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“I Gave my Dreams to Liangshan:”

The Yi People in the Chinese Literary Imagination

By James Kennerly



Anthropology 169B:

Research Theory and Methods in Socio-Cultural Anthropology

Mariane C. Ferme

Who is this man? He slouches grotesquely on the earth, his belly hanging out and his legs contorted into a geometrically-impossible position. He clasps his pointy fingers around a rock that he nibbles delicately, reaching for more on the ground. I read about him:

People from the Land of Sanman eat earth. When the dead are buried, their hearts, lungs and livers don't decay, and after a hundred years they turn back into people. It is said that they are of the same kind as the people from the Land of No Legs and have the same customs as the Beast People (Hu 2001 [1593]).¹

I found this hunched man in the *Luo Chong Lu* (Record of Naked Creatures), a 16th-century woodblock-printed encyclopedia of foreign peoples, widely read and circulated among all classes of society (He 2013, 204). The terse description of this person from Sanman poses more questions than it answers—namely where is Sanman? This character, free from the constraints of time and space, doesn't eat like me, sit like me or die like me. But that's all I know about him. He lives in the soft pages of a string-bound volume, and when I close the book he stays with me. I fill in the details of his life missing from the *Record*, thinking about what I would say if I met him—what he thinks about and how he would react to the streets of Berkeley.

The literary universe is filled with people from Sanman—human mirrors that allow the reader to look at themselves through the eyes of an exotic Other. In Chinese literature, these mirrors often reflected from the edges of the empire, on the non-Chinese peoples who one day found themselves under Han Chinese control. These artistic representations, not unexpectedly, served to justify conquest and make the conquered appear less than human.

I am interested in the process of constructing an Other through words and pictures. Is this process simply, as Freud would say, a “narcissism of minor differences?” Are these writers just venting aggression by persecuting a minority (Freud 2010 [1929]: 99)? Or is the act of persecution itself an internal act, one that takes place first and foremost within the persecutor and

¹ All translations are my own except when noted.

his culture? Where does the power of stories about the Other come from, and what need do they fulfill for those telling them? How are ideologies of time and history employed in this effort? And what role does the Other play in debates on ethics and morality?

To answer these questions, I looked at another's Other: writings about non-Chinese people in Chinese literature. And to narrow my field of focus, I focused on depictions of one area in the Southwest of China—around present-day Liangshan Prefecture in Sichuan Province (see *Appendix A*). The people who live there are now referred to as the Yi but have been known by many other names throughout history (see *Appendix B*). I draw from three time periods—5th c. AD, the Cultural Revolution Era, and the Post-Mao Era. These choices certainly do not represent all Chinese literature about Liangshan, but rather demonstrate three very different modes of representing one group of people.

1.

The Later Han Dynasty came into being during the lifetime of Jesus Christ and controlled more territory than any previous Chinese empire. Its official history, the *Book of the Later Han*, was completed a full three centuries after the empire's collapse. Somewhere among the seven thousand pages that makes up this work's latest edition is a small story of no more than a few paragraphs.

In this story I read that sometime in the second half of the second century AD, a delegation of barbarians travelled seven hundred miles to the imperial capital to hold an audience with the Emperor Ming. Their country lay in the southern reaches of the Han Empire, a district called Zuodu (near present-day Liangshan; see *Appendix A*), recently brought under the rule of

the empire. Zuodu is portrayed as a mysterious and terrifying place, with tall mountains, “celestial beings” and “longevity medicine” (Fan 1998: 2342).

When the barbarians arrived in the imperial capital they were overwhelmed by the sight before their eyes: “palaces beautifully carved and painted with drawings of mountain spirits and ocean ghosts, strange and exotic animals: carved to impress and deceive” (Fan 1998: 2341). The barbarians presented three short songs to the Emperor Ming, which were then “transmitted to the historiographer who recorded them in the annals” in both English translation and a Chinese-character phonetic transliteration of the original language.² I render “The Song of Distant Barbarians Yearning for Virtue [*de*]” in full:

We barbarians [*Man Yi*] live in the land of the setting sun. Yearning for righteousness, we approach civilization and pledge loyalty to [*gui*] the Lord of the Rising Sun. With deep grace of sagely virtue [*sheng de*], you give many gifts to the people. You give us pleasant snow in the winter, and pleasing rain in the winter. Because of you, hot and cold come and go in their proper time. Thus, my tribe has plenty. We will go through danger and experience hardship—not considering ten thousand miles to be too far—to abandon custom and return to [*gui*] virtue. Our hearts pay homage to [*gui*] our loving mother (Fan 1998: 2343).

