Explores new ways to understand the dynamics of change and mobility in ideas, people, organisations and cultural paradigms.

China is in flux but – as argued by the contributors to this volume – change is neither new to China nor is it unique to that country; similar patterns are found in other times and in other places. Indeed, on the basis of concrete case studies (ranging from Confucius to the Vagina Monologues, from Protestant missionaries to the Chinese avant-garde) and drawing on theoretical insights from different disciplines, the contributors assert that change may be planned but the outcome can never be predicted with any confidence. Rather, there exist creative spaces within which people, ideas and systems interact with uncertain outcomes. As such, by identifying a more sophisticated approach to the complex issues of change, cultural encounters and so-called globalization, this volume not only offers new insights to scholars of other geo-cultural regions; it also throws light on the workings of our ‘global’ and ‘transnational’ lives today, in the past and in the future.
Creative Spaces
CREATIVE SPACES

Seeking the Dynamics of Change in China

Edited by

Denise Gimpel, Bent Nielsen and Paul J. Bailey
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Acknowledgements

Getting a book manuscript ready for printing is a daunting task and one that takes much patience and attention to detail. It more often than not also entails the guiding and, at times, disciplining of individual contributors to ensure a publication that appears as quickly as possible and has something genuine to add to and enhance our knowledge of a particular area of scholarly investigation. Having said this, however, it has to be admitted that the activities leading to the appearance of this book have been marked by collegial cooperation and disciplined and constructive involvement on the part of all participants. The result, we feel, is a new look at old questions as well as the provision of insights into topics little known or addressed in studies to date. We feel that we have indeed made a contribution to the continuing research into transnational phenomena in their many guises.

The results, of course, did not appear overnight; it has taken many years of cooperative involvement to bring these pages to fruition. It all began some six years ago in the autumn of 2006, when, at the invitation of Shen Hong, Paul Bailey and Denise Gimpel attended the first Sino-Western Conference in Hangzhou, and it continued in 2008, when they, together with Bent Nielsen and Peter Damgaard, attended and co-organised the second conference in Hangzhou. Thus the very productive cooperation between Zhejiang University, Durham University and the University of Copenhagen began. This cooperation has meant new friends and colleagues for researchers and new opportunities for study abroad for students in each of the universities. For this we are very grateful and look forward to further common research and educational activities. We are especially looking forward to the upcoming third conference in Hangzhou in November this year and the possibility of a future conference in Durham.

This book was also brought about as a result of support from the University of Copenhagen, in particular of the Asian Dynamics Initiative (ADI), which supported our workgroup on two occasions in 2010 and 2011. Here we have benefited from and been grateful for the highly professional advice and help of ADI coordinator Marie Yoshida. We also thank the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at Copenhagen University for providing us with the facilities for our symposia. The Department, moreover, as its name
suggests, has been unfailing in its support of our Sino-European and cross-cultural endeavours.

As editors we must also express our gratitude to the contributors to this volume and for their willingness to continue with the project over a long period of time. We are proud of the fact that they include both experienced Chinese and European scholars as well as young and promising scholars at various stages of their academic careers. We are also proud of the fact that we have been able to bring together many different disciplines within the scope of our activities and the pages of this book. It almost goes without saying – but must be said – that we may not have had the opportunity to express our pride and pleasure without the faith and trust placed in us and our endeavours by NIAS Press and its editor-in-chief, Gerald Jackson. Gerald’s generosity and good humour are unfailing.

Finally we must extend our appreciation to Jessica Chabert Jensen without whose hard work and dedication the passage from idiosyncratically formatted manuscript to uniform book would never have gone so smoothly and professionally. As a patient, reliable and meticulous copy editor, Jessica’s contribution, though hidden from sight, has been absolutely invaluable.
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Editors’ Notes

1. The *pinyin* system of transcription has been used throughout the book, except in quotations from sources using other systems.

2. The following abbreviations are used in the book:

   ADI: Asian Dynamics Initiative  
   ARC: *Annual Report of the Committee of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East, One-Hundred-and-Twenty-Fourth Year*  
   BFA: Beijing Film Academy  
   CMS: Church Missionary Society  
   GAD: Gender and Development  
   NGI: Non-Government Initiated  
   NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation  
   PRC: People’s Republic of China  
   QWLAC: Qianxi Women’s Legal Aid Centre  
   SDA: Sanchuan Development Association  
   TVM: *The Vagina Monologues*  
   UNDP: United Nations Development Programme  
   YRHRA: Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association
Introduction

Denise Gimpel

This book has emerged from common interests among a small group of China scholars, interests in mobility, ideas and the manner in which things new and different can be integrated into national, personal and artistic narratives. After having met at various international conferences and established this common interest, it was our great fortune that the University of Copenhagen created a platform within which we could meet and seriously exchange our thoughts and questions. The ‘Asian Dynamics Initiative’ (ADI) focuses, as its name implies, on the dynamics of interaction both between the various regions of Asia and between Asia and non-Asia. This was an ideal context for the contributors to this volume to investigate the manner in which ideas, definitions, individuals and groups have moved between China and other areas of the world as a first step to map out new insights into the dynamics of mobility. That this can only be a first step in an undertaking that is broad and complex is adequately illustrated by the overarching theme that we outlined. It is an ambitious framework aimed at both opening up a field of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research and, more importantly, inviting further research:

Throughout history ideas have moved at different speeds and for enormously different reasons. The flow of ideas between East and West has been particularly intense since the 19th century. The flow within Asia has a far longer history. With each exchange, the original idea, concept or imaginaire changes those who espouse it and is changed by them. Thus traditional concepts are rarely ousted by the new. They are more likely to be enriched or modified and to accommodate the new or be accommodated to it. Reflections of these borrowings and reworkings can be found in both the concrete organisations and institutions within a society (for instance political, legal, educational systems), in the various genres of scholarly and creative writing and in cultural artefacts. A broad interdisciplinary study of the processes and results of inclusion and rejection, of acceptance and resistance that developed as a result of intercultural exchanges and
borrowings can provide an excellent basis for a new understanding of the complex mechanisms involved in the appropriation of the new in a broad variety of cultural contexts in Asia. By investigating the manner in which philosophical, religious, historiographical, political, social, literary or artistic concepts have travelled between East and West and within the East over time, we can develop a broad conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of cultural contact both historically and in the present.¹

The eight chapters of his book, then, are largely about change, change through mobility. Yet the book is also about continuity. It is about China and yet it also engages with many parts of the world outside China, both as concrete places visited or as places imagined or defined from within China. We are concerned with change that is sometimes embedded in cultural continuity as well as continuity that shines through change. Moreover, the topics addressed here go beyond the national boundaries of China and engage with transnational phenomena in many ways. This complex mix and overlap of the national and the foreign in which clear-cut boundaries resist definition and lack reliability is, in many ways, the characteristic of our times, and yet the various contributions to this volume show clearly that it has been a constant of all times. The contributions all address the phenomenon of change, be it in connection with central ‘national’ ideologies or historical evaluations, ‘national’ modes of cultural production or the trajectories of personal lives or institutions and trace the intended, unintended and sometimes unrecognised alterations to the world that they comprise. As such they provide new readings of known material and they present innovative insights into a number of phenomena in which China has encountered or produced difference.

In recent years the concept of change has itself undergone a sea change in historical and cultural studies and has become an issue of importance for both political and economic strategies in the wake of globalisation.² Thus studies of changes in cultures and societies, in political systems and lifestyles, have become a particular focus of attention. It seems clear that we need a more differentiated understanding of how ‘newness’ enters the

¹ This text has become one of the ADI themes, see asiandynamics.ku.dk/english/about_adi/research_themes/transit/.
² See, for instance, publications such as Robinson 1998 and Acharya 2004. In cultural studies the work of Stuart Hall, which demonstrates the close links between cultural practices, especially language and media (signifying practices) and the political are key matters. See Hall 2009.
world and that this newness is not a result of simple replacement strategies (how dictatorships become parliamentary democracies or how new subjects of inquiry entered the regimes of knowledge of a particular culture, for instance) but a consequence of often unforeseen and unforeseeable interactions and friction, of encounters and negotiations between what is perceived as old and in need of replacement and what is perceived as new and good.3 As the recent study Words in Motion shows, any assumption of the stability of terms (dictatorship, parliamentary democracy, knowledge) is a methodological trap in itself.4 Worlds and words, as Carol Gluck remarks in her introduction, are closely intertwined; they can make each other.5 Words move freely and often fiercely across boundaries firing imaginations and visions for future personal and national trajectories, cementing perceived traditions and joining together to construct arguments (discourses) that, for a period at least, brook no contradiction.6

The vectors for the mobility of words and concepts have largely been human beings and their language and texts, their artefacts, travels and experiences, their organisations and strategies. It is in the often unpredictable and innovative reactions of individuals and groups to new forms of social organisation and expression and the ensuing new life projections and visions for change and restructuring that are formulated that we can follow the micro-physics7 of change in cultures, the small fault lines that precede, lead to or reflect the larger changes. In line with this new sensitivity to motion and movement, to individuals (and their groups) and terminologies historians have begun to conduct their research on transnational lines well aware that their training in national and macro-level histories has frequently worked

3 A 2007 Oxfam Great Britain report titled ‘How Change Happens’ reflects the declining sense of certainty amongst social and political actors when it asks whether development thinking has become trapped in so-called specialised knowledge and habitual thinking and calls for a greater creativity in thinking about and promoting change. See Krznaric 2007, 5, 46.
4 Gluck and Tsing 2009.
5 Ibid., xxx. For a discussion of the problems involved in the investigation of words and world, see also Lydia Liu’s introduction to her Translingual Practice. Liu 1995, 1–42.
6 See in this respect James Hevia’s English Lessons in which he speaks of ‘the violence of arms and the violence of language’. Hevia 2003, 4.
7 The term is used here in the way that Foucault defines it in his Discipline and Punish: ‘the study of this micro-physics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to “appropriation”, but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege one might possess.’ Foucault 1997, 26.
against such an approach. Thus transnational historical studies aim to overcome arbitrary boundaries of national histories and identities and trace the mobilities of ideas and individuals at any one time or, as Martha Hodes has formulated the task, explore ‘the circulation and exchange of people, material goods, capital and ideas across national borders.’ In 1998 Robinson also identified the ‘nation-state framework of analysis’ as a hindrance to sociological study and called for a paradigm change that would be equal to the ‘truly systemic change represented by globalization.’

Scholars in literary and cultural studies share this concern. For scholars in the humanities, in particular for historians of ideas and literature, it is well to recognise that the rise of globalisation may indeed call into question the analytic usefulness of national borders for the study of ‘transnational social structure’, as Robinson proposes, but that borders are not always those concrete places between independent countries; national borders may also be spaces of imagination (either positively or negatively connoted) related to the orthodox narratives of national culture which can ensnare people in their dogmatic requirements of orthodox modes of behaviour, thought, writing and activities at whatever geographical location they may find themselves. Moreover, national political borders may be stable over time, but those ‘spaces of imagination’ can transcend and question them constantly and in changing configurations, sometimes, even, making them redundant.

Scholars have naturally sought to produce logical narratives of change in the world, but often specific examples of change resist such rational narrative and not only due to the questionability of the ‘national paradigm’. In his new novel, *El sueño del celta*

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8 Deacon et al. 2010, 5; McDonnell 2010, 56.

9 Hodes 2010, 17.

10 Ibid. Robinson 1998, 562. For discussions of the need for a more appropriate model of analysis in literary and cultural studies, see Blumentrath et al. 2007.

11 Blumentrath 2007, 7.


13 For a discussion of one aspect of this complex of spaces of imagination, see the volume on Chinese transnationalism edited by Ong and Nonini. In their introduction they speak of ‘being Chinese’ as ‘an inscribed relation of persons and groups to forces and processes associated with global capitalism’ and speak of ‘new Chinese subjectivities found in the global arena’. Ong and Nonini 1997, 4.

14 One example that immediately springs to mind is that of the “transnational author”, an author living outside his/her native country and writing in a language different from his/her native tongue. In particular authors such as Gao Xingjian or Ha Jin refuse to be associated with China or to declare themselves to be ‘Chinese authors’. This is a relatively new and largely unexplored phenomenon that would warrant further investigation.
Introduction

(The Dream of the Celt), Mario Vargas Llosa expresses a further problem in provocative form. Historical narratives, he writes, are ‘idealized, coherent, rational fabrications, to describe crude realities, which in actual fact consist in a chaotic, haphazard mixture of plans, accidents, intrigues, surprises, coincidences, and conflicting interests.’\(^{15}\)

The question remains, then, as to how we can study such ‘haphazard mixtures’. With this volume we aim to contribute to the growing body of research that concerns itself with the mechanisms and dynamics of cultural encounters and the ensuing imports, appropriations, dismissals, destructions, realignments of things local and foreign since the late 19th century and to unravel the continuing trajectory of the encounters to the present along with their creative potential. Since the late 19th century, cultures that were the object of the imperial gaze or presence had to define themselves against their perceptions of the strength, modernity and superiority of the nations entering their cultural sphere. They have often encountered new notions such as ‘modernity’, ‘science’, ‘literature’, ‘popular rights’, ‘NGOs’, etc. And these new notions have often been imported into their own cultures relatively aggressively both by native intellectuals and foreign individuals and organisations. Whereas local brokers of change may consider their efforts as an attempt to ‘become like Them’ and foreign agents of change may aim to ‘make them like Us’, very often the situation and its results require a far more sophisticated analysis.

There have been many ways of describing such phenomena in academic discussions to date: they have been designated as ‘encounters’, as ‘clashes’, as ‘meetings’, as ‘acts of violence’, as ‘responses’ of inferior cultures to the obvious strengths of superior cultures, as the dynamics of centre and periphery, to name but a few.\(^{16}\) Almost all of these categories of analysis contain a predetermined assumption of a particular power structure and are often embedded in discussions of political modernity that make them somewhat static or inflexible in approach. This was recognised almost 30 years ago by one historian who noted:

In considering the imprint of cultural contact, and the undoubted fact that ideas are imported along with goods, there is a need to develop a more supple language of causal connection than source and imitation,

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\(^{15}\) Cited in Gallagher 2010, 20.

\(^{16}\) For a discussion of some of these issues, see Gimpel and Thisted 2007.
original and copy. The transfer of cultural forms produces a redistribution of imaginative energies, alters in some way a pre-existent field of force. The result is usually not so much an utterly new product as the development or evolution of a familiar matrix.\textsuperscript{17}

In order to trace this ‘development or evolution of a familiar matrix’ that can well issue out of ‘haphazard mixtures’ of contacts, cultural assumptions, political strategies, personal ambitions, social protest or a host of other factors, the idea of investigating the manner in which the ‘redistribution of imaginative energies’ occurs in particular historical constellations seems a promising one. In order to do this, generalising theories will have to be replaced by attention to detail and sensitivity to individual phenomena which, after careful analysis, may be able to form not a model of change but a palette of possible trajectories for ideas, texts and their genres as well as for human beings as individuals or groups or in institutional contexts.

In 1987, in her book *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan*, D. Eleanor Westney addressed these issues squarely. On the very first page of her study of transfer and change, and after establishing the importance of historical and social context (timing) in studies of the kind she is undertaking, she writes:

But the availability of models is influenced not only by timing but by constraints on selection: that a potential model exists does not mean that it will be observed, or if observed, that it can be chosen. And finally, the organization that emerges once the model is chosen is the product of complex processes of imitation and innovation that are shaped both by the society’s own resources and by its access to the resources of other societies.

In a somewhat more theoretical or abstract vein, a number of more recent scholars have also tried to find a more ‘supple language’ to embrace and explain the changes in a ‘familiar matrix’ and have imagined the interaction of cultures and ideas as creating a ‘third space’, a position that comprises and negotiates the differences that collide. It is a productive space where, as Salman Rushdie’s much quoted phrase has it, ‘something can also be gained [in translation]’.\textsuperscript{18} Others have placed the meeting or exchange of ideas within a ‘contact zone’ defined as

\textsuperscript{17} O’Connor 1986 cited in Acharya 2004, 240.

\textsuperscript{18} Rushdie 1991, 17.
the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their histories now intersect. The term ‘contact’ foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored by accounts of conquest and domination and told from the invader’s perspective. A ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other.¹⁹

The ‘zone’ or ‘space’ of transformation has become a popular metaphor for what happens when entities are in transit. There does, indeed, appear to have been a ‘spatial turn in the human sciences’.²⁰ Analyses such as those by Homi Bhabha (third space) and Edward W. Soja (Thirdspace/the Aleph)²¹ are useful inasmuch as they challenge us to think differently, to acquire that more supple language that scholars of all disciplines seem to be searching for in view of new and transnational or global challenges. Today we face a whole arsenal of terms that purport to describe and explain the movements and mixtures of items, people and ideas (and their results) that confront us daily. There is interculturalism, multiculturalism, transculturalism, transnationalism, hybridity and a host of other -isms to choose from. Unfortunately many of these are prescriptive or, at least, predicated on a particular type of phenomenon and vantage point.²² Moreover they at times assume that third space and in-betweenness produce a meta-phenomenon that transcends the sum of the agents within the encounter, a transnational phenomenon that is intrinsically good since it encompasses the marginal, the resistant, the liminal. That this is a problematic assumption is adequately illustrated in examples of Occidentalist hatred and self-hatred or in essentialising attacks on other groups dangerously issuing from knowledge of the ‘Other’ rather than ignorance.²³ That this ‘in-between’ space can also lead to despair, violence and painful self-searching has been well depicted in creative writings such as those of Maxine Hong Kingston, Orhan Pamuk, Ha Jin and V. S. Naipaul, for instance.

