons why these particular texts have “survived”—whereas the latter emphasizes the element of literary diversity, the newness in “opening up a world of connections and experiences.”

² Liesl Schillinger, “All American,” *The New York Times Book Review*, Jan. 2, 2009. Accessed online <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/04/books/review/Schillinger-t.html>.

³ Charles McGrath, “Lost in Translation? A Swede’s Snub of U.S. Lit,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 4, 2008. Accessed online <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/05/weekinreview/05mcgrath.html>.

⁴ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 5.

⁵ Mabel Lee, “Of Writers and Translators,” National Library of Australia Conference: “The Flight of the Mind: Writing and the Creative Imagination,” (24 & 25 October 2009) [unpublished paper].

⁶ Quoted by Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 7.

⁷ Goethe, “Some Passages,” 10, quoted by Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 8.

⁸ Damrosch writes, “All works cease to be the exclusive products of their original culture once they are translated; all become works that only ‘began’ in their original language... works of world literature take on a new life as they move into the world at large, and to understand this new life we need to look closely at the ways the work becomes reframed in its translations and in its new cultural contexts” (22–24). As I mentioned in the last chapter, especially in contrast with Lin Yutang, Xu Xu is the one figure whose work has not been translated into English or French; how this is related to the way that Western academia has relatively ignored his work may be chicken-egg in nature.

⁹ Yu Dafu, “Sinking,” trans. Joseph S.M. Lau and C.T. Hsia in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, 38. The role of translation in the story has generally been read as symptomatic of the character’s “national inferiority complex.” See for example *The Lure of the Modern*, p. 116–117 and Kirk A. Denton, “The Distant Shore: Nationalism in Yu Dafu’s ‘Sinking,’” *CLEAR*, Vol. 14 (Dec., 1992), 107–123.

¹⁰ Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*, 281.

¹¹ Stephen Owen, “What Is World Poetry?” *The New Republic* (Nov. 19, 1990), 31.

¹² Alan Riding, “Artistic Odyssey: Film to Fiction to Film,” *The New York Times*, Jul. 27, 2005. Dai Sijie explores his relationship with the Chinese language and translation—and language in general—more directly in his most recent novel, *Once on a Moonless Night* (*Par une nuit où la lune ne s’est pas levée*, 2007; translated by Adriana Hunter, 2009). He has written five novels in French.

¹³ “Pour une ‘littérature-monde’ en français,” *Le Monde*, Mar. 16, 2007. English translation available in *World Literature Today* 83.2 (March–April 2009), 54–56.

¹⁴ Alan Riding, “In Paris, Language Sparks Culture War,” *The New York Times*, Mar. 31, 2007.

¹⁵ Lauren Elkin, “The End of Francophonie: The Politics of French Literature,” *The White Review*, Issue 2, Jun. 1, 2011. Extract online <http://www.thewhitereview.org/features/the-end-of-francophonie-the-politics-of-french-literature/>.

¹⁶ Gao Xingjian, “The Case for Literature” in *Nobel Lectures from the Literature Laureates, 1986 to 2006* (New York: New Press, 2007), 88. See also Yingjin Zhang, “Cultural Translation between the World and the Chinese: The Problematics in Positioning Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 31.2 (July 2005), 127–144. Zhang observes, “Gao the Nobel laureate has now found himself carrying an added value as a ‘political dissident,’ a banned writer in China whose aspiration for transcendence is ruthlessly compromised if not completely shattered by a concrete historical situation of *realpolitik*... The geocultural politics in the era of globalization thus sheds light on Gao Xingjian’s dilemma of struggling between his claim to creativity, individuality, and transcendence on the one hand, and the demand of translatability and universality in the contemporary cultural production and circulation of ‘world literature’ on the other” (141–142). Other works that discuss Gao Xingjian and the Nobel Prize include Julia Lovell’s *The Politics of Cultural Capital: China’s Quest for*

a Nobel Prize in Literature (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006) and Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*, 151–153.

¹⁷ James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 308.

¹⁸ Gregory Lee and Noël Dutrait, “Conversations with Gao Xingjian: The First ‘Chinese’ Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 167 (Sep., 2001), 738–739.

¹⁹ Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, 146.

²⁰ Paisley Rekdal, interpreted by Valerie Lincy, “The Way We Live Now: 12-10-00: Questions for Gao Xingjian; Found in Translation,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 10, 2000.

²¹ Eugene Y. Wang, “Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency,” p. 154.

²² See for instance Ali Behdad, “Postcolonial Theory and the Predicament of ‘Minor Literature’” in Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2005), 227; and Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

²³ W.J.F. Jenner, “Insuperable Barriers? Some Thoughts on the Reception of Chinese Writing in English Translation” in Howard Goldblatt, ed., *Worlds Apart: Recent Chinese Writing and Its Audiences* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 195.

²⁴ Brooke Allen, “A Suitcase Education,” *The New York Times*, Sep. 16, 2001.

²⁵ Alan Riding, “Artistic Odyssey: Film to Fiction to Film,” *The New York Times*, Jul. 27, 2005.

²⁶ Jonathan Curiel, “Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, Sep. 2, 2005.

²⁷ Yingjin Zhang, “Cultural Translation between the World and the Chinese: The Problematics in Positioning Nobel Laureate Gao Xingjian,” 141–142.

²⁸ Haun Saussy, “Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memes, Hives, and Selfish Genes” in Haun Saussy, ed., *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁰ Haun Saussy, “Letter from ACLA President Haun Saussy,” *Comparative Literature* Vol. 63 No. 1 (2011).

³¹ “Do Colleges Need French Departments?” *The New York Times*, (Oct. 17, 2010).

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/10/17/do-colleges-need-french-departments>.

See in particular Mark Bauerlein, “Where Dickson Fits In,” *The New York Times*, (Oct. 17, 2010). <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/10/17/do-colleges-need-french-departments/where-dickinson-fits-in>. Bauerlein explains that humanities departments have lost funding and appeal because “In recent decades, the humanities invested in ineffectual vogues. First, they embraced “high theory,” a blanket term covering abstract and dense models of interpretation such as deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Theory then took a personal/political turn and spotlighted racial and sexual identity. However much the topics inspired the faculty, though, they failed to attract students, and without enrollments those programs just don’t look affordable.”

³² Mabel Lee, “The Writer as Translator: On the Creative Aesthetics of Gao Xingjian,” *Culture in Translation: Reception of Chinese Literature in Comparative Perspective*, Kwok-kan Tam and Kelly Kar-yue Chan, eds. (Hong Kong: Open University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), 8. Lee cites Gao Xingjian and Lu Xun as two examples of writers who have explicitly explored the “bifurcation of the persona of the creative writer.”

APPENDIX



1. Chang Yu, oil on mirror, “An Autumn Poem” (undated)



2. Chang Yu, watercolor, “Nude With Full-Makeup” (1927)



3. Chang Yu, watercolor, “Kneeling Nude” (1928)



4. Chang Yu, oil, “Reclining Nude” (1930)



5. Chang Yu, oil, "Chrysanthemums in a White Vase" (1929)



6. Chang Yu, oil, "White Chrysanthemums" (1930s)



7. Chang Yu, oil, "Chrysanthemums in a Black Vase" (1930s)



8. Pang Xunqin, oil, "Such is Paris" (1931)

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