The perilous physical journey of the barbarians is the ground from which the ideological and figurative content of the song grows. The barbarian’s trajectory begins with darkness, unpredictable weather and custom. Then after the barbarian’s journey and the emperor’s pleasing rain, the barbarians’ world fills with light virtue. The general attitude of the Confucian ruling class toward non-Chinese peoples is well encapsulated in the phrase “abandon custom and return to virtue.” While discourse about the *Yi* in popular Chinese literature has gone through varied cycles of change, official Confucian discourse toward barbarians remained remarkably consistent from the first known mention of the *Yi* in the three thousand-year-old *Classic of Poetry* to

² These songs, known now as the “Bailang Songs [*Bailang Ge*],” have generated a great deal of scholarship in China and elsewhere. Based on a reconstruction of ancient Chinese phonetics, Chen Zhongxiang and others determined that the songs share a common root with the modern-day Prmi and Naze ethnic groups who live in neighboring areas to the *Yi* (Chen and Deng 1990). The “Bailang Language,” known only from these songs, thus constitutes the earliest attested language (aside from Chinese) of the Trans-Himalayan/Sino-Tibetan language family (Hill 2017).

Republican documents on Liangshan from the 1940s. This discourse is dominated by a discourse of ethical failure, most commonly the lack of *de*, one of the five cardinal virtues of Confucian ethics. *De* is a broad category of all the qualities one cultivates within oneself and one's subordinates. It is the basis of Confucian traditions of self-improvement and governance.

The *Book* refers to the inhabitants of Zuodu with the term *Man Yi* 蠻夷. *Yi* 夷 is a general character for “barbarian” or “outsider” (not to be confused with the other *Yi* 彝, a far more specific ethnic designation used after 1949). *Yi* 夷 is a “combined meaning” [*huiyi*] character composed of a person (大) and a bow (弓). *Yi* originally referred to the peoples of Eastern China (Jiangsu and Anhui), a prosperous and fertile region. Thus, one connotation of *Yi* is “peaceful,” “level” or “smooth.” But as the ancient dynasties of China's Central Plain increasingly came in conflict with the peoples of the East, *Yi* developed its more common (and pejorative) meaning—that of “barbarian” or “foreigner” (Yu and Liu 2010: 140). *Man* 蠻 is a more specific term that refers to the barbarians of the Southwest of China (the same character in the term *Sanman* from the *Luo Chong Lu*). Its classifying radical [*yifu*] is *chong* (虫), meaning insect or snake. This appears to arise from the association of the South with hot and humid weather, and with that a proliferation of dangerous animals that would appear exotic and threatening to Northerners (Yu and Liu 2010: 192).

The poem describes the barbarians' physical journey using the verb *gui*, which means “return to” or “converge upon,” like, as the song says, a child “returning to his mother.” It also means “pledge loyalty to” like the barbarians' gesture towards the emperor. Custom *gui*-ing to virtue” means that the *Man Yi* arrives at mankind's natural state, which in the Confucian tradition means *de* (virtue) (see *Mencius* 6A.2 and 6A.8). This journey is described as a perilous process: “Han takes us by the hand and we move toward [*gui*] kindness [*ren*], through dangerous and

narrow straights, across tall mountains and jagged peaks." Interestingly, the *Man Yi*, in accepting the rule of the Han Dynasty, figuratively move back in time. Custom infects the pre-existing human condition of virtue, just as the *Man Yi* are a modern deviation from the path of the sagely Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC-256 BC) kings.

Indeed, these narratives' sociological function is to justify the conquest of non-Chinese peoples, but they have an additional effect on the reader. Confucian official histories like the *Book of the Later Han* were didactic texts, written to cultivate effective and moral officials (Ng 2005). In the Confucian tradition, personal ethics and political ethics were intimately connected; one becomes a benevolent ruler by acting correctly in one's family and extending that model to the state (see *Mencius* 1.7). Therefore, the thousands of anecdotes and records in the *Book* contain practical information about events but are also parables on personal conduct.