A far more open and useful meaning of the spatial (and one used by some contributors to this volume) has been proposed by geographer, Doreen

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¹⁹ Pratt 2008, 8.
²⁰ Price 1999, 342. See, for example, the use of thirdspace as an analytical tool in Moles 2008.
²¹ Bhabha 1994; Soja 2000.
²² See Patricia Price’s sensitive and insightful review of Soja’s concepts and approach: Price 1999.
²³ See the numerous examples in Buruma and Margalit 2004.
Massey.\textsuperscript{24} Massey describes space as a ‘meeting-up of histories’. As the product of interrelations, space to her is constituted through interactions and contemporaneous plurality.\textsuperscript{25} Space, as she sees it, is a ‘negotiation of relations within multiplicities’.\textsuperscript{26} This definition of space does not require particular participants nor does it relate to specific situations (of the migrant, the colonised, the marginal); it can be applied to any number of phenomena in which narratives, interpretations, life trajectories so far meet and exert their particular and specific influences upon one another. Spaces, therefore, are never ‘closed, coherent, integrated as authentic, as “home”, a secure retreat’; spaces are not ‘somehoworiginarily regionalised, as always-already divided up’.\textsuperscript{27} These insights may seem overly theoretical to some, but the consequence of them has to be that we neither essentialise the space of origin nor the space of destination of anything that moves. It is always in the particularities of the perceived place from which and the perceived place to which that we must seek the creative or destructive frictions that occur. Massey’s idea of space thus obviates ‘national’ analyses and takes us back to a study of mobility in itself. Her concept, moreover, removes the very word ‘nation’ from the toolbox of analysis and may thus free us from some of the constraints this term also implies for the researcher’s work. Thus mobility of ideas, people and things can be conceived of as taking place within a space of transformation that is itself not to be imagined as a physical place but as a process. This space of transformation, therefore, is not bounded by national territorial limitations even though the participants in any one phenomenon may well be bounded by their perceptions and visions of their imagined national belonging. The idea of such transformative space has proven useful in a number of the studies presented here.\textsuperscript{28}

Rather than relying on any one particular framework of analysis, the aim of our project was to explore the productive potential of mobility, of ideas in transit, in any direction and within the various disciplines of our research and to see them as spaces of creative friction that affect both sides of the encounter. Instead of one cultural phenomenon replacing another, such

\textsuperscript{24} See in particular Massey 2006.
\textsuperscript{25} Massey 2006, 4, 9.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{28} For a discussion of the concept of transformative space, see Gimpel and Thisted 2007. See also Gimpel and Bagger-Corlin in the present volume.
cultural encounters produce new cultural phenomena, modify ‘traditions’ and provide the actors on both sides of the exchange with new and, more importantly, differently constructed life trajectories and visions. Thus what we encounter is a form of cultural translation where one cultural community’s notions are relocated selectively and often with clear bias into a completely different environment whose inherent paradigms and hierarchies of knowledge may not provide an immediate and neat fit. The discrepancy between the two and the impossibility of complete replacement of one thing by another is the result of and gives rise to new processes of transformation that are historically contingent.

Each of the localities or topics of translation, transformation or mobility addressed in this collection of case studies, that is the spaces of their putative origin and the places to which they travel or are taken and from which they may return to their supposed starting points, has its own clear agenda and a particular constellation of translation agents to suitably adjust and appropriate new terms for perceived local or personal needs. Thus they have been analysed as individual and specific examples of mobility in its many facets and without a guiding agenda apart from an intention to identify the pertinent factors in each of the cases and to attempt to relate the specificities of each to the others. We have sought to identify recurrent themes and yet to avoid the overarching generalisations inherent in grand theoretical stances that group together similar but, in their specificities, often disparate and, perhaps, unique phenomena. A shared designation does not necessarily involve a shared identity.

This insight, that there exist, to borrow a phrase from Dipesh Chakrabarty, multiple ‘normative horizons specific to our existence and relevant to the examination of our lives and their possibilities’ is important not only for the researcher but also for governments in their assessments of foreign policies, for businesses going to foreign destinations, for aid organisations entering different cultural spheres, for university exchanges, for readers of creative writings. There are no ‘natural laws’ involved in the manner, direction or reason why ideas, concepts, institutions travel. When different ‘narratives so-far’ meet up, each of them issues from a set of perceived national paradigms and is further predicated on the perception of how a personal or institutional narrative relates to the larger paradigm. In other words, one very important aspect of the analysis of any example of mobility

is the manner in which it is framed in its narrative. Personal, public, scholarly and meta-narratives are in a constant state of interaction both in public debates and in private cogitation.\textsuperscript{30} Thus ideas do not simply travel. They are moved (translated), and they are moved under very particular historical and personal circumstances and by individuals or groups that have acquired the power to suggest or insist on their institution and, in some cases, the authority to cement change in a society, at least for a time.\textsuperscript{31}

Thus in all of the contributions in the present collection there is no simplistic assumption of power relationships: that the West was/is stronger than China and thus China ‘borrowed’ from the West. This is too simplistic a notion of the concept of power and cannot account for the many types of movement and transformation on both national and personal levels throughout the world. This means that it can be advantageous to focus attention on the agents of change and how they assume, maintain or lose the authority to act in the way they do, how they develop and change their personal narratives to weave them into or disentangle them from the public and meta-narratives of their day, how they redistribute their imaginative energies in order to effect change. Agents of change can range from individuals and their networks to governmental departments, non-governmental agencies and organisations, entrepreneurs and their organisations, pressure groups, religious or academic communities. In this way, these agents could be seen as particular kinds of ‘epistemic communities’.

The concept of the epistemic community has largely been used to date in studies of international policy-making to denote ‘networks of knowledge-based experts’ that play a role in ‘helping states identify their interests, framing the issues for collective debate’ and other matters.\textsuperscript{32} It could, however, possibly prove a useful category of analysis in identifying other areas of human agency and authority-creation that, as Haas puts it, lie ‘at the interstices between systemic conditions, knowledge, and national actions’,\textsuperscript{33} even if the

\textsuperscript{30} For a brief summary of these narratives, see Baker 2006, 28–49.
\textsuperscript{31} Although not overly theoretically emphasised in the present collection of essays, the concept of the translation or relocation of ideas is central to our studies. As Bella Brodzki has argued, it should be ‘inconceivable to overlook translation’s integral role in every discursive field’ since it is an activity that ‘underwrite[s] all cultural transactions’. Brodzki 2007, 2.
\textsuperscript{32} Haas 1992, 2.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. Haas lists further possible attributes of epistemic communities as follows: ‘members of an epistemic community share intersubjective understandings; have a shared way of knowing; have shared patterns of reasoning; have a policy project drawing on shared values,
category of ‘national’ action may only be of interest to actual political lobbyists and the narrow political class. Others have defined such communities as those whose ‘key element is the primacy of epistemic criteria for activities that involve the creation of new reality constructs or their application to situations in practice’\textsuperscript{34} or indeed that ‘epistemological agents \emph{are} communities.’\textsuperscript{35} Such a category of analysis, together with the idea of spaces of mobility, may provide a useful tool in analysing contemporaneous reform projects within a society, such as those of the urban and the rural elites in China in the first half of the 20th century. Both were results of appropriations and alterations of ideas in transit: on the one hand, the urban elite in China created a myth of universal values that would ‘save’ China, a myth presented as something new but with roots deep in traditional Chinese culture. Its keywords included perceived Western concepts such as science and democracy as well as individual responsibility on the basis of informed citizenship; on the other hand, the rural movement for change was predicated on another perceived ‘universal’ but foreign term, Marxism in its Chinese guise. The first group occupied the nodes of power in ministries, universities and literary circles during the republican era, whereas the second group won the day eventually. The reasons for this development and its close links to ‘ideas in transit’ have yet to be explained in depth. How were these epistemic communities developed? How did they gain or lose status and power? How were new or newly constructed elements of knowledge created and woven into a narrative that produced discursive cohesion and was thus able to unite a community of followers? How do such ‘knowledge’ communities, through their use of conventional and disruptive discourse, change or attempt to change existing hierarchies of knowledge? Do they mask or consciously display epistemic violence?

Many of the ideas of new epistemic communities could be defined as being in-between the narratives of the geo-cultural spaces from which they issue and the imagined narratives of the geo-cultural spaces to which they incline. These have often been described as hybrid as an attempt to

\textsuperscript{34} Holzner and Marx 1979, 107. They further qualify this by stating that ‘[a]ny special way of knowing, whose development and elaboration requires the establishment of an autonomous social space, will tend toward the structure of an epistemic community.’ Holzner and Marx 1979, 109.

\textsuperscript{35} Assiter 1996.
overcome the stiff binaries of, for instance, Occident and Orient. Yet hybridity, a term that, as one contributor to the volume notes, originates in the generally non-reproductive mixture of different entities, lacks the creative potential of the dynamic spaces in which narratives meet, friction arises and new and often unpredictable combinations take form. Hybridity, in other words, is unproductive as a concept for theorising mobility. Clearly, we were all born hybrid and thus hybridity constitutes a starting point rather than an acquired state. We are all participants in a global space—the world—in which narratives and histories of origins intertwine with entities that define themselves as new, progressive and necessary to all aspects of personal, social and political life in the form of new life trajectories, new interpretations of ideas and ideals, new business and political practices, new textual genres, or new institutions. Thus in this volume our attention has been directed at actors and entities that have evolved within various spaces of physical, mental, artistic and intellectual transformation. These are temporarily mobile individuals, innovative authors and their creations, intellectuals or the state trying to relocate the meaning of central Chinese concepts or historical events and their significance or organisations trying to cement their meanings in a foreign location.

Perhaps nothing denotes the mobility or malleability of concepts and identities so clearly as the chameleon-like and utterly historically contingent transformations of the person of Confucius and his significance outlined by Bent Nielsen. Confucius images can hardly be described as hybrid. If anything, he and his statements started off life as hybrid entities and yet, paradoxically each and every twist in their identities has, through an almost ‘natural’ process of accretion and deletion, maintained the aura of a ‘true’ Confucius, a ‘true’ Confucianism, even when the name we in the West give to the whole cultural phenomenon itself is ‘a Jesuit fiction.’ Confucius and Confucianism, like the Great Wall of China, are floating signifiers available for agents of change, and they are sensitive measures in particular of the micro- and macro-fault lines in Chinese political attitudes and aspirations. They are one of the spaces of transformation in which various narratives have met and are still meeting. One is indeed tempted to cite William Cowper’s (1731–1800) famous hymn and see the very close relationship with that other floating signifier of a whole cultural tradition: ‘God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform’.36 Unlike Confucius, however,

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God (according to Cowper) is ‘his own interpreter’, although attention to
the work of churches and theologians in various cultural and historical eras
would tend to disaffirm this statement.

The ‘Jesuit fiction’, moreover, created a new Confucius-for-the-West
which did not fail to subsequently influence the perception of the Chinese
Confucius. This Confucius-for-the-West was predicated from the very
beginning on mobility, the mobility of mission and its needs in a foreign
geo-cultural arena. It was also predicated on perceptions of power and
authority and the desire to move into, and utilise for very different purposes,
the influential cultural space of the ru 学 or scholar-officials. Thus a tradition
was invented on the basis of partial understandings and very partial needs,
a tradition on which much of Europe bases its understanding of China. And
while Confucius was gaining a new life and trajectory in the West his ideas
and symbolic value were, as Bent Nielsen shows, undergoing a roller-coaster
ride in China. From the beginning of the 20th century, Confucius has been
literally hijacked by as many epistemic communities as have vested interest
in the exegesis of China.

In many ways adding to the sense of global flows and exchanges, of mobil-
ity and the creativity and friction that can arise when ideas travel and meet,
when narratives so-far collide not only at a certain point in history but since
a certain point in history, are Bent Nielsen’s suggestive remarks about the
cross-pollinatory potential of Confucianism (in both Chinese and Western
guise) and Marxism. The similarities between worldviews that, on the one
hand, have been perceived and narrated within conflicting frameworks
(especially during the Cultural Revolution) and, on the other, have been
consciously interwoven to present a new ‘New China’ built on the socialist
harmony of Confucianism are truly mind-boggling. Even more astounding
is the thought that Confucius in Jesuit guise may have been a factor in the
European Enlightenment, that very period of intellectual development we
believe to separate us from the Chinese. These are promising paths indeed
and truly bring us to an investigation of the ‘redistribution of imaginative
ergies’ that gives rise to ‘not so much an utterly new product as the devel-
opment or evolution of a familiar matrix.’\textsuperscript{37} It certainly raises the question as
to whether this ‘familiar matrix’ was a facilitating cause of the easy mobility
and flexibility of Confucius and his ideas from China to Europe, in Europe
and back to China in altered form. Today new epistemic communities have

\textsuperscript{37} O’Connor 1986, 7.
made attempts to export their brand of New Confucianism to a Western geopolitical sphere that, it would appear, no longer recognises a ‘familiar matrix’ and thus looks sceptically upon Asian values and Confucius Institutes.

If Bent Nielsen’s contribution illustrates the continuous and continuing circulation of the many available Confucius’ over time, Shen Hong confronts us with a specific example of how the needs of a particular epistemic community can radically alter the manner in which ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ are created. The Protestant missionary presence in China has undergone many different evaluations and studies. In the *Cambridge History of China*, Paul A. Cohen opens his discussion of ‘Christian Missions and Their Impact to 1900’ with the following statement:

> Traders came to China in the nineteenth century to extract profits. Diplomats and soldiers came to extract privileges and concessions. Alone among foreigners, Christian missionaries came not to take but to give, not to further their own interests, but, at least ostensibly, to serve the interests of the Chinese. Why, then, of all those who ventured to China in the last century, was it the missionary who inspired the greatest fear and hatred?38

Fear and hatred were, then, some of the contemporary reactions to the missionary presence that *ostensibly* only meant well. The mobility of the Christian faith and the desire to move away from home and save heathen souls that increased enormously from the 19th century stands in direct correlation with European colonialism. It can be interpreted as the Christian epistemic community’s attempt to dislodge and replace the knowledge claims of foreign epistemic communities. As Cohen observes, the majority of the missionaries were ‘intolerant of Chinese culture and unwilling or unable to make meaningful adjustments to it’39 and describes the encounter as a ‘violent non-meeting of minds’.40 Nevertheless we do know that minds met over the period of the missionary presence in China and that, due to the obvious power constellations of the time, Chinese minds may have been less reluctant to contemplate the Western regime of knowledge than missionaries to investigate Chinese regimes of knowledge.41

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38 Twitchett and Fairbank 1986, 543.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 565.
41 This is adequately reflected in any comparison of the range of texts that were translated from foreign languages to Chinese and vice versa. For the range of translations into Chinese between the 1850s and 1950s, see the Taiwan National Library’s list from 1958.
Certainly it was not the task or the intention of missionaries in China to enable or encourage a true meeting of minds and the expulsion of missionaries from China in the 1950s after the founding of the People’s Republic was also predicated on a wish that certain ideas would not move into or take root on Chinese soil. The continued expulsion of missionaries from China at certain sensitive moments was also evident in the 2007 expulsion of missionaries from China prior to the Olympic Games. It is therefore perhaps no exaggeration to say that missionaries have not had a good official image in China since the founding of the People’s Republic. It is intriguing, then, to read a Chinese scholar’s assessment of one Christian missionary, A. E. Moule, and his great importance as the creator of ‘transformational spaces which help us to understand our historical past.’ This is a transformation indeed! Even as the Chinese government continues to expel Christian missionaries, Chinese academia is ‘discovering’ and evaluating the significance of their work albeit in a field far removed from success or failure in converting the native population to the ‘true faith.’

The truth to which this particular sojourner contributed is interpreted as conservation of the original architectural space of the city of Hangzhou, a space that was, in this interpretation, first invaded by the missionary endeavour, subsequently invaded by the new orthodoxy of Communism and now to be restored in the reinstatement of historical and linguistic accuracy. Here we have clear illustration of the destructive and creative frictions of a narrative that has travelled to and from China since the 19th century and has undergone various and historically and politically contingent scholarly interpretations over time. If we wished to express this in an extreme manner, we could say that ‘fear and hatred’ have today transformed into gratitude and admiration (at least in the academic narrative), the destroyer has become the conserver who can reunite China with its lost past.

If the two contributions discussed above are concerned primarily with ideas themselves and how much they are able to change and be changed over time, two other contributions focus on people in search of ideas and as vectors for them. Li Shizeng (1881–1973) and Chen Hengzhe (1890–1976) were both intellectuals who lived at a moment in China at which new ideas and concepts affected almost all aspects of life in China. Visions of a different world excited many and gave rise to intense political and cultural debate. It

42 This, of course, was an event highly publicised on Christian and missionary websites and was interpreted as an attempt to stop infiltration and proselytising during the Games. See, for instance, au.christiantoday.com/article/over-100-foreign-missionaries-expelled-in-china/2934.htm.
was, as both Paul Bailey and Denise Gimpel observe in their contributions to the present volume, a turbulent time. It was turbulent with regard to events and ideas: with the foundation of a republic in 1912 the old political world order had apparently been overthrown, and with the so-called New Culture Movement of the 1910s the past cultural world order had come under attack. This was a time in which the old was to be replaced by the putatively new, a time of optimism and the belief that new political systems and new regimes of knowledge, new genres of writing and new life trajectories could ‘save China’ and bring it into line with the ‘world’ or, more correctly, with those strong nations of the world with which China had had so many problems since the mid-19th century.