For example, later in the *Book* there is an unresolved debate about whether it debases the ruler to govern the *Man Yi* of modern-day Hunan, Hebei and Guizhou: "The ancient sagely kings did not accept those of different customs as his subjects. It was not that they could not achieve virtue [*de*], or that their power could not be controlled; rather it was because they had the hearts of beasts, filled with unending greed. Thus, we could not use the rites [*li*] to make them submit" (Zhang 1998: 2329). The *li* (rites) are the foundation of Confucian ritual self-purification, defined in opposition to the behavior of the barbarians. For example, in the Book of Rites [*Li Ji*]: "To give free rein to one's feelings is to imitate the barbarians...(who) in happiness sing, swaying as they sing, gesticulating as they sway" (in Granet 1975 [1922]: 108).

Without the rites, a ruler resorts to brute force to maintain power, deviating from the path of the sagely kings and forfeiting his humanity [*ren*]. This discussion demonstrates an important ethical dilemma at the heart of Confucianism that extends beyond the *Man Yi*: to what extent can

a superior person (ruler, husband, elder brother, etc.) improve his inferiors (servants, wives and younger brothers)? When are one's inferiors too depraved to be changed at all? And when does this process of changing others corrupt oneself?

Another famous passage highlights this tension. The *Book of the Later Han* claims that the *Man Yi* were descended from the mythical Chinese emperor Gao Xinshi (reigned B. C. 2436-2367). In a bizarre story, the *Book* explains how Emperor Gao's plan to capture a rebel leader went terribly wrong. After he offered his daughter's hand in marriage in return for the rebel's life, it was the Emperor's brightly-colored dog *Panhu*, not one of his human subjects, that returned with the rebel's head. Unable to break his word, the Emperor marries his dog to his daughter:

Panhu got the girl and fled to the Southern mountains with her on his back, lodging in a stone room. This room was in a place steep and dangerous, unreachable by man. Then the woman tossed aside her clothes and did her hair in the style of peasants and put on rough clothes for manual labor. The emperor bitterly longed for his daughter and sent out messengers to find her. But because of the gloomy weather, the heavy wind, rain snow and the rumbling thunder, every messenger he sent were unable to proceed (Fan 1998: 2328).³

Eventually, the dog and the Emperor's daughter have five children together, who then marry among themselves to create the *Man Yi*. This story explicitly connects barbarians with the peasantry, a common theme in Confucian literature. But it also describes cultural difference through the metaphor of kinship. The *Man Yi* are estranged brothers of the Chinese people, separated from the family by the double taboos of bestiality and incest. Interestingly, the description of Emperor Gao trying to save his daughter—with the “gloomy weather, the heavy wind, rain snow and rumbling thunder”—resembles narratives about conquest of non-Chinese regions in the *Book of the Later Han*. Indeed, conquest is just part of the struggle to restore the unity of one's family and allow one's lost relatives to return home.

³ Interestingly, this myth is also told by several southwestern ethnic groups as their creation story (Yang 2005: 52).

2.

A comic book from 1975 fits neatly into a pocket. On its cover is a striking orange-tinted photograph of a man wearing a black turban. His lips are pursed, his brows are furrowed, and he glares powerfully into the distance. He holds his fist in the air, his fingers clasped tightly around a broken metal chain. Bold characters spell out the book's title: *Never Let Slavery Make a Comeback in Liangshan*. The typeface is very slightly exotic—with strokes almost, but not quite perfectly, square.

After I flip through five pages of quotes by Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin at the beginning of the book, I arrive at the preface. I learn about a place called Liangshan—one of the few modern examples of a “slave society”—where the means of production, as well as the workers themselves, are owned by a class of slave owners. In the system of cultural evolution proposed by L. H. Morgan and edited by Friedrich Engels, the slave society is the second stage of social development (see Engels 1942 [1884]; Marx 1965 [1858]). This idea came to China mainly through Stalin's works (1952 [1938]).

And in these small pages I see a character that seems to me out of place—*man* 蠻 (southern barbarians). I remember this character from the *Book of the Later Han*. How could this ancient ethnic designation still be found in descriptions of the Yi, some two thousand years after it first came into use?