The two individuals presented here were truly fascinated by ideas they conceived of as ‘universal’ or of global significance and throughout their lives they maintained a great interest in the exchange and discussion of ideas regardless of the confines of national borders. Ironically both of them encountered criticism and personal limitations as a result of their global attitudes during the period after the founding of the People’s Republic of China and both have now, in the wake of the opening policies of the late 1970s, become a focus of interest as China once again needs to decide how to meet the outside world and how to define itself and that world in the process.

There are so many parallels to the, in many ways, very different trajectories of these two individuals. Both had been introduced to foreign ideas from an early age and both issued from relatively traditional circles with parents and grandparents at the forefront of official circles. Both envisaged completely different life trajectories for themselves from those that had been available prior to their meeting-up with different narratives of life in the ideas of foreign writers and colleagues or co-students. They were, in the words of Paul Bailey, ‘far from being merely the passive and hapless recipients and imbibers of “superior” Western knowledge’. They participated in and engaged with ‘global knowledge and connections’. Their lives are perfect illustration of a space where different local, national and global narratives met and coalesced to form their particular outlook on life and to bring forth results that reflected their particular concerns in their particular modes of interaction with the world, whether these be in business, education, literature or historiography. Their epistemic communities, both local and international affected China’s perception of its place in the world as well as foreign communities’ concept

43 Bailey, this volume, p. 67.
of China and its standing and potential. This is all the more fascinating as we see two individuals sojourning outside China at almost the same moments in history and in the face of the same historical constellations. Such micro-studies of individual biographies and life choices and their ramifications for local and global understandings of the world in which they lived can help us to piece together a more sophisticated image of the microphysics of change in China at such a sensitive time when vistas and borders were perhaps more open than at any other time in Chinese history previously. They can also provide us with a wider range of expression from what Denise Gimpel describes as the ‘cacophony of voices’ that characterised the late Qing and Republican eras in China. This would give us greater insight into the criss-crossing activities and thoughts of individuals and communities and, to some extent, remove our focus from those monumental individuals (such as Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, Lu Xun) who appear to have a monopoly on historians’ interpretations of their day.

Change and mobility, creation and demolition are at the centre of the two chapters by Peter Damgaard and Mai Corlin. These are chapters that deal not so much with the individuals who are in transit but with the modes in which transition, change and reconfiguration can be traced in cultural production, a cultural production that is both documentation and interrogation of phenomena of the static and the mobile.

Ma Yuan’s creative and provocative journeys away from the political and cultural centre of Han China, and thus away from the central orthodoxy of cultural production there, are a test for reader and the genre alike. As Peter Damgaard writes, the story ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ is symptomatic of Ma Yuan’s challenge to the ‘reader’s engagement with the translated “Other” through a continuous disruption of the narrative point of view.’ This disruption or movement from one narrative position to another questions the stability of identities and text, a stability upon which geo-cultural distinctions and hierarchies rest. Here indeed, in Ma Yuan’s prose, we come face to face with the dynamics of the meetings of narrative-so-far. We experience the unresolved tensions in encounters between different life stories and trajectories through the resistance of the text to smooth reading and smooth assimilation into a straightforward tale of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. In fact we lose sight of who exactly ‘They’ are, who ‘We’ are, since a firm

44 Gimpel, this volume, p. 92
45 Damgaard, this volume, p. 128.
narrative (and thus reading) position for observing the encounters between the various actors and their encounters and acts of narration is denied us.

The choice of Tibet as the site at which ‘knowledge’ of others is challenged is particularly stark since here, as Peter Damgaard shows, the narrative of otherness has been tightly constructed by the Chinese authorities. However Tibet not only offers a site for questioning static judgement values and constructed discourses; it is also an entity that the author acknowledges as ‘an unusual place; it can provide you with imaginative power and a unique perspective and mindset’. This place seems to offer to author, protagonists and readers an inkling of what can happen when ideas, knowledge and cultural conditioning meet: we are, at one and the same time, outsiders who fail to comprehend as well as insiders (since we are intimately involved in a particular situation) and our accounts of our lack of understanding as well as our partial insights will ultimately change us to differing degrees. All the characters in the story are affected by the fact that their life trajectories and histories-so-far have interlocked at specific moments. What is more, as Damgaard has shown, the experience of narrating this space of meeting has destabilised the orthodox narrative as well as the narrator’s position. Narrative/discursive certainty has been banned from the text and we are left with an insight into a situation out of which ‘multiple normative horizons’ could possibly arise.

Mai Corlin addresses the many stories-so-far that enjoined to give rise and shape to a cinematic form and a particular story of Beijing. In her analysis, the 2001 feature film *Beijing Bicycle* combines the space of the hutong (with their past and present residents, as past markers of the city but with uncertain futures), migrants (memories of home and aspirations for the future) and youth (perhaps the most friction-laden moment in the developing narrative of a life) with both the trajectory of Beijing, a changing city, and the creative forces that shaped the director, Wang Xiaoshuai. The individual moments of all these stories collide in the film and, as Mai Corlin shows, the fluidity of their entanglements is made concrete in the mobility of the bicycle, itself a disappearing mode of navigating the various spaces of Beijing. In this contribution *Beijing Bicycle* appears as a vignette of the complex mix of overlapping personal, national, political and social histories and visions in which clear-cut boundaries resist definition and lack reliability. The stories of the two boys, the bicycle, the hutong, of Beijing.

46 Ibid., 133.
residents and migrants, cannot be disentangled, but neither can the outcome of their engagement be predicted. What we do have is an example of the manner in which imaginative energies are channelled and redistributed. We do not know what the boys will do; we only know that their meeting, their cycling, their common and individual experiences of navigating the world and coming of age have left indelible marks on their own personal identities.

Likewise, as Mai Corlin argues, the eclectic education, both Chinese and Western, of the director Wang Xiaoshuai has been constituent in his artistic production. In line with O’Connor’s remarks on the effects of cultural contact, *Beijing Bicycle* cannot be approached using concepts such as ‘source’ and ‘imitation’, ‘original’ and ‘copy’. The ‘redistribution of imaginative energies’ that resulted from Wang’s encounters with the narratives of foreign film classics and Chinese concepts of cinema have not produced copies of films noirs or imitations of a foreign genre; they have developed ‘a familiar matrix’ in a new environment or, as Corlin puts it, they constitute ‘a new green branch on the family tree’; it is an ‘addition’ to a trajectory or narrative, not an end.

This is an important point and, once again, underlines the need to focus on the dynamics of change that characterises all the contributions here. Change and transformation need to be studied as the co-presence of trajectories and possibilities that are never quite aligned or in tune with each other. It is the particular friction that arises in each contact together with the power structures and their influences and resistance to them in personal lives and creative works that ultimately form the particular results of any encounter. These results, however, are tentative or temporary since they carry within them the very basis for further encounters and further change. This helps to understand Corlin’s lack of confidence in the notion of hybridity, a mantra of much research into change to date. Like the mazes in *Beijing Bicycle*, the term is, on occasion, a conceptual dead end in that it closes rather than opens our discussion of people, ideas, narrators and narratives in transit.

The penultimate contribution to this volume takes us on the journey of an organisation from one area of the world to another, a journey that has often been predicated (both by actors and researchers) on assumptions of superiority by one epistemic community (NGO) over another (those to whom we travel; those in need of development). This contribution is again inspired by Doreen Massey’s ideas of space and stories or trajectories that meet. Cecilia Milwertz and Wang Fengxian reject the assumptions of superiority...
in the developmental aid offered by Western organisations and which often characterise the mode of analysis in scholarly discussions. They attribute this attitude to the notion of ‘space’ so radically critiqued by Doreen Massey: space conceived as a place to which one might travel, which one might occupy. Space is not geography; space is relations. As an area of relations, space means coevalness and open-ended relations; it includes, it is the meeting of different interest groups, their negotiation of positions and their creation of something new as a result. Milwertz and Wang Fengxian distinguish this idea of space from that of transformative space used by many contributors to this volume, but the results of the uses of the concept of space in both cases are very similar: space, we may conclude, is relations, is not a place; space is the ever-present interactions of individuals, organisations, interest groups (epistemic communities) that leads to change, transformation and unpredictable forms of newness.

Milwertz and Wang provide a very concrete example of the ways in which this concept of space can offer a much more sophisticated analysis of the becoming of two non-government initiated organisations in China. Their analysis again warns us of the dangers for understanding of a priori assumptions of power relationships and simplistic binaries of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. Much as in Ma Yuan’s stories, explicit and essentialised identities (here of Western NGOs and Chinese organisations) are shown to be far more complex matters that resist simplistic narration. Moreover, the authors have managed to point to that ‘more supple language of causal connection than source and imitation, original and copy’ called for by O’Connor. Just as O’Connor predicted, the contact between Western donor institutions, Chinese interest groups and the state truly appears to have produced ‘a redistribution of imaginative energies’ and to have altered ‘in some way a pre-existent field of force.’ As the authors show, the redistribution and alterations are highly dependent on the particular relations, the particular actors and their particular concerns. The outcomes of space conceived in this way cannot and should not be predicted beforehand. In cases where such predictions abound we can assume either simplistic notions of superiority on the part of donor organisations or simplistic analytical paradigms on the part of scholars respectively.

The final chapter turns to a short interview between Cecilia Milwertz and Bu Wei on the shifting meanings of *The Vagina Monologues* as they made their way to China and travelled within China’s borders. The interview offers a highly informative and concrete example of the creative potential of borrowing
and realignment of text and meaning today. *The Vagina Monologues’* journey from an open feminist and middle-class protest in America to an initially restricted-access means of comparison and creative and critical self-reflection in China is truly fascinating in that it shows translation to be a place in which ‘narratives-so-far’ meet and coalesce in a new narrative that can transcend the so-called ‘originals’ aims or scope. Reverberating with and against the American feminist narratives and opening up to public, private, urban and rural narratives of sexuality and gender inequalities in China, the tale of the Chinese afterlives of *The Vagina Monologues* exemplifies well the need for a more subtle analysis of ideas in transit and the ‘redistribution of imaginative energies’ that can ensue from them.

This contribution is an excellent way in which to close the volume. It shows so very clearly how the concerns that lie at the centre of this project not only have repercussions for the analysis of events of the past, for cultural products, for writing and thinking; they are also acutely pertinent to the planning and implementation of any nation’s future interactions with partners. If the ideas presented here were taken seriously and factored into not only the planning but also the understanding of interaction and contact, governments, scholars, organisations and businesses would be able (and willing) to be mobile and global in a new way: if we enter ‘space’ in the same way as we enter a relationship, if we recognise that our research, business and teaching should reflect the fluidity of spaces, as well as the multiple narratives colliding or embracing these, we might, in all our various fields of activity, be able to resist those ‘idealized, coherent, rational fabrications’ and deal more adequately with the ‘chaotic, haphazard mixture of plans, accidents, intrigues, surprises, coincidences, and conflicting interests’ that have always constituted our global lives.

**Bibliography**


1

Confucius ver. 2.0 or Confucian Whatever-ism?
A Preliminary Inquiry into the Constructs of a
Cultural Conciliator

Bent Nielsen

Each age has its own Confucius, and in any one period there are also various
different kinds of Confucius.


Whether or not the Jesuits of the 16th and 17th centuries – as
suggested by Lionel Jensen – actually invented Confucius, they
certainly designed their own Confucius who played a crucial
part in the ‘knowledge and access to China [they brokered] for an expanding
market in personal libraries, political strategy, and economy.’ This Confucius
was made to represent China and Chineseness as a single secular tradition
embodied by the scholar-literate-officials commonly referred to in China
with the term ru 儒. Similarly, the Confucius who has been on offer with the
Confucius Institutes (Kongzi xueyuan 孔子學院) since 2004 has been carefully
crafted by the Chinese government to represent China and Chinese culture
as peaceful and harmonious. Like the Great Wall of China and the famous
Ming dynasty (1368–1644) voyager Zheng He (1371–1435), icons of passive
resistance and diplomatic relations, Confucius was adopted to epitomise the
cultural accomplishments of Chinese civilisation, the wen side of ‘the dyad
wen-wu 文武 (cultural attainment-martial valour).’ Responses in the West

1 The latter half of the title is borrowed from the translators Laura and David Truncellito of
Li Ling’s essay ‘What We Can Learn from the Analects’. Li 2009–10, 95.
2 Ge shidai you ge shidai de Kongzi, ji zai yige shidai zhong ye you zhongzhong butong de
Kongzi ne 各時代有各時代的孔子，即在一個時代中也有種種不同的孔子呢, see Gu 1982, 131.
3 Jensen 1997, 113.
4 See Louie 2002, 4. Thanks to Denise Gimpel for drawing my attention to Louie’s wen-wu
paradigm, which may be just as useful in a political-philosophical context as it is in Louie’s
study on society and gender.
to the rise of the late 20th and early 21st centuries Confucius range from very enthusiastic (for example, the so-called 'Boston Confucians') to highly sceptic (for example, Samuel P. Huntington). In the following I will look into the recent history of Confucius' role as a cultural conciliator, as it were, in the dialogue between China and the (Western) world.

Before proceeding any further, however, a brief exercise in ‘rectification of names’ (zheng ming 正名) is called for. Neither the name Confucius nor the term Confucianism derived thereof have a precise Chinese counterpart. The name Confucius supposedly was a Latin form of the native Kong Fuzi but Lionel Jensen concludes his textual investigation saying, ‘“Kong Fuzi” was an uncommon title and even more uncommon term of address. As the putative native equivalent of ‘Confucius’, it, too, was a Jesuit fiction.’ The Chinese tradition commonly refers to Kongzi 孔子 which may be translated into ‘Master Kong’. To what degree we may identify ‘Confucius’ with ‘Kongzi’ will be apparent below. The term ‘Confucianism’ is even more problematic as it has no obvious Chinese equivalent and suggests one distinct and separate tradition that may be traced back to a historical Confucius whose dates traditionally are given as 551–479 BCE. The adjective ‘Confucian’ was first introduced to a European audience in 1687 by a group of Jesuits led by Philippe Couplet (1623–1693) in Confucius Sinarum Philosophus, sive Scientia Sinensis (Confucius, Philosopher of the Chinese, or The Chinese Learning). ‘Confucian’ and ‘Confucianism’ in the Jesuit discourse of the 17th century referred to a perceived tradition of Chinese scholar-officials with whom the Jesuits identified in their evangelical mission in the Ming and Qing (1644–1911) empires. This tradition was loosely called ru 儒, a term with an uncertain origin. In the Zhou li 周禮 (Rituals of the Zhou dynasty, 1046–256 BCE), a work compiled during the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) but with older contents, ru referred to a person who mastered the six arts (liu yi 六藝) and instructed the people. In some 3rd-century BCE texts such as the Mengzi 孟子 (Master Meng) and the Han Feizi 韓非子 (Master Han Fei), ru refers to traditions associated with the followers of Kongzi as opposed to other traditions. The latter text informs us that at the time of its

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6 On the historicity of Confucius (Kongzi 孔子), see Jensen 2002.
7 See e.g. Jensen 1997, 12ff.
8 Lin 1974, 99. The six arts refer to rituals (li 禮), music (yue 音), archery (she 射), charioteering (yu 駕), writing (shu 書), and arithmetic (shu 數).
composition (probably late 3rd century BCE) the adherents of Kongzi had split into eight such traditions. Etymologically, the word ru seems to have been cognate with rou 柔 (soft, weak), hence Jensen's translation of Rujia 儒家 (often read as ‘Confucianism’) as ‘the Weakling fellowship’. Before the above texts were compiled, the term ru most likely covered a variety of magico-religious functions such as shamans (wu 巫), astrologers (shi 史), high-priests (zhu 祝), and diviners (bu 卜). Thus the history of the term ru is long and complicated, and by the time the Jesuits arrived in China and started identifying themselves with the ru (after 1595) the term had acquired a wide spectrum of meanings associated with the imperial cult, examination candidates, ancestor worship, orthodoxy, and social position.

Leading Jesuits of the late 16th century ‘read the surface similarities of ru and the Jesuit order as formal evidence of substantive likeness and presumed that ru doctrine had shaped, as did Christianity in Europe, the language, laws, customs, and literature of the empire’. Thus the ru were considered the intellectual descendants of Confucius, ‘the wisest moral philosopher, politician, and orator’, and through Jesuit interpretation and translation ‘Confucianism’ became the secular ethico-philosophical tradition that persists today. What also endures, however, is the uneasy relationship between the two concepts: ‘The term ru certainly comes closest to our naïvely inclusive term “Confucianism”, but the two words are not commensurate or equivalent. […] By conjuring a tradition that was seemingly always devoted to one man, “Confucianism” is an invented signifier that bears a problematic relationship to the thing it signifies.’ Much recent research has uncovered the multiplicity of the Confucian tradition and the multiple personas of Confucius who himself has been described as ‘the consummate chameleon’

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10 Xu and Duan 1983, 366.
12 Ciyuan, s.v. ‘ru 儒’. See also Yao 2003, 507–509.
13 Jensen 1997, 53.
14 Ibid., 50.
15 Ibid., 129.
16 See e.g. the Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of World Religions, which includes a nine-page article on Confucianism in which it is described as ‘a worldview, a social ethic, a political ideology, and a scholarly tradition’. Doniger 1999, 251.
18 Louie 2002, 57.
or ‘a free-floating signifier’.\(^{19}\) The Jesuit understanding (fabrication) of Confucius and Confucianism completely dominated the European reception and appreciation of China and things Chinese during the 17th and 18th centuries, the first period of Confucius in his role as a cultural conciliator in the West. To borrow a term from contemporary computer software development, we could designate this persona as Confucius version 1.0.\(^{20}\)

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 – or more specifically Lu Xun (1881–1936) and Hu Shi (1891–1962) – famously dismissed Confucius and called on the students ‘to destroy the Kong family shop’ (破壞孔家店) meaning the entire cultural tradition.\(^{21}\) A little over two decades earlier Confucius had had a prominent role in the so-called Hundred Days Reform (bai ri weixin 百日維新, also known as the Wuxu bianfa 戊戌變法) advanced by Kang Youwei (1858–1927) during the summer of 1898. Confucius was to be the head ‘of a “national religion” (guojiao 國教) modeled on Christian sects and equipped with its own churches and a unifying ideology combining the best features (the “essence”) of Chinese culture.’\(^{22}\) Kang’s esoteric readings of tradition and Confucius’ part in it probably in no small way fuelled the fierce reactions from the May Fourth activists.

The last years of the Qing dynasty witnessed considerable precariousness regarding Confucius and his role in the politics of the day; would he save the dynasty or would he take it down with him? The Qing court led by the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) did not share Kang Youwei’s vision, and he had to run for his life as Qing soldiers cracked down on the reform movement (his brother Kang Guangren (1867–1898) and other reformers such as Tan Sitong (1865–1898) were executed). A few years later in 1905 the Qing government abolished the traditional examination system based on the Four Books (Si shu 四書), which include The Analects (Lunyu 論語), the work that had come to be most closely associated with Confucius and his teachings as it purported to record the views and answers he offered

\(^{19}\) Jensen 2002, 214.

\(^{20}\) Here the discussion is limited to Confucius’ role in the dialogue between East and West. Many earlier (beta-) versions of Kongzi co-existed and/or succeeded one another in dynastic China and its neighbours before the advent of the Jesuits.

\(^{21}\) See e.g. Jensen 1997, 347, note 70. Actually, as pointed out by Li Ling, ‘what was knocked down was the shop of the Zhu Xi school, not the Confucianism shop.’ Li 2009–10, 20. Zhu Xi’s (1130–1200) synthesis and reinterpretations of his predecessors’ thoughts became orthodoxy, and his redaction and commentaries on the Four Books (Si shu 四書) were used in state examinations from 1313 to 1905.

\(^{22}\) Nylan and Wilson 2010, 193.
to questions posed by his students. Later that same year, however, the Qing court announced that Kang’s idea of Kongjiao (“Confucius-religion”) would provide the basis for a revived Chinese culture.\(^{23}\) In 1904 Confucius’ birthday (fixed at 28 September according to the Gregorian calendar) had been declared a national holiday, and in 1906 ‘a School for the Preservation of Antiquity’ was set up in Confucius’ birthtown Qufu 曲阜.\(^{24}\) Although Michael Nylan sees these initiatives as ‘hollow gestures’, it does testify to the ambivalence the Qing court felt in dealing with modernity and tradition, and eventually it was the Qing that took Confucius down when it collapsed in 1911. Or so it seemed.

In spite of the May Fourth Movement’s radical departure from tradition and its foremost representative, and notwithstanding the ensuing Skeptical of Antiquity (yi gu 疑古) school spearheaded by Hu Shi, Gu Jiegang, and Guo Moruo (1892–1978) who took a critical view of Confucius and stripped him of most, if not all, of his cultural credentials. Confucius had not been shaken, and he had certainly not died. In the 1960s it may have looked as if ‘Confucianism is gone forever’\(^{25}\) while in fact both Confucianism and its putative founder endured a turbulent existence: ‘By turns, the Sage was to be dumped unceremoniously in the trash bin of history or “restored” as some kind of “comeback kid” newly in vogue.’\(^{26}\) In the equally turbulent political climate of China’s 1930s, in which the main contenders turned out to be the Nationalist Party (Guomindang 國民黨) and the Communist Party (Gongchandang 共產黨), the Sage was by no means a spent force. Gone were the condescending and scathing criticism and rejection of the early 1920s, and once again Confucius became the rallying point in the face of internal turmoil and a national symbol in the battle against foreign (especially Japanese) aggression and imperialism.

When the leader of the Nationalist Party, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi, 1887–1975), in February 1934 launched his New Life Movement (Xin

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\(^{23}\) Nylan 2001, 311.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) As my old Prof. Søren Egerod (1923–1995) wrote in a Danish reference work on World Religions: 25 Living Creeds (first published in 1964), which obviously did not include Confucianism, see Aagaard 1974, 334.

\(^{26}\) Nylan and Wilson 2010, 195.
shenghuo yundong 新生活運動), his sources of inspiration were many; however, Confucius played a significant role. In August 1934 the Nationalist Party sponsored a gigantic birthday celebration for Confucius in Confucius’ hometown of Qufu. Coming as it did a mere six months after the inauguration of the New Life movement, the celebration, absolutely unrivaled in its splendor in the cash-strapped Republican China, underscored the notion that Chiang’s legitimacy, like that of the emperors of old, rested upon lavish sponsorship of traditional values.

Confucius and his teachings were summoned by the Nationalists to bolster national and cultural pride and as a bulwark against communism and certain undesirable elements inherent in modernity such as individualism, materialism, and amorality.

The Communist Party viewed itself as the heir to the May Fourth Movement and as the founder of modern China, and therefore also faced the challenge of dealing with the past and tradition. Mao Zedong (1893–1976) himself had an ambivalent attitude towards tradition in general and Confucius in particular.

According to Xu Quanxing, professor at the Communist Party School, Mao often eulogised Confucius in speeches and writings, and Confucius’ influence on Mao was so positive that it made him ignore material and economic progress. But from a Marxist perspective the high culture of traditional China had little worth preserving and was basically standing in the way of modernisation. However, internal strife in the Communist Party in the late 1950s following disastrous political decisions made by the radical wing paved the way for people like Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969) and a more favourable look at traditional culture.

So the early 1960s witnessed a renewed interest in Confucius, and academic conferences were convened. For example, more than 150 academics

27 Some of Guomindang ideologues were also inspired by the new regimes that had come into power in Germany, Spain, and Italy. Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) in particular struck a chord in Chiang’s camp, see Spence 1999, 358.

28 Nylan 2001, 325. This was accompanied by an ‘official recanonization of Confucius and Confucian heroes.’ Traditional rituals at Confucius Temples had already been restored in 1928, birthday celebrations as a national holiday in 1931, and studies of the Four Books had been reintroduced for soldiers and students. Ibid., 327.


30 See Louie 2002, 52.
including the famous traditional Confucian scholar Feng Youlan (1895–1990) attended a conference commemorating the 2440th birthday of Confucius in Jinan, Shandong, in November 1962. More surprisingly, perhaps, ‘[t]ourists flooded into Confucius’ hometown in Qufu (on average, 30,000 people daily).’ The new Chairman of the People’s Republic of China (since April 1959), Liu Shaoqi, took an active part in this development, and in his now famous How to be a Good Communist he not only showed inspiration from traditional Chinese thinkers but also quoted Confucius and the Mengzi, a highly influential work inspired by Confucius and named after its putative author Meng Ke. The passage Liu Shaoqi cited from The Analects is the well-known, ‘At fifteen, I set my mind upon learning; at thirty, I took my place in society [. . .]’ When the radicals eventually struck back in 1966, Liu was accused of counterrevolutionary crimes and he died in prison in 1969.

It seems, however, that Liu Shaoqi’s essays were merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Confucius’ influence on the Communist Party prior to 1962. The so-called ‘Confucianisation (ruxuehua 儒學化) of Marxism’ in China in the 1930s is an interesting topic in itself but it also has a significant bearing on the understanding of the Communist Party’s view on Confucius today. This area of research has been opened by such contemporary Chinese scholars as Jin Guantao and Chen Lai but has received relatively little attention in the West. Ideological contamination of this research is difficult to avoid since the history of the Chinese Communist Party is at stake and with it the legitimacy of the contemporary leadership and its policy decisions. While the confirmation of the existence of a Confucianised Marxist ideology in the 1930s will strengthen the present leadership in China by showing an unprecedented continuity in party politics, it also blurs the alleged differences between the Nationalists and the Communists. Michael Nylan states:
‘After all, if the May Fourth stereotypes were accurate, and Confucianism truly was anti-individualistic, hierarchical, and undemocratic, it was precisely this constellation of virtues that Chiang Kai-shek intended to harness in the service of his government.’

Critics of ‘New Confucianism’ would probably say that the very same constellation of virtues is what the present Chinese government intends to employ in its service.

Having recovered from the attacks of the May Fourth Movement, the next – and seemingly insurmountable – challenge was to recuperate after the lethal assaults of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (Wuchanjieji wenhua da geming 無產階級文化大革命, 1966–1968) and the campaign to criticize Lin Biao (1907–1971) and Kongzi (pi Lin pi Kong yundong 批林批孔運動, 1973–1975). Together with other remains of traditional culture, Confucian temples all over China were ravaged, and in Qufu, which is home to the no. 1 Confucian temple, the Kong family’s hereditary home (or palace), and the Kong family cemetery, a surreal battle was fought between locals and red guard detachments from the capital led by the infamous Tan Houlan (1937–1982) over what could and what could not be destroyed.

Using slogans similar to those previously coined by Lu Xun and Hu Shi – ‘destroying the Kong family shop’ (daohui Kong jia dian 損毀孔家店) – the red guards succeeded in destroying thousands of artifacts, rare books and steles, dragging the sculpture of Confucius out of the temple, parading it through the streets and dumping it on a bonfire outside of town. Confucius’ grave was opened but as the diggers (not surprisingly) did not find any corpse they blew up the grave site with dynamite.

The campaign against Lin Biao and Kongzi coincided with the discovery of the famous terracotta army outside Xian, which was quickly identified as belonging to the mortuary complex of Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝 (259–210 BCE), The First August Divine Ruler of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE). This particular emperor was known from history to be the archenemy of traditionalism and Confucianism; according to the chronicles of the following dynasty he had the classics associated with the scholar elite burned and a few hundred scholars buried alive, which made him eligible for inclusion

36 Nylan and Wilson 2010, 204.
37 MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 119ff.
38 See the fascinating story in Wang 2002.
39 See Sang and Barmé 2009 for an illustrated account of this and other atrocities committed in Qufu in November 1966.
in the battle against Confucius. Ancient textual traditions hostile to and ridiculing Confucius and his adherents like, for example, *The Zhuangzi*, a composite work dating to the 4th–2nd centuries BCE, were also cited in support of the campaign. Academic conferences on Confucianism were characterised as 'black sessions', intellectuals were accused of being 'secret agents of the ancient Sage' and wanting to reintroduce feudalism and a slave society. The battle was, so to speak, fought on two levels; most ordinary Chinese seemed to believe that Confucius was the target while most party members presumably knew that this was a veiled attack on the not so radical Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) and later Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997). The whole affair came to an end in 1976 when both Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong died, and the so-called Gang of Four (*Si ren bang*) was arrested and subsequently held responsible for the turmoil and excesses that took place during the period 1966–1976 (which became the official dates of the Cultural Revolution).

In the power struggle that followed, Deng Xiaoping came out on top and by 1980 he was in firm control of the Party and the country and confident enough to launch his policies of economic reform and opening up to the world. Over the last three decades Confucius and the ideas associated with him have come to play an increasingly significant role in China; sometimes as an explanation for the rapid economic development, sometimes as a corrective to that development, and ultimately for a wide variety of other reasons. The economic miracles that had taken place in China's immediate vicinity in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore were often attributed to a unique Confucian work ethic, which could stand up to the Protestant work ethic formulated by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920). In particular Singapore's government led by Lee Kuan Yew (b. 1923), Goh Keng Swee (1918–2010), and Goh Chok Tong (b. 1941) made a

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40 See e.g. Man 2008, 208–212.
41 E.g. the story of Kongzi's visit to the camp of the robber Zhi (chapter 29 of the *Zhuangzi*, see Guo 1982, 990ff.). The intention of the *Zhuangzi* chapter is obviously to deride Kongzi who stands in awe of a simple robber chief but in the retelling of the story robber Zhi becomes 'a celebrated head of a slave uprising' (*nukang qiyi zhuming lingxiu* 奴康起義著名領袖), see Brashier [n.d.]. Ironically, some professors at Chinese universities took this opportunity to reintroduce the teaching and study of classical Chinese so the students could 'criticize Confucius with maximum effect [using] every nuance of his reactionary language', see Spence 1990, 637. According to Spence this reason was given 'in mock innocence'.
showcase out of making Confucianism the foundation of a modern industrialised, multiethnic state. Famous American-Chinese scholars such as Tu Weiming (Du Weiming, b. 1940) were hired to help implement Confucianism in education and society at large. Significantly, according to Goh Keng Swee (as cited by Michael Nylan) it was ‘up to the scholars to find it (i.e. the sort of ethic we should teach in Singapore) somewhere in Confucian literature.’

To put it bluntly, ‘Goh said, he “would turn Confucius on his head to make him appropriate for Singapore.”’

Deng Xiaoping’s drive for economic development and modernisation could make good use of a secular Confucius and his work ethic for many reasons. First of all, to distance himself from the financially (and otherwise) disastrous Cultural Revolution, embracing Confucius – the radicals’ enemy number one – was a clear signal that times had changed. Secondly, if the sort of work ethic associated with Confucius had been useful in Singapore and the other tiger economies why not also in China? Furthermore, Deng’s open door policy would stand to benefit from the more benign image of Confucius and the aura of familiarity and predictability that surround him. In addition, this improved image could help pave the way for a future unification with Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

As modernisation got under way new areas appeared where Confucius turned out to be useful; for example, as a guardian of ‘Asian values’ vis-à-vis Western liberalism and demands for Western style democracy. A logical consequence of that was, of course, a rejection of the May Fourth Movement and its legacy. Mao Zedong thought (sixiang 思想), the ideological underpinnings of the People’s Republic prior to Deng’s return to power, had lost its energy and broad appeal, which also invited the return of Confucius (as well as less desirable elements such as Falun Gong 法轮功 and various Christian sects). Having in effect dismantled the communist state in favour of a market economy, which is perhaps best characterised as unbridled, the results of the Confucian work ethic, namely ‘[w]orship of money, hedonism, and extreme individualism,’ had to be opposed with other traditional Confucian virtues such as self constraint and consideration for others. These virtues, it was hoped, would be able to curb other ‘social ills’ such as ‘a

43 Nylan and Wilson 2010, 217.
44 Ibid., 218.
45 See, for example, Moody 2007, 88ff.
46 See Moody 2007, 92.
spiraling crime rate, unemployment, corruption, and an increasing wealth gap.\footnote{Zhu 2006.} As it turns out, particularly in the last 20 years, Confucius as well as his new supporters and new critics have been busy on so many fronts that the picture has become somewhat blurred.

While it is indisputable that Confucius is among us again, the question often posed is, was he ever gone and if so who or what brought him back? Or, if he was with us all along, where and how did he hide? The answer, I am afraid, is as ambiguous as Confucius himself. As far as I can see, we are at the moment dealing with (at least) three different incarnations of Confucius:

First to be listed here is the Confucius engaged by academics (philologists, historians, philosophers, and so on). One significant contributing factor to the popularity of Confucius among Chinese scholars today is the many exciting archaeological discoveries made in China over the last decades which have brought to life new texts written on bamboo strips and silk cloth dating back more than 2,000 years. These texts, the most famous of which are those of Mawangdui 馬王堆 (1972–1974) and Guodian 郭店 (1993), have considerably changed the picture of early China's intellectual history and Confucius' role in it. Scores of conferences focusing on excavated texts have been held in China, Europe, and the US, and once again philology has risen to prominence. However, there seems to be a marked difference in the way these texts are read and understood in China and in the West with regard to Confucius and his position. Generally speaking, Chinese scholars tend to find support for a 'pre-May Fourth' Confucius not unlike ver. 1.0 of the Jesuits described at the beginning of this chapter whereas Western scholars try to reconstruct, as it were, a de-secularised (even semi-mythological) Kongzi of the pre-imperial era. So while the sceptical tradition in China of the early 20th century is in a way being continued by Western scholars who attempt to look beyond the Jesuit construct, Chinese scholarship seems to be restoring Confucius to his traditional position and former glory of the Jesuit era. In both the Chinese and the Western camp we find intellectuals who regard Confucianism as normative with an unmistakable resemblance to a religious faith or a political ideology.\footnote{See Makeham 2008 (especially pp. 261–330), and Mou 2003.}

The second Confucius is a distant relative of the scholars' Confucius, and he is perhaps more difficult to pin down. This ghostlike incarnation is thriving – or said to be thriving – among ordinary people and is perhaps
most tangible as the internalised equivalent of the Weberian Protestant ethic. This Confucius is largely synonymous with a set of norms and adages culled from interpretations of a motley collection of texts, which have come into existence over the last 2,000 years. Some of these texts like the *Three-Character Canon* (*Sanzi jing* 三字經) and the *Thousand-Character Text* (*Qianzi wen* 千字文) were for centuries taught at primary school,\(^{49}\) and other texts (often copiously illustrated) were and are circulated privately and commercially.\(^{50}\) In many ways this rigid adherence to a textual tradition has shaped the minds of generations (not unlike the way New Testament Christian ethics have entered the minds of generations elsewhere) making it impossible to discount the notion of the Confucian ghost (or ghosts) in Chinese popular culture, which is already crowded with equally elusive counterparts from other religio-philosophical traditions such as *Daoism* (Taoism) and Buddhism.

The third manifestation is the Confucius entertained by the Chinese Government and the Communist Party elite; he is not exactly the identical twin of the scholars’ Confucius, rather an extremely well-behaved cousin. In fact, he is so well behaved that he has been chosen to represent China and Chineseness, connoting a secular and humanist tradition with an emphasis on education, harmony, and meritocracy. This refers to an ideal – praised by enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire (1694–1778) – of the past, which was rarely realised: The sage-emperor taking good care of his children (the people). In invoking this secular and humanist tradition it has been imperative for the present Chinese government (as well as for past governments) to co-opt all the distant relatives of Confucius, material and non-material, scholarly and popular, domestic and foreign.