Over the centuries, *man* slowly became used figuratively in other word combinations through the process of metaphorical extension [*yinshen yi*]. In modern Chinese, *man* has several usages. By itself it is an intensifier like “crazy” in the colloquial English phrase “crazy good.” Joined with *ye* (wild or rough) it becomes *yeman*: “uncivilized” or “savage,” as used in translations of, for example, Bronislaw Malinowski's “The Sexual Life of Savages” or L. H.

Morgan's ethnological work. *Never Let Slavery Make a Comeback in Liangshan* uses the word *yeman* to talk about pre-revolutionary Liangshan's slave system:

"The dark and barbarous [*yeman*] Old Liangshan is already gone, never to return, and the socialist New Liangshan takes great strides forward. Just as the rushing waters of the Golden Sand [*Jinsha*] River will never flow backwards, the great Yi people of Liangshan will never let the slave system make a comeback" (SLYAPEC 1975: 5)!⁴

To understand the meaning of *yeman* in *Never Let Slavery Make a Comeback in Liangshan*, it is useful to trace the concept of 'barbarism' through the 20th century. Lu Xun, the great revolutionary writer of the early 20th-century, interpreted Western theories of evolution and progress, creating a distinctly Chinese frame of thought that helped to explain the colonialism, war, and economic stagnation of the previous century (Jones 2011). His most popular work, the novella *A Q Zhengzhuàn* (The Real Story of Ah Q), distills his notions of Chinese cultural backwardness, superstition and exploitation into the character of Ah Q: a drug-addicted, illiterate, gambling, seasonal worker who falls prey to the desires of imperialists, bandits and feudal lords (Lu 2009a [1921]: 78). Lu Xun's work attempts to wake his compatriots from their unconsciousness and complacency, injecting them with a dose of fierce (wounded) nationalism and the goal of development on Chinese terms (see Lu 2009b [1922], 15; Jones 2011).

We must understand *Never Let Slavery Make a Comeback in Liangshan*—especially its discussion of Yi religion—in this context. For example:

Xide County Heboluo Commune Poor Peasant Association Vice-Chairperson Ergu Liuniu's child was only three years old when a slave owner's son fell ill. The *bimo*⁵ (a superstition professional) intimidated the slave owner with spirits, stupidly saying: 'A ghost has taken the little master's heart. Unless he gets better, you must find a young slave and throw him off a cliff to replace his death.' In this way, Ergu Liuniu's child met his end (SLYAPEC 1975, 38).

Ergu, like all the Yi people in *Never Let Slavery Make a Comeback in Liangshan*, is a "character" in the sense described by Alasdair MacIntyre and Xin Liu: "...moral beliefs and

⁴ This work, like most other publications from Mao's era, is collectively and anonymously authored. It is attributed to the Sichuan Province Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture Exhibition Center.

⁵ Yi shaman.

ideas...[consisting] of images stored in a number of characters whose meaning is directly accessible in everyday situations” (Liu 2002: 23). Ergu transcends Liangshan and exists outside space and time as the essential example of oppression and backwardness.

In effect, the same condition of ignorance and cultural underdevelopment that caused her son’s death is also the cause of China’s defeat to imperialist powers in the 19th and 20th centuries—*yeman* (barbarism). Ergu Liuniu plays the same rhetorical function as Lu Xun’s character of Ah Q—attempting to break through the reader’s culturally-imposed unconsciousness and shape the reader into a good socialist person—in the words of Lenin quoted in the work: to make “the slave discover his own status as a slave.”

Lu Xun’s ideas found a champion in Mao Zedong, who saw himself as an intellectual descendent of Lu (Lu 2017). One example of this connection is *yeman*, which Mao uses in only one context—describing the cruelty of Japanese imperialism. In the work *On Protracted War*, Mao says, “On top of Japan's regressive [*tuibu*; lit. ‘step backwards’] quality, its imperialism also has a military-feudal quality. These conditions create the special savagery [*yeman*] of Japanese warfare... and are the reasons for its inevitable failure (Mao 1991 [1938]: 122).