The last two decades, while actively endorsing Confucius and Confucianism (most visibly through the establishment of more than 300 Confucius Institutes worldwide), the Chinese Government and its leaders seem to have been very careful not to state their approval publicly. Makeham lists

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\(^{49}\) A modernised version of the *Three-Character Canon* was published on the initiative of the Communist Party in 1994, see Yao 2003, 527f. The Confucius of the Four Books, which formed the basic curriculum for the Imperial exams, belongs to the elite, i.e. the scholars and administrators. The primary school textbooks recount episodes from the Four Books in popular and more fanciful versions.

\(^{50}\) A very large number of classical Chinese texts including principal texts of the ‘Confucian’ tradition have been issued in a series with titles prefaced by *The Illustrated* […] (*Tu jie* […]), see the publisher at www.zito.cn/.
a number of government initiatives on the educational front during the
period 1993–2004 none of which appeal to traditional values, Confucian-
ism or Confucius. At the same time it has been not only possible but also
desirable for universities again to convene conferences, set up centres and
research teams, invite foreign scholars as well as Chinese scholars living
abroad (such as Du Weiming and Cheng Chung-ying [Cheng Zhongying, b. 1935]),
and to publish journals, since so-called ‘New Confucianism’ (xin rujia 新儒家) in 1986 ‘was identified and funded as a key research project.’
Prior to the establishment of this key research area, a new sculpture of the
master had been installed in the renovated temple at Qufu (1984), and a
Chinese Confucius Research Institute (Zhonghua Kongzi yanjiusuo 中華孔子
研究所) had been established (1985) to, among other things, ‘promote inter-
national cultural exchange related to Chinese civilization’; strongly indicat-
ing the impending reorientation of party policy on the issue. Celebrations
of Confucius’ birthday at the temple in Qufu (and elsewhere) were revived
with funding from the government and active participation of government
officials such as, for example, Vice-premier Gu Mu (1914–2009) who was
made Honorary Chairman of the China Confucius Foundation (Zhonghua
Kongzi jijinhui 中華孔子基金會, established in Beijing in 1984). At least on one
occasion Jiang Zemin (b. 1926) met with representatives of a symposium
held in connection with these celebrations although it seems not to have
been part of the official program.

From the mid-1980s popular outbursts of interest in traditional culture
(of which Confucianism is arguably believed to be the biggest subset)
became comparatively widespread in China. These included the Culture
‘Craze’ or ‘Fever’ (wenhua re 文化熱) of the 1980s and the National Studies
‘Craze’ or ‘Fever’ (guoxue re 國學熱) of the 1990s, and the magnitude of these
eruptions is perhaps best gauged by the enormous number of books on
traditional history, culture, and philosophy published. During the period

51 Makeham 2008, 311–313.
52 See Makeham 2003, 5–6, 34.
53 See, for example, Murray 2009b, 264. After a government-sponsored restoration, the three
Confucius sites (the Temple, the Mansion, and the Cemetery) in Qufu, received status as a
54 Makeham 2003, 87. This meeting took place in October 1989, only three months after
Jiang Zemin took office as General Secretary of the Communist Party on the 24th of June
that year. See also Murray 2009b, 265 where she says, that during the traditional sacrifices
‘painted facsimiles are substituted for real animals.’ When I visited the temple in Qufu for the
birthday celebrations in September 2006 real animals were sacrificed.
of National Studies one of the oldest books in China – often referred to as both the first book in the Confucian canon and the Chinese library – *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) became immensely popular and countless different editions for different purposes were (and are) published every year. In 1992 alone four *Yijing* encyclopaedias (totalling 4,211 pages) were published and in 1993 a fifth (1,546 pages) was added. Today all major book stores in China have separate sections for *Yijing* studies next to expanding sections on various other aspects of traditional culture such as biographies of model emperors, philosophers, and the aforementioned illustrated editions of classical works. To what extent these popular expressions of interest in the past in general and Confucianism in particular are manipulated by the state is difficult to say. Perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of this phenomenon is how it relates to nationalism and how it may serve to safeguard against unwanted influences that have come with China’s growing involvement with the rest of the world.

As the Chinese government has continued its no longer quite so tacit endorsement of Confucius, the most notable change is that the sage has come out of the university venues and entered popular culture and the mass media. In a series of lectures on China Central Television (state run and generally considered to represent official government positions) broadcast in 2006 Associate Professor at Beijing Normal University (Beijing Shifan Daxue 北京師範大學) Yu Dan (b. 1965) expounded the thought of Confucius, which was subsequently published in book form and became an instant bestseller. More TV shows and books followed (as well as translations into English), and while Yu Dan enjoyed great popularity among the general population, scholars and intellectuals were less enthusiastic about her interpretations of Confucius, which have been characterised as ‘a watered-down version’ and ‘Chicken Soup for the Chinese Soul’. However, as Daniel Bell rightly points out, labelling Yu Dan’s Confucianism apolitical or depoliticised misses the point: Yu Dan’s self help adaptation of Confucianism seasoned with selected sayings from Buddhist and Daoist sources is designed to bring consolation and hope to people in need of it and thus seems to serve the political agenda

56 See Yu 2006, Yu 2008, and Yu 2009. My copy of Yu 2006 is the 28th reprint bringing the total to a mind boggling 4,550,000 copies!
57 See, for example, Merkel-Hess, Pomeranz and Wasserstrom 2009, 263.
quite adequately.\(^{58}\) According to newspaper reports Yu Dan is also a popular speaker in prisons, and both private business owners and local governments purchase her books by the thousands to be distributed among employees.\(^{59}\) It remains to be seen whether or not Yu Dan’s first book translated into English (\textit{Confucius from the Heart}) will also become a bestseller in the West. I think it is safe to say, though, that no other individual in the 21st century has singlehandedly done more to promote Confucius – a highly palatable ver. 2.0, perhaps – as a remedy against all evil at home and abroad than Yu Dan.

Yu Dan’s lectures and books may also have paved the way for an animated television series about Confucius and his teachings which aired on the Master’s 2,560th birthday in 2009. The cartoon series, which runs to 104 13-minute episodes, portrays Confucius as a 10-year-old, middle-aged and old. According to the official Xinhua News Agency the 10-year-old Confucius ‘is a cute boy with bright eyes, holding a book.’\(^{60}\) A perhaps more serious attempt to portray the ancient sage hit the front page of the \textit{China Daily} on 25 September 2006; a big colour photo portraying ‘[t]wo primary school students dressed as Han dynasty (202BC–AD220) intellectuals pay homage to a Confucius statue; a 2.55 metres tall bronze statue which, from that day on, was to be considered the official image or standard portrait.\(^{61}\) The uneasiness of having several Confucius personas around is clearly addressed in the article below the photo: ‘The idea, a copyrighted [sic] statue, was developed because the image of Confucius differs in historical works. [. . .] A standard portrait is needed so that different countries can have the same image of him.’\(^{62}\) Also, as Julia K. Murray rightly calls to mind, ‘[e]stablishing an official portrait of Confucius is an assertion of authority over the heritage of Chinese civilization.’\(^{63}\)

The second decade of the 21st century witnessed new developments in state-sponsored efforts to define and market Confucius ver. 2.0. This was 115-minute biographical movie \textit{Kongzi}, starring Hong Kong actor Chow Yun-fat (Zhou Runfa b. 1955) as Confucius and directed by Hu Mei (b. 1958),

\(^{58}\) See Bell 2008, 174. At the same time though, Bell finds that ‘the deepest problem with Yu Dan’s book is the Daoist-inspired effort to depoliticize Confucianism.’ Ibid., 170.

\(^{59}\) Ho 2009.

\(^{60}\) Zhao 2009. See also Murray 2009b, 269–270.


\(^{62}\) \textit{China Daily} 2006, frontpage.

\(^{63}\) Murray 2009b, 269.
was to be revealed on the 60th birthday of the People’s Republic (coinciding with 2,560th birthday of Confucius) but for reasons not disclosed had to be postponed to January 2010. It is not clear to what degree the authorities were involved in this production, however, it is most likely to be remembered best for the state-run China Film Group Corporation’s not wholly successful attempts to disadvantage James Cameroun’s *Avatar* in the competition between the two films in Chinese cinemas (clearly, the Chinese audience preferred the latter).  

It is also far from clear what role the Chinese party state played in the inauguration of the Confucius Peace Prize in November 2010. Broadly perceived as the Chinese government’s reaction to the Norwegian Nobel Committee’s decision to give the 2010 peace prize to Liu Xiaobo (b. 1955), who had been sentenced to 11 years in prison for anti-state activities in 2009 by the Chinese authorities, the institution of the Confucius Peace Prize was surprisingly suspended on 27 September 2011 on the official website of the Chinese Ministry of Culture.  

At the same time a short list of nominees had already been published including the names of Vladimir Putin, Jacob Zuma, Angela Merkel and Bill Gates, and while various departments and associations under the Ministry of Culture blamed each other for acting on their own and illegally, a committee composed of ‘16 patriotic scholars’ including a certain ‘Qiao Damo, the self-described co-founder and president of the Confucius Peace Prize committee’ and ‘Kong Qingdong, a professor of Chinese literature at Peking University who has boasted widely that he is in the 73rd generation of Confucius’ lineage’, awarded the prize to Vladimir Putin at a ceremony held at a newly established China International Peace Research Centre in Hong Kong on 11th November 2011. The prize was reportedly accepted by two Russian female exchange students on behalf of Putin but different pairs of girls appear in different photographs from the award ceremony.  

A similar hesitant and precarious attitude seems to surround the unexpected appearance on 11th January 2011 of an almost ten-metre high bronze sculpture of Confucius outside the northern entry to the new National Museum just east of Tiananmen Square (and not on the Square and not

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64 Widely reported in the international press, see e.g. LaFraniere 2010, A4.
65 Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Wenhuabu 2011. See also Moore 2011.
67 See e.g. Curtis M. Wong 2011.
facing the portrait of Mao as often reported in the Western press). The statue, which incidentally did not conform to the copyrighted standard mentioned earlier, occasioned a lot of speculation in both China and the West but before any conclusions could be reached it had disappeared again. During the night of 20–21 April 2011 the estimated 17-ton Confucius was moved to one of the inner courtyards of the National Museum where it can be seen through the windows but not accessed (in September 2011 the staff would not allow this author anywhere near the statue). However, the disappearance and relocation of the statue has left the world with the impression that not everyone in the Chinese party state stands behind Confucius and that some are more eager than others when it comes to promoting the sage.

Nevertheless, the naturalness with which Confucius has re-emerged on practically all levels of Chinese society is striking. Kang Youwei’s attempt to introduce Confucius as a religious (Christian) icon was a complete failure, and the Chinese government has excluded Confucianism from the list of approved religions in spite of the fact that the annual birthday celebrations at Qufu and elsewhere have clear religious overtones with sacrifices, ritual music and dance. The secular Confucius, on the other hand, seems to have enjoyed better relations with the Communist Party and the government than the disruptive decade 1966–1976 would suggest. Several scholars have taken note of the many similarities between (Chinese) Marxism and Confucianism. Both ideologies are rational in their self-perceptions and opposed to religious superstition, and both ideologies are all-inclusive and based on a small elite who are responsible for the education of the masses. Both Marxism and Confucianism put a heavy premium on the moral aspects of education, role models, and self-cultivation.

It seems that Confucianism as modified and interpreted in the Jesuit construction helped pave the way for the introduction of Marxism (and not Liberalism or Democracy), which in turn facilitated the recent rise of or focus on Confucianism (and not Liberalism or Democracy). On the one hand, the initial dismissal of Confucianism and call for modernity in the early 20th century opened the field to new players, and on the other, the educated elite found itself without the support of an ideological foundation. From an elitist point of view, the divide between the Confucian scholar-official and the Communist party-cadre could be bridged without compromising any

68 See e.g. Curtis M. Wong 2011.
69 See e.g. Tian 2005, 7, Idema and Haft 1997, 264.
major assumptions entertained by the elite as is apparent in the writings of, for example, Liu Shaoqi mentioned above. As Idema and Haft state, ‘this transformation [from Confucianism to Marxism] did not require fundamental rethinking of the basic interrelationships of truth, elite, state, and society.’

A somewhat more radical idea or question – but one well worth looking into – suggests itself: Did Confucianism in its Jesuit guise in any way influence the thought of Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895)? Of course, I am not suggesting that an explicit transmission of Confucian ideas took place from the early Jesuits to Karl Marx but it is not unlikely that certain notions associated with Confucianism became widespread in learned communities in Europe from the early 18th century on. The Jesuit construct of Confucius attracted a certain amount of attention among European thinkers during the Enlightenment period of the 18th century. Leibniz (1646–1716) was one of the very first to take an interest in Confucianism and the Chinese intellectual heritage, and he was soon followed by such prominent thinkers as Voltaire (aka François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778), Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and, not least, François Quesnay (1694–1774) who was known as the European Confucius. Others – who were less impressed with China than the aforementioned – include Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu (1689–1755), Denis Diderot (1713–1784), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) but Confucianism had clearly become an item on the European agenda. Hegel even lectured on Confucianism and, together with Kant, was among the primary influences on Karl Marx.

In conclusion, perceptions and interpretations of Confucius and Confucianism have not been confined to any one locality but seem to have been travelling freely within and between cultural boundaries. In the process these perceptions and interpretations have continually been negotiated and changed to accommodate different needs and preferences. The present Chinese government’s increasingly explicit support of Confucius and Confucianism is just one example of such an accommodation, albeit an important one. On the surface it seems perfectly ‘natural’ that Confucius again is given an official image in China and canonised (after all, was he not born in China?) but on closer inspection this appropriation may be predicated on and motivated by a number of suppositions – some of which I have hinted at

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70 Idema and Haft 1997, 264.
above – that make the choice less natural in terms of Confucius’ Chineseness. Serious academic studies of the recent history of the changing perceptions and interpretations of Confucius and Confucianism in a global context need to be conducted if we hope to come to an understanding of these sometimes highly elusive phenomena.

**Bibliography**


2

An English Missionary’s Contribution to the Historical Memories of Hangzhou: A Study of Arthur Evans Moule’s Writings and Photographs

Shen Hong

Hangzhou is an ancient Chinese city with a history of more than 2,000 years. Once the capital of the Southern Song Dynasty, it is now the capital of Zhejiang Province, famous for its rich cultural heritage and beautiful natural surroundings. Since the days of Marco Polo in the 14th century, Hangzhou has been well known as ‘a heavenly city’, or ‘heaven below’.

Nevertheless, since the 1850s, the city of Hangzhou has experienced a series of wars, revolutions, political movements and, after the reform of the 1980s, large-scale economic development. A direct consequence of these drastic social upheavals and rapid developments is that the skyline of the city and the landscape of its suburbs are constantly changing. The ancient city walls and gates, as well as many historical and religious buildings, have totally disappeared. Some canals within the city have been filled in and transformed into asphalt roads and streets. Whole blocks of old houses

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1 The pinyin system is adopted in this chapter for place names. Therefore the old spelling of ‘Hangchow’ will be replaced by ‘Hangzhou’ unless it appears in quotations.
2 Marco Polo cited in Yule 1903, 185.
3 As an old Chinese saying goes, ‘Up in heaven there is a paradise, down below there are Suzhou and Hangzhou’.
4 In 1860 and 1862, Hangzhou was twice invaded and occupied by the Taiping rebel armies, nearly all the Buddhist temples were burned down. Towards the end of 1937, Hangzhou was invaded and occupied by the Japanese troops, nearly all the shops along Yanling Road were robbed and destroyed by Japanese soldiers.
5 The revolutions of 1911 and 1949 both caused major transformation of the city’s infrastructure. The city walls and city gates disappeared, much religious architecture was either destroyed or turned into educational or administrative institutions, and several canals were filled in to become streets.
6 Since 1949, there have been a series of political movements, which directly affected the work of city construction. During the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s, large-scale destruction occurred to many historical buildings.
were torn down to make way for modern high-rise buildings, overpasses and subways. Together with these physical changes to the city skyline came changes in social customs and lifestyle. After the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), most of the traditional Chinese festivals and religious practices were either abandoned or neglected. Young people today prefer Christmas rather than the traditional Chinese Spring Festival; they celebrate St Valentine’s Day, instead of the traditional Double Seventh Festival (Qixi jie 七夕节) in the lunar calendar, when the mythological Cowherd and Weaver Maid meet with each other once a year on a magpie bridge in heaven.

Undeniably this process of modern urbanisation or globalisation is a sign of social progress, yet these changes came so rapidly that the local people did not even have the time to reflect on what they were losing in this process. It was not until 2006, when the municipal government of Hangzhou decided to apply to UNESCO for the Grand Canal and the West Lake to be listed as World Heritage Sites, that people began to realise that many historical memories about Hangzhou’s past had been lost since the primary requirement for these candidates of the World Heritage Sites is to have their original environments well preserved. In the efforts to restore historical relics in the city of Hangzhou and the scenic spots around the West Lake to their original state a century before, the city planners and local historians in Hangzhou came to learn about their ignorance concerning the details of the city’s historical past.

It is true that from the existing records of some local chronicles we can still draw a rough picture of the city’s past. Yet it can only be a very sketchy picture for, generally speaking, Chinese history books omit minute details, and there are relatively few representations of images. For instance, we can hardly find any physical descriptions and practically no pictures of the ten city gates on the old city walls of Hangzhou in the local chronicles. As a result, any previous effort to restore these city gates inevitably resulted in a misrepresentation.