As we can see, the Chinese leftist idea of “barbarism” discursively merges Japanese imperialism, Chinese feudal lords and Yi slave owners. Therefore, Chinese Communist literature about Liangshan casts Yi society as a remnant of the (Confucian) Chinese past:

Cockfucius⁶ obeisantly defended the declining position of wealthy slave owners, campaigning for them left and right, attempting to restore the governing order of the Western Zhou Slave Society. The Zhou is just history from some two thousand years ago, but in pre-liberation Liangshan, there existed a thriving slave society (SLYAPEC 1975: 2).

Another work of literature from the same year evocatively states that the 1956 Chinese Communist Party (CCP) reforms implemented in Liangshan allowed the Yi to “cut across one

⁶ My best attempt to translate a pejorative name for Confucius “Kong Lao’er,” a portmanteau of Confucius’ family name Kong and *lao’er*, a Beijing dialect slang word for male genitals.

thousand years in one step” (“Slaves Create History” 1975: 3). Ethnological fieldwork allows one to personally meet people like those of the Western Zhou Dynasty—Confucius’ revered utopia and another “slave society” in the Morgan-Engels paradigm. *Minzu gongzuo* (ethnic work)—research, modernization and development projects among the minorities—attempts to bring every Chinese citizen into the present. It is therefore part of the modernist project that aims to sculp the Chinese past into a great curve of unceasing development and growth (see Koselleck 2004). The 1956 reforms were part of this project of national self-purification. They exorcized elements of underdevelopment and barbarism not only from the Yi, but from China’s national body.

We now have enough background to understand the word *yeman*, and by proxy, the role of Liangshan in the Chinese communist discursive sphere. Roman Jakobson distinguishes between three possible functions of a symbol, put simply: referencing a specific object, referring to the act of communication itself or “indexing an entire referential frame” (Jakobson 1957: 131; Briggs 1986: 53). *Yeman* is an adjective that lacks an explicit reference. Instead, its meaning emerges by indexing a referential frame and evoking categories of people, things and ideas. Before Lu Xun, this referential frame was mainly constructed with the Confucian discourse around the “Southern Barbarians” that I discussed in the previous section. But after the revolutions of the 20th century destabilized the traditional Confucian idea of civilization, the referential frame of *yeman* dramatically shifted, now referencing class oppression—like, for example, the violence of Japanese imperialism.

The character *man* is a good illustration of the intellectual road taken by the communists on their way to Liangshan. It is not enough to argue that the evolutionary paradigm of the CCP is just a modern form of Confucian moralism toward minorities (see McKhann 1994: 42).

Instead, it is important to consider CCP literature on the Yi in the larger universe of Chinese leftist thought and examine the connections it draws—specifically between violence in Yi society and violence in Chinese society.

Indeed, the “Liangshan Slave Society” idea was an abyss into which Chinese communists could gaze. It was a Platonic form of uniquely Chinese experiences—an extreme embodiment of Chinese history, class oppression and imperialism. And the image of the heroic Yi person revolting against the Slave Society was the distilled essence of Mao Zedong’s project and China’s new category of the model socialist person. The Yi represented the darkest moments of the Chinese past as well as the brightest hopes of a Chinese future.

3.

I met You Yeke through typed words on a computer screen from a Chinese-language online magazine based in Maryland. He is an elderly man who now lives a quiet and calm final chapter of a lifetime of struggles: the “free, individual and completely optional” (You 2018a) venture of emigrating to Canada, and his work during the Cultural Revolution, a collective and involuntary project “for the country, under the sacred banner of all mankind.” But now, in his peaceful Canadian home, You is free to recall the worlds he previously inhabited. He explains, “Separated by many years, people and events, once clear, slowly become blurred... Only the tool of storytelling can straighten them out.” His stories have clear heroes and villains, linear paths of social decline, and even morals—things one rarely encounters in real life.

One of these stories, published online, is *Those Mountain People, Those Mountain Times*. It explains how You Yeke became a *zhiqing* (“educated youth”) in 1969, one of the millions of young people relocated from Chinese cities to the countryside (in You’s case Liangshan). They

were to be reeducated by the peasants as part of Mao Zedong's "Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement."