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7 There might be two alternative answers to this strange phenomenon: these city walls and gates were either too common to attract the attention of the authors of the local chronicles; or any knowledge concerning the city walls and gates was regarded as military secret. If the enemies learned about this secret, they would easily find out the weak points to break into the city.

8 In 2008, a pseudo-classical Museum of Old City Gates was built on the original site of Qingchun Gate, one of the three old eastern city gates of Hangzhou. For lack of historical reference, the designer of the museum had to take his model of the city gate from a famous ancient Chinese scroll painting entitled Along the River during the Qingming Festival, which actually represents a street scene in Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty. If we
In this respect, the books written in foreign languages and the photographs taken by foreigners of Hangzhou in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have become an indispensable supplement to Chinese historical records. Fortunately, being a commercial centre and a city of political and cultural importance, Hangzhou has through the ages attracted foreign merchants, Buddhist monks, Christian missionaries, diplomats, customs officers, painters, photographers and tourists from all corners of the world. In the late Qing and early Republican periods, quite a few foreign residents and travelers recorded their personal impressions of Hangzhou in the forms of books, paintings and photographs – William Alexander, A. E. van Braam Houckgeest, G. E and A. E Moule, David Duncan Main, Mrs. J. F. Bishop, Robert Ferris Fitch, Frederick D. Cloud, Sidney Gamble, Ernst Boerschmann, William Edgar Geil, Eugene E. Barnett, Eugenia Barnett Schultheis, to name only a few. Among this group of foreigners, A. E. Moule is one of the earliest and most remarkable to have left behind written as well as photographic records of Hangzhou in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Arthur Evans Moule was an English missionary sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to China in 1861, three years after his elder brother George Evans Moule (1828–1912) had started work at the Zhejiang (Chekiang) Mission in Ningbo (Ningpo). George was later consecrated as the first Bishop of CMS Mid-China Mission, and in the following years Arthur worked closely with his brother as Archdeacon and secretary to the same mission. In the 1922–1923 CMS annual report of the Zhejiang Mission, we find the following eulogy on the Moule family:

No name is so identified with the Chekiang Mission as that of Moule. The brothers, George and Arthur, who became bishop and archdeacon, were the leaders respectively for many years at the two chief cities occupied, Ningpo and Hangchow. Adding their wives and sons and daughters, we can count fourteen Moules who have done definite service in the missionary enterprise; to say nothing of the influence of their family connexions at Dorchester, Cambridge, and Durham.

compare the restored city gate with the more recently discovered photographs of the original gate, we may see clearly that it is a preposterous mistake.

9 Since 2008, I have published a series of ten articles on this particular subject in the journal of Studies in Culture and Arts, published by Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Culture and Arts in Hangzhou. See also the following books: Shen Hong 2010, Shen Hong et al. 2010, Martin 2004, and Geil 2008.

10 ARC 1923, 75.
During his half a century’s stay in China, Archdeacon Moule was intimately involved in all kinds of missionary work, including that of an acting bishop while his brother George was taking his furlough in England. Yet in spite of the heavy workload, he was also a prolific writer and translator. Incomplete statistics based on the collections in Harvard libraries show that he published at least nine books, one booklet, and two journal articles in English,\(^\text{11}\) recording in great detail his missionary experiences in China, including his first impressions of Ningbo, Hangzhou and Shanghai in the 1860s and the development of the CMS missionary cause in Zhejiang Province through the 1870s. He tried in various ways to introduce the geography, history, culture, religions, classical works, educational systems of China, as well as the lifestyles of the Chinese people, to an English audience.

At the same time, he translated the gospels and other biblical texts into Chinese, in both Ningbo and Hangzhou dialects. For instance, he translated psalms (\textit{zanmeishi} 赞美诗), ‘the Common Prayer’ (\textit{Qidaowen} 祷祷文), ‘the Gospel of Matthew’ (\textit{Matai fuyin} 马太福音), and ‘the Gospel of John’ (\textit{Yuehan fuyin} 约翰福音) into Hangzhou dialect.\(^\text{12}\) These texts are now invaluable; since the written scripts of Hangzhou dialect are rare and we know very little about what the original dialect was like more than a hundred years ago. Now with these texts, linguists will be able to figure out how the Hangzhou dialect evolved into the present form.

Besides translating biblical texts, A. E. Moule also wrote numerous sermons and articles in both English and Chinese and published at least two original works of his own in Chinese: \textit{Yingguo yuzhi} 英国舆志 (\textit{The Geography of Great Britain}), \textit{Jiuyue zhushi} 旧约注释 (\textit{Notes on the Old Testament}).\(^\text{13}\) All of these works were apparently addressed to a Chinese audience, in an effort to open their eyes to a larger external world and to understand England and the holy scriptures of Christianity better. Relying on his extraordinary language proficiency, A. E.

\(^{11}\) An incomplete search of A. E. Moule’s works yielded the following nine books, one booklet, and two articles: \textit{Four Hundred Million: Chapters on China and the Chinese} 1871; ‘The Use of Opium, and Its Bearing on the Spreading of Christianity in China’ 1877; \textit{The Story of the Cheh-kiang Mission of the Church Missionary Society} 1878; \textit{Chinese Stories for Boys and Girls} and \textit{Chinese Wisdom for Old and Young} 1881; \textit{New China and Old: Personal Recollections and Observations of Thirty Years} 1891; \textit{The Glorious Land: Chapters on China} 1891; \textit{Personal Recollections of the T’ai P’ing Rebellion} 1861–63 1898; ‘Ningpo Under The T’ai P’ing’ 1904; ‘Ningpo: Ancient and Modern’ 1905; \textit{Young China} 1908; \textit{Half A Century in China: Reflections and Observations} 1911; \textit{The Chinese People: A Handbook on China} 1914.

\(^{12}\) MacGillivray 1907, 30.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 31.
Moule perceived himself as a bridge between two very different cultures. In this respect, he was a real practitioner of so-called ‘ideas in transit’.

His initial impressions and observations of Hangzhou are most vividly presented in his memoir, *New China and Old: Personal Recollections and Observations of Thirty Years* (1891). In that book, A. E. Moule told the readers that he set out from Ningbo on his first journey to Hangzhou in May 1865, one year after his older brother G. E. Moule had established his permanent residence in the provincial capital.

Travelling in a native sailing boat, he found everything so different from his familiar English ways. For instance, there were no locks in inland waterways, so when the boats were passing from one canal to another, they had to be pulled, often with the help of buffalos, across a high embankment, and then, with a push, the boats would slide down along a mud track into another canal. Arriving at Xixing (Si-hyin), near the city of Hangzhou, he had to change from the boat to a ferry-junk in order to cross the Qiantang (Ts’ien-Tang) River. A. E. Moule found that the ferry system in Hangzhou was quite a unique one:

Instead of allowing the fares to be charged in the ferry-junks which ply to and fro from sunrise to sunset, the gentry of Hangchow, the gentlemen-merchants of Ningpo, the gentlemen-merchants of Shaou-hyin, the Custom Office, and Salt Department at Hangchow, and a great banker, since then bankrupt and dead, subscribed a large fund, from the interests of which the twenty or thirty junks are fitted out, repaired and manned; and crowds of people, rich and poor alike, pass free.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the ferry was not always free. If there was a war or famine in some part of China, the provincial treasurer and the above-mentioned Committee would issue an order that the ferry-junk would not start until everybody in the ferry made some kind of contribution to the relief work. Another thing that impressed him was the fact that the river beach was so muddy that the passengers had to use a buffalo cart in order to reach the ferry. Information of this kind is useful to both Western and Chinese readers alike for, as a rule, such details are rare in the official archive.

As he was crossing the river in a ferry-junk, A. E. Moule tells us, the formidable presence of a pagoda on the other side of the river suddenly came into his view:

¹⁴ Moule 1891a, 40.
Opposite to us, on the further shore, standing now fully four miles beyond the city walls, but formerly in all probability within their vaster circuit, loomed the grand Pagoda of Six Harmonies (Liuhetā 六和塔), founded A.D. 950, and built in its present form A.D. 1200. The long white line of the suburb stretches almost to the promontory on which this pagoda stands; the end of the suburb being marked by a small but graceful ‘needle’ pagoda, twenty-five feet high.\textsuperscript{15}

As will be discussed later, the Pagoda of Six Harmonies as he saw it in 1865 is very different from what it is today. What might interest a native reader of Hangzhou more in this same passage is his following discussion or introduction to the vicissitudes of the city walls in the past one thousand years:

Under the T’ang dynasty, A.D. 891, the most ancient and original wall (built during the Sui dynasty, A.D. 606, and ten miles or thirty-six Chinese \textit{li} 里 in length) was enlarged to seventy \textit{li} or twenty miles.

In the twelfth century (A.D. 1159), under the Southern Song dynasty, the walls seemed to have stretched to their greatest length of one hundred Chinese miles (according to Marco Polo), or nearly thirty of our miles. Under the Ming, who succeeded the Mongols during the latter half of the fourteenth century, they were once more contracted to twelve miles, or nearly the primal circuit of the city.\textsuperscript{16}

Such a succinct but detailed summary about the history of Hangzhou’s city walls can hardly be found elsewhere. Even today, local historians in Hangzhou are still puzzled over the question how Hangzhou’s city walls evolved, for these historians have never seen the city walls in their original state. Their knowledge about the city walls is incomplete, derived partly from local chronicles and proverbs, partly from recent archaeological findings. As an English missionary, A. E. Moule must have been extremely well read and well informed to have had such an intimate knowledge about Hangzhou’s history.

Through the parapets of the city walls, the newcomer A. E. Moule could catch sight of two other pagodas: the Pagoda of the Thundering Peak (Leifengta 雷峰塔) on the southern shore of the West Lake, and the Needle Pagoda (Baochuta 保俶塔) on the northern shore of the lake. And, as he approached the city shore, he could see more clearly the hills westward of the city around

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 41.
and above the Pagoda of Six Harmonies. The ruined imperial Summer Palace and pleasure grounds of the Southern Song dynasty also became discernible through the tall grass on the hillside, and he could clearly see an imperial road leading up to the top of the mountain. The picturesque view of this ancient city deeply impressed the young English missionary:

I am reminded, as we near the city landing, that Hangchow and Soochow (the capital of the adjoining province of Kiangsu) are to the Chinese heavenly paradises – 'Heaven above; Hangchow and Soochow below'; and in truth on that warm summer afternoon, Hangchow looked from a distance like a glimpse of celestial regions.17

Here A. E. Moule's tone sounds much like that of Marco Polo when the latter exclaimed: 'the city is beyond dispute the finest and the noblest in the world.'18 Indeed, as we read on, this impression becomes increasingly stronger. Both authors lived long in China, both are good storytellers, and both pay great attention to the details in their narration, and both are enthusiastic about what they see. When A. E. Moule first entered the city of Hangzhou, he was a little stunned by the number of people he saw in the street. He noticed that some of the pedestrians were well dressed in silk and satin, some wore light or dark blue tunics, some were holding umbrellas against the scorching sun, while nearly everyone had a fan in his hand. Among the crowd, he noticed some special groups of people typical of Hangzhou:

Some near the city gate are carrying singing-birds in cages; a favourite amusement for dilettante gentry. They held the cages at arm's-length in the wind, or hang them on the low boughs of a tree, and stand or sit smoking and listening to the cheerful and melodious notes of the 'yellow eyebrow,' a loud-voiced thrush; and of the lark which abounds on the flats of the T’sien-tang. Buddhist priests go by with shaven heads and unwashed vestments, bound for the famous monastery beyond the head of the western lake. Taoist priests pass us with a tuft of hair on the crown of the head, and a square hat through a hole in which the tuft of hair appears. But the vast majority of the throng consists of merchants, coolies, agricultural labourers, and artisans.19

17 Ibid., 43.
18 Marco Polo cited in Yule 1903, 185.
19 Moule 1891a, 48.
Moule’s description of the ‘ dilettante gentry ’ is quite accurate, for caged singing-birds was indeed a favourite pastime among the gentry class in traditional Hangzhou. Even today there is still a market in the city to sell singing-birds in cages and there are still quite a number of people who enjoy ‘listening to the cheerful and melodious notes of singing birds’ at home or in the open air. Hangzhou used to be a centre for Buddhist and Taoist temples, and the number of Buddhist and Taoist priests was very high. The accuracy of A. E. Moule’s observations is further confirmed by another passage describing a special method Hangzhou builders used to build their mud walls:

Parallel boards were firmly lashed together, forming a kind of narrow case round the prepared wall. The earth is poured in, and moistened with water, and the builders squeezed in between the boards, and stamp or knead the mud with their feet, or ram it down with long pestles. When the work is finished the boards are removed, and walls are roofed and tiled and plastered. If left exposed to heavy rain or frost, they split and collapse.  

As late as the 1960s, many walls within the city of Hangzhou were still made of mud, and such a method of wall-making as described above was still generally employed.

Similar descriptions of premodern Hangzhou in the above-mentioned book include A. E. Moule’s account of the fashionable commercial quarter of the city, with different kinds of shops, especially the colourful fruit shops with oranges, apples, loquat, small cherries and apricots, luscious persimmon, and the cumqua (a diminutive of lemon-orange); of the daily routine of the Yamen and the somewhat complicated police system in the late Qing period; of the great Kung-yuen (Examination Hall) in the northern quarter of the city, ‘with its transcribers’ and printers’ offices, its temple and watch towers, its kitchens and its 10,000 cells for candidates’; of the various forms of public entertainment, especially the flying of colourful paper kites in spring; of the different varieties of flowers in Hangzhou – ‘the camellia, the apricot, the peach-blossom, roses, the red pomegranate, the lotus, the balsam, the Quey Hwa, or Olea Fragrans [. . .] the aster and chrysanthemum,

20 Ibid., 49.
21 Ibid., 57.
22 Ibid., 59–62
23 Ibid., 64.
24 Ibid., 70–71.
the hibiscus, the *lammey* or wax almond [ . . . ] and the white and pink varieties of double almond or apricot,\textsuperscript{25} and so on.

As has already been pointed out earlier, the description of the physical formation of Hangzhou’s city walls and gates is quite rare in Chinese local chronicles. Therefore the following detailed account of a city gate by A. E. Moule is well worth our special attention:

With something akin to awe we pass under the shadow of the great gate, and are inside Hangchow. The gateway rises in a fine true arch twenty-five feet overhead, and above the course of brick and stone lead up to the parapet and embrasures; and over all stands the guard-house of the gate, a large shed open to the south, and boarded in to the north. Through the embrasures the mouth of some antiquated cannon gape at us. Except when hostilities are imminent, or a new governor is expected, the defenses of a Chinese city are neglected in the most slovenly manner. One of the curved corners of the guard-house roof is knocked off and in ruins; so it may stay for years. The uprights are rotting, the cannon dismounted and rusted. The very brick parapets of the twelve–mile circuit of the walls, with piercings for *gingal* or rifle, may be kicked down and fall into the moat, and the authorities care not. But if the rumor spreads of a rising of the hill-men thirty miles off, or the official announcement is received of a change of a governor, the masons and carpenters hurriedly appear, and in a superficial manner they patch up the roof, daub the posts, repair the breaches; and soldiers with sudden zeal remount and burnish the old guns, and make the wall’s circuit bright with brave fluttering flags. Chinese city walls are formidable obstacles even to modern artillery. They are simply earthworks of massive construction, broad at the base, and slightly tapering upwards, and they are faced with granites. They are wide enough on average to allow six or seven men to march abreast along the paved summit of the wall, and under cover of the parapets.\textsuperscript{26}

Then he goes on to tell us about the strict rule in the provincial capital of opening the city gates at sunrise and shutting the gates at sunset. There was also a special practice of lighting a red tallow candle in the guard-house as soon as the sun set under the horizon, that would give people an extra hour to get into the city. As soon as the candle-flame expired, the great gates

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 71–72.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 50–51.
would be promptly shut and securely barred.\textsuperscript{27} Again, such vivid details are nowhere recorded in the local chronicles of Hangzhou.

Yet that is not all. As we read on, we find out more characteristic features of Hangzhou’s city walls and gates. For instance, if a person was shut out of the gates in an ordinary Chinese city, usually the gates could be opened by offering a sum of money to bribe the guarding soldiers. But this was not the case in Hangzhou. The rules concerning the opening and closing of the city gates were more strictly observed. We further learn that the gates were sheathed with strips of thin iron, secured by massive bars that fitted into strong sockets on either side of the gates; the bar was also secured to the closed gates with a massive padlock. The rules of closing the gates at sunset also applied to all the water gates around the city. A kind of portcullis with open iron-work would be lowered to about six inches or so above the water to prevent any boats or ships from getting into the city after dark. The most important feature, however, is that some major gates of the city had a peculiar form of defence structure:

We pass now through the first gate, and traverse the large barbican between this and the inner gate. Most Chinese cities have these outer defences. The walls circle around it; and the area seems designed for the massing of troops to defend the outer gate. Then when hard pressed, the garrison can retreat behind the inner gate, and renew the defence there.\textsuperscript{28}

Surprisingly, this barbican structure of the city gates is either unknown or forgotten by many Chinese scholars and historians. In looking at the aforesaid pseudo-classical Museum of Old City Gates built in Hangzhou in 2008, for example, it is clear that the designer was apparently unaware of this basic principle for the functions of the city gates. In this respect, A. E. Moule is again very similar to Marco Polo in providing us with quite unexpected yet crucial information of his times.

Nevertheless A. E. Moule has one advantage over Marco Polo, since he had received a modern college education and lived in an era of industrial change. Therefore he had a more extensive scientific knowledge, as well as a more logical mind. Whenever he described a marvellous scene, he was able to explain the scientific reason behind it. His account of late Qing Hangzhou

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 53.
contains more truth than mere fantasy or hearsay. Take his description of the famous ‘Hangchow Bore’ (Qianjiangchao 钱江潮), for example,

the Hangchow Bore – one of the most remarkable of these singular phenomena. This great wave is sucked from the outer sea beyond Chushan, and joined and strengthened by the wash of the Yang-tse. It is then forced through the funnel-shaped, narrow mouth of T’sien-tang at Haining, thirty miles below Hangchow. It varies from the mere swell of the incoming tide, to a great wall of rushing water, eleven or twelve feet in sheer height, with a stretch of a mile and half in width, and a graceful crest of falling foam like a horse’s mane. It sweeps up the river with a velocity of fourteen or fifteen knots, striking the shore and leaping up, as I have seen it more than once, twenty or thirty feet into the air, swaying and rocking violently the junks and boats moored close to the shore, out of reach of the wall of water, but touched by its wash and current.29

Here he mentions the several factors causing the high tide of the ‘Hangchow Bore’: the great wave sucked in from the outer sea, the strengthening power of the wash of Yangzi River into Hangzhou Bay, the peculiar narrow and funnel-shape mouth of Qiantang River – all of these natural phenomena combined to form this amazing sight of high tide.

Another advantage A. E. Moule had over Marco Polo is that he was acquainted with the modern technology of photography. He was thus able to illustrate and support his points more directly and convincingly by placing photographs in his books as illustrations. These included not only photographs taken by himself, but also those taken by his friends. As his own note indicates on page xii of New China and Old, 15 out of the 31 photographs he used in the book were actually placed at his disposal by one of his fellow missionaries, W. L. Groves.30 About one third of these photographs was taken in Hangzhou. Rediscovered only a few years ago, these photographs in effect are the earliest to have been taken of the city.

Due to the limited space in this chapter, let us examine just three of these photographs from the book New China and Old, Figures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4. The first is that of the Pagoda of Six Harmonies taken about 1885:

29 Ibid., 44.
30 William Leach Groves, M.A., was a CMS missionary sent to Ningbo in 1883. He returned to England because of illness in 1886. Therefore these photographs must have been taken between 1883 and 1886.
An English Missionary’s Contribution to Historical Memories

Figure 2.1: The old Pagoda of Six Harmonies (W. L. Groves 1885). Moule 1891a, facing p. 42.

Figure 2.2: The Pagoda of Six Harmonies today (Shen Hong 2008).
At first sight, one could hardly believe that Figures 2.1 and 2.2 represent the same pagoda, because they look so different: the new pagoda in Figure 2.2 has 13 storeys, whereas the old one in Figure 2.1 has only six. The new pagoda has a beautiful outward wooden structure, whereas the old one has nothing except the brick core left. Yet the authenticity of the old photograph is not in any doubt. The outward appearance sometimes can be deceptive. If one enters the current pagoda and examines it carefully, one will soon find out that it has only seven storeys. In its history of more than one thousand years, the Pagoda of Six Harmonies suffered much serious damage, and it was rebuilt or renovated numerous times. The present wooden structure was added to the pagoda in 1899; since then the pagoda has also undergone several major renovations. Without the photograph provided by A. E. Moule, we simply cannot imagine what the pagoda looked like in the 19th century. From this particular example, we can see how important a role photographs can play in helping us restore the historical memory of Hangzhou.

The second example is a photograph of ‘Ba 堤’ or portage on the way to Hangzhou (1885). From Moule 1891a, facing p. 46.
common. This practice, however, was also long forgotten until the following photograph was rediscovered in A. E. Moule’s book some years ago. Since then it has fired the inspiration of some artists to create a landmark sculpture for the city of Hangzhou, entitled ‘The Soul of the Grand Canal’ (Yunhehun 运河魂). The scene of a loaded boat being pulled up the embankment by five water buffaloes and a group of coolies really has a powerful and heart-stirring artistic effect.

Figure 2.4 is a photograph of an ancient pavilion in the graceful Chinese style on one of the islands in the West Lake. The pavilion was some kind of community house. The citizens living in Hangzhou during the late Qing dynasty used this pavilion on important occasions, such as weddings, family reunions, public gatherings, or birthday feasts. This beautiful pavilion, unfortunately, has not survived the passing of time, but is now replaced by another building of a very different style. The pavilion is still there on the island, but a different one.

A. E. Moule provided photographs and pictures of Hangzhou in two other books. They are equally effective in helping us restore our historical memories of Hangzhou and understand what Hangzhou really looked like in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Figure 2.4, a photograph in A. E. Moule’s Half A Century in China (1911), is just such a revealing example.
which shows one of the several courtyards in the 800-year-old Yue Fei Temple in its original state in the late 19th century.

Another example is Figure 2.6, a picture A. E. Moule provided in The Story of Cheh-kiang Mission of the Church Missionary Society (1878) about the earliest CMS church and mission house in Hangzhou. The mission house on the right of the picture still exists, having survived as part of the original CMS hospital (now known as No. 2 Zhejiang Provincial Hospital in Hangzhou), which is the oldest and still the best modern hospital in Zhejiang Province. In 2010, the hospital celebrated its 150th anniversary with the publication of a memorial book tracing its history. At the suggestion by the writer of the present chapter, the following picture serves as the subject of one chapter in that memorial book.

The experience of having lived, worked, and travelled in China for altogether 45 years enabled A. E. Moule to have an in-depth knowledge of Chinese culture and a good understanding of China’s social problems. His description of Hangzhou is by no means an idealised one, for he also complained about the numerous and ubiquitous beggars in the provincial capital,\textsuperscript{31} the stagnant

\textsuperscript{31} Moule 1891a, 48.
and open sewage which caused unsavoury odours in the city,\textsuperscript{32} and the dark opium dens in the lanes and streets of Hangzhou.\textsuperscript{33} He learned from his Chinese teacher that these opium dens were closely related to the importation of opium from British India, and he also saw with his own eyes the local anti-opium movement in Hangzhou, when 8,000 opium pipes and lanterns were collected and burnt in public.\textsuperscript{34} He was one of the first English missionaries who condemned publicly the opium trade as a ‘Christian sin’, and ‘Christian shame’, and called upon the British government to abolish the trade that he perceived as causing untold suffering for ordinary people.\textsuperscript{35}

Our study of A. E. Moule’s life and work as an English CMS missionary in China is still at an initial stage. In the present chapter, we have touched upon only a small part of his writings. A vast number of his handwritten manuscripts of correspondence, diary, reports, personal memoirs, and family documents in the archives of the CMS China Mission in Hong Kong and in the Papers of the Moule Family deposited now in the Library of University

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{33} Moule 1911, 135.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 135–136.
\textsuperscript{35} Moule 1877, 9, 15.
of Birmingham in England, remains yet to be explored and carefully studied. It is interesting to note how the writings of this English missionary more than a century ago can create such transformational spaces which help us to understand our historical past, at the same time having a direct impact on the present city of Hangzhou.

In mainland China, the name of A. E. Moule may still be relatively unknown at the moment, though he has already earned himself one of the most prominent landmark sculptures by the southern terminus of the Grand Canal. Nevertheless we are confident that it will not be long for his contribution to our historical memories of the ‘heavenly city’ to be fully recognised by the people of Hangzhou and by the Chinese people in general.

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3

Cultural Interaction, Globalisation and ‘Creative Spaces’ in the early 20th Century: Li Shizeng (1881–1973) and the Chinese Francophile ‘Lobby’¹

Paul J Bailey

IN A 1907 article in a journal he had helped publish in Paris, the then little-known Chinese intellectual Li Shizeng justified his interest in Western anarchism by claiming that he would always engage with, and utilise, any intellectual or ideological trend on the basis of whether it was both ‘correct’ (zhengdang 正当) and ‘practically appropriate’ (shiyi 适宜) or not. He went on to insist:

It certainly is not necessary to enquire whether [such intellectual and ideological trends] are enunciated by Chinese or Westerners. It is rather a question of what constitutes universal truth (gongli 公理), and not one of simply worshipping what foreigners say.²

Li Shizeng (1881–1973), in fact, went on to become one of the most intriguing political, cultural and intellectual figures in China’s turbulent 20th century.³ Son of a late Qing court official, Li Shizeng studied in France during the early years of the 20th century and became the most prominent member of a group of Francophile Chinese intellectuals who enthusiastically promoted overseas Chinese study in France and Sino-French cultural interaction. An admirer of French utopian and anarchist thought, Li made contact with French intellectuals, politicians and diplomats, and helped establish cultural and educational organisations in both France and China (his contribution to Sino-French cultural relations was later recognised by the French government.

¹ This chapter is based on papers I presented at two workshops organised by Professors Denise Gimpel and Bent Nielsen of the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen in September 2009 and January 2010. I would like to thank Professor Gimpel and Professor Nielsen for inviting me to participate in these workshops.

² Li Shizeng 1907a, reprinted in Li Shizeng xiansheng wenji 1980, 1: 5.

³ For a brief biography of Li Shizeng, see Boorman & Howard 1967, 2: 319–321. For a more detailed account of Li Shizeng’s life, see Yang 1980.
in 1925 when it made him Commander of the Legion of Honour). He, along with other members of the Francophile Chinese ‘lobby’, later became senior figures in the Nationalist Party (Guomindang 国民党) and fierce opponents of the Chinese Communist Party during the late 1920s (during which time they attempted abortively to implement their anarchist political agenda within the party), although Li continued to devote much of his energies to the promotion of global cultural interaction. In 1932, for example, he led a Chinese delegation to Geneva to participate in meetings of the International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation sponsored by the League of Nations; while there he established the Sino-International Library (comprising 100,000 Chinese books, as well as scrolls and paintings). In 1949 the National University of Uruguay in Montevideo arranged to have the collection transferred there, and Li was employed to oversee and manage the library (after 1954 he maintained a second home in Taiwan). In his later years Li became an unofficial policy adviser to Chiang Kai-shek.

Such a role, however, should not obscure the extraordinary cultural odyssey of his earlier years. In many ways, Li Shizeng represented a new kind of Chinese intellectual in the early years of the 20th century, one who not only operated within very different political circles, but also who moved comfortably and confidently between different cultures. Li’s commitment to internationalism and world harmony drew him to embrace French culture and (what he understood to be) its values, while at the same time highlighting what French and Chinese cultures shared in common. Focusing on the first two decades of the 20th century, this chapter will explore Li Shizeng’s activities in France, his role in Sino-French cultural interaction, and his educational thought to illuminate the ways in which Chinese intellectuals like Li, far from being merely the passive and hapless recipients and imbibers of ‘superior’ Western knowledge, actively engaged with, and participated in, global knowledge and connections. Li Shizeng’s role in Sino-French interaction, however, represents more than just an illustration of ‘globalisation’, ‘transnationalism’ or ‘diasporic’ adventure. Appropriating the concept of ‘deterritorialisation’ used

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4 Items from the Sino-International Library were eventually returned to the National Central Library in Taibei (Taiwan) in 1993.

5 As a recent study notes, ‘diaspora’ in its current use refers variously to any phenomenon of dispersion from a place, the organisation of an ethnic, national or religious community in one or more countries, a population spread over more than one territory, as well as to places of dispersion or any non-territorial space where exchanges take place. Dufoix 2008, 2. In a 1943 article (in a Chinese journal published in New York), Li coined the term
in Deleuze and Guattari’s study of the nature of capitalism\(^6\) in a *cultural* sense, it might be argued that Li’s outlook and activities enacted (and embodied) a kind of cultural ‘deterritorialisation’ (i.e. in his transnational initiatives and ability to operate in different socio-political circles that transcended both internal boundaries and national frontiers), all of which opened a portal to imagining multiple possible existences\(^7\) or ‘spaces’.\(^8\)

**Early Years in France: Space as Multiple and Overlapping Sociopolitical Constituencies**

Li Shizeng came from a distinguished line of imperial officials. His father, Li Hongzao (1820–1897), was a Grand Councillor and one-time tutor to the Tongzhi Emperor (r. 1861–1874).\(^9\) His paternal great-grandfather had passed the metropolitan degree examination (*jinshi* 进士) in 1767, and became an editor in the Hanlin Academy, educational commissioner in Guangxi province, provincial governor of Anhui and Fujian provinces, and, eventually, Governor-General of Zhejiang and Fujian. Li later reminisced that as a child important government officials such as Weng Tonghe and Zhang Zhidong

\(^6\) For Deleuze and Guattari, the more free market capitalism ‘deterritorialises’ (or dissolves) social structures into abstract flows of labour, capital, information and money so the more its ancillary apparatuses (government bureaucracies and forces of law and order) seek to ‘reterritorialise’ or ‘recode’ that which has been ‘decoded’. Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 33–35. The concepts have also been recently appropriated by Hevia 2003, 22, to describe the process and impact of British imperialism in China (commerce and warfare represent the decoding or deterritorialising elements of the imperialist apparatus, while Treaties and treaty ports with their physical structures and institutions function as a mechanism of colonial reterritorialisation or reordering); and by McGrath 2008, 9–11, to describe the impact of post-Mao market reforms in the 1990s, which initially resulted in deterritorialisation (marketisation, differentiation, individualisation, pluralisation) but has recently given way to reterritorialisation as market ‘heteronomy’ supplants market autonomy.

\(^7\) On cultural deterritorialisation, see Appadurai 1996. It might also be noted that it is often *between* nation states that certain activities or connections acquire their full meaning. Dufoix 2008, 32. Li’s activities might also be seen in this light.

\(^8\) On the concept of space-time in physical and human geography (and used also to illustrate multiple and overlapping encounters), see Massey 2005. Massey emphasises that such spaces are constantly being constituted through interaction at all levels.

\(^9\) On Li Hongzao, see Hummel 1943–1944, 1: 471–472.
had been frequent visitors to the Li household. Li also remembered that his father discouraged him from taking the traditional civil service examinations (a result, perhaps, of his traumatic experience in the 1880s, when his advocacy of firm resistance to France over its claims to Annam and Tonkin led to his dismissal as Grand Councillor and several years of virtual disgrace) and that from an early age he was introduced to ‘Western learning’ by his tutor, Qi Xiting, a friend of his father’s and Secretary of the Board of Revenue. From the beginning, therefore, Li Shizeng embarked upon an unconventional intellectual trajectory while firmly remaining within official circles and enjoying official patronage. Keen to study abroad in the West, Li was able to take advantage of official regulations in 1890 that required Chinese Ministers to Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the US to take with them two ‘embassy students’ (suīyuán xuěshēng 随员学生) to study foreign languages. Thus in 1902 Li accompanied Sun Baoqi, the newly appointed Minister to France as an embassy student (again, family connections proved useful, since Sun Baoqi’s family had been neighbours of the Li household in Beijing).

Li’s decision to study in France was a relatively bold one for the time. Although overseas study had begun during the latter half of the 19th century when Chinese students went to the US and Europe primarily for technical or military training, by the turn of the 20th century the most significant and popular destination for Chinese overseas students was Japan; numbers there increased from about 400 in 1902 to nearly 9,000 in 1906. Going to France (a country that in the Chinese official mind at this time was identified with subversive political radicalism and chronic instability) thus bucked a trend;

10 Shizeng biji 1961, 15. This is reprinted in Li Shizeng xiansheng wenji 1980, 2: 1–226.
11 Bastid 1988, 1.
12 Shizeng biji 1961, 77, 148. In fact, Li never did take the civil service examinations, nor did he ever aspire to government office either in the late Qing or early Republican periods. Nevertheless, Li ‘inherited’ official rank on the death of his father, which qualified him to hold the post of department magistrate.
13 Shu 1927, 21, Qu 1973, 116. In 1895 the number was increased to four. Wu Zhihui, another member of the Chinese Francophile ‘lobby’, noted that such ‘embassy students’ were expected to work in the embassy most of the time and were poorly paid. Wu Zhihui xiansheng wen cui 1968, 58–60.
14 Li Shizeng xiansheng wen ji 1980, 2: 19.
16 Li later recalled that anyone wishing to study in France at the turn of the 20th century was likely to be thought of in China as someone needlessly exposing himself to ‘dangerous
furthermore, Li’s agenda was to immerse himself in a new culture and its values rather than simply acquire a technical training, the primary agenda hitherto for most overseas Chinese study missions to Europe and the United States.

Years later, Sun Baoqi reminisced that Li had been a ‘diligent’ student and that he had given him permission not to come into the embassy so often in order that he could study more. Li must have done more than this, however, since shortly after arriving in France he enrolled in an agricultural college (école pratique de Chesnoy) in Montargis, 60 miles south of Paris (an area well-known for its anticlerical sentiments). Later, in 1905, he studied chemistry, biology and bacteriology at the Institut Pasteur in Paris. While at the Institut Pasteur, Li began reading anarchist works by Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876) and Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921); he became especially inspired by French utopian or anarchist thinkers such as Charles Fourier (1772–1837), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) and the geographer Elisée Reclus (1830–1905), whose nephew (Paul Reclus) Li met in Paris. Li translated parts of Reclus’ last completed work, the six-volume *L’Homme et la Terre* (Man and the Earth) into Chinese, and many of Reclus’ ideas found an echo in Li’s own preoccupations and concerns. Reclus’ faith, for example, in the power of science (that at times subverted his more holistic and ecological approach to the relationship between humans and nature) and education to dissolve all social prejudice and his stress on gradual and peaceful evolutionary change in the creation of a new (world) community in which all humans would recognise their common membership of the planet (prompting a recent study to hail Reclus as an ‘early prophet of globalisation’) were to inspire Li’s promotion of Chinese worker education extremism (hongshui mengshou 洪水猛兽, lit. ‘fierce floods and savage beasts’). Li Shizeng 1925. A portrait of Li Shizeng appearing in *Annales Franco-Chinoises* 1927, No. 2: 27–30, also noted that Li’s parents were reluctant to see him study in France since the country at the time was perceived as dangerous as ‘Bolshevik Russia today’.