You Yeke's work is part of the Educated Youth remembrance movement that commemorates the complicated experience of Educated Youth in novels, cinema and museums (Wang 2011). But *Those Mountain People, Those Mountain Times* also reflects a shift in literary representations of Liangshan after the death of Mao Zedong. Though academic ethnological literature continued to focus on the Marxist questions of social history and class oppression, popular Chinese writers discovered another Liangshan.

This new body of literature highlights new themes—ecology, subjectivity and madness—that drew from the traditional archive of 'barbarian' literature but responded to vast social changes of the transition to a market economy. For one, the Yi are now an economic underclass and migrate to the cities in great numbers to find work (see Liu 2011). Also, this New China lacks the reverence of the past of pre-revolutionary Confucian China, as well as Mao's promise of a bright communist future. In this present-focused China, Xin Liu says, "...time has lost its depth, and the world has become one of constancy and instantness" (Liu 2002: 161).

You remembers a different China than that of the present, represented by a "mountain path [*shandao*]" in Liangshan:

Of the countless paths I have walked in my life, this one carved the deepest mark in my memory... This mountain path, concealed by the thick pine forest, divided the highest point of Huadan Commune—the Xia Family Ridge—into two... Under the rocky mountain peak that looked out east toward the Jinsha River was one mountain road that led to the layers of mountains and ancient forests of Huidong (You 2018b).

The character used in "mountain path," *dao* 道, can literally mean "road" or "trail" but also represents a foundational concept in Chinese philosophy, meaning the "way" of the universe in Daoism, or in Confucianism the *xian wang zhi dao* (way of the former [Zhou Dynasty] kings)

(see *Analects* 1.12). In other words, “the mountain path” could also be “the way of the mountains.”

You Yeke identifies Liangshan’s “mountain path” as an embodiment of pure ethics that has been destroyed by the New China. This process is embodied in the character of Poppa Xia, whom he met during his time as an Educated Youth: “With his back hunched and stooping, his body was hardly as sturdy as that in the legends. But that pair of eyes, still bright and full of spirit, stated clearly his status as a hunter” (You 2018b). This description resonates with the American “noble savage” artistic trope embodied in James Earle Fraser’s iconic 1915 sculpture “The End of the Trail”—which somberly depicts the “last” American Indian being driven over a cliff into the Pacific Ocean (see Grandin 2019).

Another writer takes a related but opposite approach to You Yeke. “Soul-Splitting Liangshan” by Zhang Hongyue (2013) is a novella that follows two Educated Youth in Liangshan. Instead of glorifying Liangshan as a noble remnant of the past, it uses Liangshan as the staging ground for a dark psychological horror narrative. The Educated Youth encounter Yi women who occasionally stop by their work camp to chat—objects of curiosity and sexual desire—described as “plump and fertile, with touching, twinkling, eyes” (Zhang 2013: 7). But the Yi are not significant actors in the story. Far more significant is the forest itself, which is indeed a *character* in MacIntyre’s sense.

For example, after the death of the narrator’s good friend in a logging accident, the narrator writes: “At this point I finally could comprehend these layers of mountains and dense forest. They kill people, like squashing an ant. In this place, human life becomes worth less than one metal coin” (Zhang 2013: 15). It is suggested that the forest also makes one of the characters—“Woman #28”—insane. The forest (and the Yi Nation by extension), embodies

psychological, as well as political, anarchy, and stands in for fear, hunger, physical pain and boredom. In the first paragraph of the piece, Zhang writes:

I let years slip away. Memory becomes entertainment, and I look back and think it was always this beautiful. But when I distantly gaze at my spent teenage years, I suddenly wake up with a start. I have given my dreams to the mysterious forest of Liangshan (Zhang 2013: 4).

There is some resonance between this passage and Xin Liu's view of post-reform China as increasingly cut off from both past and future. In You's account, history is nothing but individual memory, which dies with the body. But Zhang evocatively claims that his future has been similarly foreclosed, when he "gave my dreams to the mysterious forest of Liangshan." This forest has left the narrator stranded in the present.

In a slightly darker interpretation, the forest is simply a stand-in for the Yi. Shao-hua Liu describes the related epidemics of heroin use and AIDS in Liangshan in her medical ethnography of the area. She describes how stigma surrounding heroin use and AIDS drastically changed Han residents' perception of Liangshan and the neighboring areas. She says, "Many residents [of Chengdu] came to believe that all Nuosu [Yi] youths must be drug users or dealers, as well as thieves" (Liu 2011: 71). I cannot help but see the parallels between this discourse of drug use and illness, on one hand, and Zhang Hongyue's description of the "soul-splitting" ancient forest of Liangshan on the other. The forest, like the Yi, is the embodiment of a new, uniquely capitalist, mode of criminality. Or have we returned to a theme from the *Book of the Later Han*, where people are like "dangerous straights, tall mountains and jagged peaks?" Has Zhang revived an old type of racism, one that considers more than just *human* difference?

* * * * *

I still don't know where to put Sanman and its earth-eating people on my map. But using the sources I have just presented, I can make an educated guess. Judging from the *Book of the Later*

Han, Sanman is somewhere beyond the border of the known and the unknown, in the depths of night and winter, where virtue, like cereal grains, lays rotting in the fields. From the evidence presented in the Educated Youth narratives, we can conclude that Sanman is just as far away but is not immediately visible. It may not, after all, be inhabited by earth eating savages, but rather an earth-eating psychology, either good or bad depending on who you ask. But according to the leftist literature, Sanman is not as far away as we might think. It is not beyond China's border, but in its very center—in the hallways of the Forbidden Palace and in the streets of Shanghai. As Lu Xun tells us:

It appears that in the society of a well-cooked civilization, sometimes there emerges—suddenly and unmistakably—a hair-eating-blood-drinking barbarian spirit [*manfeng*]. This barbarian spirit doesn't come from barbarism's [*many*] advance to civilization, as if one were beginning to write a character on white paper. No, it comes from civilization's decline to barbarism, like a paper already black from layers and layers of characters (1983 [1926]: 300).

All three models I looked at use the Other to highlight some supposed truth about one's society too terrifying to be confronted on its own. Lu Xun's admonition is so threatening because in these circumstances, destroying the distinction between oneself and the Other is blasphemous. Historically, racial categories, stories about degeneracy and images of difference have been promoted by those in power to divide their subjects (see Cox 1948). But my sources show that what makes this strategy effective is the fact that this rhetoric becomes a vibrant and essential part of every-day life, one that allows people to think about ethics, identity and history in seemingly new ways.

Should I be surprised that Lu Xun's discovery of the nearness of Sanman was soon forgotten? That the earth-eaters were once again banished to the frontier? Should I be concerned that the Liangshan Slave Society has morphed back into a hazy forest of dreams, like adolescence fading to old age? No, just as the "Golden Sand River will never flow backwards," the history of the Other will drift on.

Appendix A: Map of Southern China (Original; public domain background map created by Wikipedia user Joowwww).



Red Line: Approximate boundary of Later Han Empire.

Purple: Present day Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture.

Brown: Approximate location of Zuodu.

Appendix B: Glossary of Chinese terms (cf. Manser 1986; Yu and Liu 2010).

Character (simplified)	Romanization	Meaning
道	dào	Road, way, method, doctrine.
德	dé	(Confucian) virtue, morals.
歸 (归)	guī	To return, converge upon, marry.
孔老二	Kǒng Lǎo'èr	Pejorative nickname for Confucius.
禮 (礼)	lǐ	(Confucian) rite or ceremony, standard for conduct.
凉山	Liángshān	Prefecture in Sichuan Province (lit. “cool mountains”).
蠻 (蛮)	Mán	Southern barbarians.
蠻風 (蛮风)	mán fēng	Lu Xun’s neologism: “barbarian habits.”
民族工作	mínzú gōngzuò	“Ethnic work” (wide term for development projects among the minorities).
奴隸社會 (奴隶社会)	núlì shèhuì	Slave Society.
仁	rén	(Confucian) humanity, benevolence.
退步	tuìbù	Regressive, reactionary (lit. step backwards).
先王	Xiān Wáng	The former (Zhou Dynasty) kings.
野蠻 (野蛮)	yěmán	Savage, barbarous, uncivilized.
夷	Yí	Barbarian, foreigner.
彝族	Yízú	The Yi nationality (after 1949).
知青	Zhīqīng	“Educated Youth” (sent to rural areas during the “Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement”).

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