17 Zhongfa jiaoyujie 1926, 49.
18 Paul Reclus (1847–1914) was a surgeon and professor at the Paris medical faculty. Shao Kelu (Jacques Reclus) 1984, 87–88. Jacques Reclus was the son of Paul Reclus.
19 Clark and Martin 2004, 4. As the authors point out, Reclus foresaw a world in which there would be no ‘core’ or ‘periphery’, but one which would have ‘its center everywhere, its periphery nowhere’. Little has been written on Reclus in English. For an earlier study, see Dunbar 1978. See also Fleming 1979. This was later revised under the title *The Geography of Freedom: The Odyssey of Elisée Reclus* (1988), Newtown, NSW: Black Rose Books. Reclus’ influence on Li Shizeng is generally overlooked in earlier English-language studies of Chinese anarchism such as Scalapino and Yu 1961 or Bernal 1976, and is only mentioned fleetingly in more recent
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and the ideal of work-study (qingong jianxue 勤工俭学), which for Li would contribute to the elimination of all distinctions between intellectual and worker and the birth of a radically new society. Li was equally influenced by Reclus’ vision of a society that comprised self-sufficient but mutually supporting associations that would ultimately lead to a ‘federative republic of the entire world’.20 In his later memoirs published in 1961, Li noted that the greatest ‘truth’ (daoli 道理) he had discovered while in France was the principle of peaceful ‘federation’ (lianhe 联合), a principle he thought France currently embodied with its championing of the European Economic Community on the one hand, and its desire to form a mutually beneficial and equal economic association with Francophone African states on the other.21 Overall, Li Shizeng became a passionate admirer of French culture, and often contrasted the ideals of the French secular republic, which he identified as ‘freedom’, ‘creativity’ and ‘pacifism’, with the apparently more ‘brutal’ German ideals of ‘autocracy’, ‘utilitarianism’, and ‘militarism’.

During these early years in France, Li was joined by other future members of the Francophile ‘lobby’, the most prominent of whom were Zhang Jingjiang (1877–1950), Wu Zhihui (1864–1953) and Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940). Zhang, who came from a family of wealthy silk merchants, had accompanied Sun Baoqi’s 1902 mission to France and later served as a commercial attaché at the Chinese consulate in Paris.22 He also set up an export-import business in Paris (4, Place de la Madeleine) trading in tea, silk, ceramics and carpets as well as opening a (short-lived) teashop in Rue d’Italie.23 Like Li, Zhang cultivated a wide network of contacts amongst French intellectuals and politicians; in 1907, for example, he was listed as a member of the editorial committee of the Bulletin published by the Association amicale franco-chinoise (Sino-French Friendship Association).24 The honorary president of the Association was Stéphen Pichon, a senator and Foreign Minister (from 1906

studies. See, for example, Dirlik 1991, 25, 81, 94. Another article on Chinese anarchism by a Japanese scholar overlooks the role of Li Shizeng altogether. Nohara Shiro 1975.

20 Fleming 1979, 70–71.

21 Shizeng biji 1961, 105–108. Li in 1961 spoke of his hope that France and China (referring to the Nationalist regime in Taiwan) would take the lead in promoting ‘world federalism’.


24 The Association was founded in 1907, and the Bulletin published between 1907 and 1916. The first issue of the Bulletin referred to a certain ‘négociant’ (businessman) by the name of Tsang (French romanisation for Zhang), as a member of the committee. This almost certainly refers to Zhang Jingjiang.
to 1911), while the president was Georges Dubail, a former French Minister to China. Other notables belonging to the Association included a Mr. Guillain, a former Minister of the Colonies, and a Mr. Moret, director of the Bank of Paris. Wu Zhihui, from a scholar family in Jiangsu, had known Li since 1898 and arrived in Paris in 1906 after spending two years studying in Britain.²⁵ Cai Yuanpei, a metropolitan degree-holder, was to become in 1912 the first Minister of Education in the new Republic and later (in 1916) the Chancellor of Beijing University. He visited Paris on his way to study in Germany during the years 1907–1911. Like Li, Wu and Zhang, Cai Yuanpei was to be elected a member of the Guomindang Central Supervisory Committee in 1924, and together were known as the ‘four elders’ (*silao 四老*). Other figures in France at this time who also embraced French anarchist thought were Wang Jingwei (1883–1944), a future leader of the Guomindang’s ‘civilian’ wing who established a pro-Japanese regime in Nanjing during World War Two (Wang joined Li Shizeng in Paris after 1912); Chu Minyi (1884–1946), Wang Jingwei’s brother-in-law and later a martial arts master and promoter who combined modern calisthenics with more traditional *taijiquan* 太极拳 before joining Wang Jingwei’s wartime government;²⁶ and Zhang Ji (Zhang Puquan, 1882–1947), an early member of Sun Yat-sen’s anti-Manchu organisation, the Tongmenghui 同盟会 (Alliance League) and later a prominent representative of the Guomindang’s right wing faction.²⁷ Both Wu Zhihui and Zhang Ji at this time visited the celebrated anarchist communal village of Aiglemont, 100 kilometres northeast of Paris on the Franco-Belgian border.²⁸

It is important to distinguish this Francophile ‘lobby’ from the rather loosely organised group of Francophile writers and aesthetes who gathered in Shanghai’s French Concession area in the 1920s. This group was centred on the writer Zeng Pu (author of the 1905 novel *Niehai hua* 蛟海花/Flower in a Sea of Retribution) and his son Zeng Xubai, who founded a publishing house that aimed to create the atmosphere of a French-style salon and whose bookstore residence at 115 Rue Massenet likewise conjured up images of an imaginary French world (Zeng Pu himself never went to France); other ‘members’ of the group included Xu Zhimo, Yu Dafu, Tian Han and


²⁸ Zhang Puquan xiansheng quanji 1982, 236 and Li Shuhua 1974, 44.
The Francophile lobby centred on Li Shizeng, by way of contrast, embraced a specific cultural and educational agenda that they were prepared to promote politically. In some ways, they constituted what Alison Assiter (discussing feminism in the postmodern age) has termed an ‘epistemic community’, defined as ‘a group of individuals who share certain fundamental interests, values and beliefs in common […] and who work on consequences of these presuppositions’. Members of such a community (who might additionally be members of various other social, cultural or political groupings) are convinced of the truth of their views, and constantly provide evidence of such ‘truth’.30

In 1906 Li Shizeng, Wu Zhihui and Zhang Jingjiang opened a cultural and publishing house in Paris, known as the Shijie she (World Society), which produced a pictorial giving information on world-famous scientists and philosophers. One year later they began publishing an anarchist journal, Xin shiji (New Century), which shared a building (at 4, Rue Broca) housing the offices of the French anarchist newspaper, Les Temps Nouveaux (and from which it borrowed its name). In the third issue of the journal Li publicised his brand of anarchism.31 In contrast to the other Chinese anarchist group that emerged at this time in Tokyo, Li did not advocate a return to an idealised rural past uncorrupted by modern life, rejecting any idea that present-day anarchism echoed certain ideals of China’s ancient past such as the Mencian well-field system (jingtian) or the Daoist imperative of wuwei (non-action, non-interference), but rather clearly identified science and education with civilisation and progress.32

Interestingly, although Li (as well as Wu Zhihui and Zhang Jingjiang) had all formally joined Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary movement by this time, Li made it clear in 1907 that he was not in favour of establishing any kind of ‘tutelage’ (civilian or military) over the people, neither was he enthusiastic about the prospect of a centralised republican government replacing the

29 Lee 1999, 18–20. Lee notes that some of these aesthetes (e.g. Fu Yanchang, Zhang Ruogu) incorporated French and Western exoticism into a nationalist argument by claiming that Shanghai’s very uniqueness would benefit the entire nation and would lead to ‘experimental restoration’ of Chinese civilisation. On the Chinese salon world in the Shanghai French Concession during the 1920s, see also Fruehauf 1993.

30 Assiter 1996, 82.

31 Li Shizeng 1907a.

32 In fact, Li in this article elevated science as a universal guarantor of truth and the public interest, anticipating the ‘scientism’ (extreme faith in the benefits and possibilities of science) that gripped Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s, see Kwok 1965.
monarchy; clearly influenced by Proudhon, he envisaged a new society comprised of autonomous co-operatives (ziyou xiehe zuzhi 自由协和组织).\footnote{Li was especially impressed with recent anti-militarist protests and army mutinies in France, see Li Shizeng 1907b.}

Between June 1907 and May 1910, 121 issues of Xin shiji were published. In addition to attacking the ‘backwardness’ and corruption of the Qing monarchy, it introduced its Chinese readers to the anarchist thought of William Godwin (1756–1836), Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin. Li himself translated into Chinese excerpts from Kropotkin’s ‘The Conquest of Bread’ (Mianbao lüqu 面包录取) and ‘Mutual Aid’ (Huzhu lun 助论); the former (originally published in 1892 and with a preface by Elisée Reclus) extolled the virtues of a decentralised economic system based on voluntary co-operation, while the latter (published in 1902) took issue with social-Darwinist assumptions and insisted that co-operation and mutual aid were more significant than strife or competition in the evolution of living species.\footnote{Li’s translation of ‘Mutual Aid’ is in Xin shiji 1908, Nos. 31–52, reprinted in Li Shizeng xiansheng wenji 1980, 1: 101–173, while his translation of ‘The Conquest of Bread’ is in Xin shiji 1908, Nos. 58–62. See also Xin shiji congshu 1907 which contains photographs of Reclus and the communal village of Aiglemont.}

Another of Li Shizeng’s projects in France was the opening of a soybean-processing plant (usine caseo-sojaine) in Garenne-Colombes just outside Paris in 1908 (Li had recently converted to vegetarianism). The plant was part of Li’s anarchist-inspired vision (as well as a potentially profitable business venture) of changing the eating habits of Europeans by promoting the consumption of beancurd (doufu 豆腐) as a substitute for meat; in 1912 he published a pamphlet (in French) extolling beancurd’s medicinal benefits, for example the alleviation of diabetes and arthritis\footnote{Li Shizeng 1912. Li noted that soybean (from which beancurd is produced) exports to Europe had increased from 200,000 tons in 1908 to over 500,000 tons in 1909. Li also initially set up a laboratory in Paris to produce soybean milk, before its operations were taken over by the plant in Garenne-Colombes. Ibid, 7. See also ‘Le soja’ 1914, 196–198, which referred to a wide variety of soybean-based foodstuffs produced by Li’s plant; unfortunately, the article continued, Parisians did not care very much for beancurd jam, beancurd eggs, or beancurd cheese, although they were more partial to beancurd flour, beancurd biscuits, and beansprouts.} (ever the entrepreneur as well as the anarchist visionary, Li had arranged for excerpts from the as yet unpublished pamphlet to be distributed amongst the crowds visiting the Brussels’ Universal Exhibition in 1910). In order to secure funds for his project Li Shizeng returned to China in 1910, gaining an interview with the Governor-general of Zhili, Yang Lianfu, thanks to the fact that Yang’s...
secretary was Li’s nephew (it also helped that the Governor-general had been an acquaintance of Li’s father). Yang was apparently enthusiastic and agreed to contribute funds (clearly, Yang too had a keen eye for potential financial benefits). The encounter between a top provincial official appointed by the Qing court and a self-declared anarchist, anti-Qing revolutionary and entrepreneur was an extraordinary example of how Li Shizeng was able to operate in very different (and conflicting) political and social circles, as well as advancing different agendas at the same time. If the 1958 memoirs of a Chinese work-study student who came to France in the late 1910s under the auspices of a scheme championed by Li Shizeng (see later) are to be believed, Li had other unexpected sources of funding. He Changgong (1900–1987), a Minister of Heavy Industry in the People’s Republic, noted that Li Shizeng was reported at the time to be the ‘adopted son’ (干儿子) of Empress-Dowager Cixi, and that while he was studying in France had received from her 8,000 liang (ounces) of silver every year.

Li recruited 30 Chinese workers for his beancurd plant, all from his native district of Gaoyang (in Zhili, later Hebei, province). It was amongst these workers that Li first began to put into practice his ideal of ‘work-study’ (工作学习). He opened a school at the plant that taught Chinese, French and general science; the workers were expected to adhere to a strict regimen (no smoking, gambling or alcohol), and to devote as much of their spare time as possible to study. After the war, the plant expanded production as soybean milk became a popular substitute for increasingly expensive cowsmilk. Li also publicised both the economic and educational functions of the enterprise by inviting important personages such as the Chinese Minister to France (Hu Weide) to visit the site and meet the workers. For Li, work-study had both a moral and educational function, transforming ‘ignorant’ and ‘superstitious’ workers into knowledgeable, hard-working and morally upright citizens. Furthermore, Li believed it was the most effective means to heal the deep division between scholars and manual workers that he

36 Shizeng biji 1961, 78 and Li Shuhua 1974, 44.
37 He 1958, 6. I have not been able to find any more information about this.
38 Sheng 1932, 44.
39 Lüou jiaoyu yundong 1916, 50. This publication has recently (in 1996) been reissued by Academia Sinica in Taibei. Li also discussed his beancurd plant and the education of its Chinese workers in a letter to Wu Zhihui 5 June 1915, see Li Shizeng xiansheng wenji 1980, 2: 305–311.
40 ‘Bali huaren doufu gongsi canguan ji’ 1919.
insisted had always characterised Chinese society; only such a scenario, in Li’s anarchist-inspired vision, would bring about the desired co-operation, mutual assistance, and equality in society.

Sino-French Cultural Interaction: Space as Transnational Education

As a passionate Francophile, Li also believed that France – as a republic *par excellence* free from the ‘baneful’ influences of monarchy and religion – was an ideal environment in which to work and study. On returning to China in 1912 shortly after the establishment of the Chinese Republic, he and other members of the Francophile lobby founded the Association for Frugal Study in France (*liufa jianxuehui* 留法俭学会) to encourage Chinese students to go to France. Wang Jingwei, for example, later claimed in 1917 that France was a more appropriate destination for Chinese overseas students than even the US, since revolution in the former had been more thorough than in the latter and had thus brought about a more complete renewal of politics, culture and society.\(^{41}\)

A preparatory school was opened by the Association in Beijing to provide potential overseas students with some basic French; under the direction of Qi Rushan (1872–1962), whose family also came from Li’s district of Gaoyang,\(^{42}\) the school (through the offices of Cai Yuanpei, Minister of Education) was allowed to occupy rooms in the former Imperial Academy (*guozijian* 国子监), China’s highest institute of learning in existence since the late 13th century (and which now houses the Capital Library). In November 1912 Li was back in France, where he was able to utilise his contacts and the fact that he had studied there in the early years of the 20th century to meet with the mayor of Montargis (Thierry Falour) and arrange for the reception of Chinese ‘frugal study’ students in schools and colleges in the area (by the end of 1913 there were 70 ‘frugal study’ students in Montargis).

\(^{41}\) Wang Jingwei 1917. Wang admitted that France’s colonial record in Indochina was poor, but insisted this should not overly influence views on French culture in general.

\(^{42}\) Qi was to become the first Chinese scholar to carry out extensive research on traditional Chinese drama. His younger brother, Qi Zhushan, had managed Li’s beancurd plant before 1914. Both brothers had studied French at the Beijing Tongwenguan 北京同文館, China’s first modern language school (established in 1862). The father of the Qi brothers was Qi Xiting, Li’s boyhood tutor. According to the memoirs of a Chinese work-study student, all the surnames of the Chinese workers recruited for Li’s plant were either Li or Qi. Sheng 1932, 44.
Municipal authorities were pleased with the arrangement, which once again demonstrated Li Shizeng’s ability to combine pragmatic business concerns with a more altruistic agenda of cultural interaction. In an open letter to local residents the Montargis mayor declared:

We must thank Mr Li Yuying [i.e. Li Shizeng] for having thought of benefiting our town materially, which will be taken advantage of by our businessmen as well as the town itself, since these Chinese students will pay the same amount of college fees as the current ones. The college will be the next location for fifty or so young men and women coming from well-off families and who will add a picturesque and unexpected ambiance to the charm of our town.  

During World War One, when the French government began recruiting Chinese labour in 1916 for war-related work in France to make up for domestic labour shortages, Li Shizeng welcomed the opportunity to both extend his work-study programme and further enhance Sino-French cultural interaction. Li confidently predicted that Chinese workers coming to France, exposed to new values and enjoying access to education, would become truly ‘civilised’; on their return to China, he enthused, they would form the vanguard of an educated workforce contributing to the diffusion of industrial skills and the reform of society. He and Cai Yuanpei, along with French scholars and politicians, created the Sino-French Education Association (华法教育会) in 1916 as an umbrella organisation to promote the expansion of Sino-French cultural relations and part-time education for the soon-to-be arriving Chinese workers (branch associations were also set up in a number of Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu).

At the opening meeting of the Association, the co-chairmen (Cai Yuanpei and the French historian, Alphonse Aulard) called attention to the affinities between French and Chinese cultures, remarking that the humanist philosophy of Confucius anticipated the ideals of the French Revolution. Several years earlier in 1912, Cai Yuanpei – on taking up the post of Education Minister in the new Chinese Republic – had already asserted that the French revolutionary ideals of freedom, equality and universal brotherhood were

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43 Cited in Kriegel 1974, 78.
44 On this, see Bailey 2000, 2009a, 2009b.
45 Lü’ou jiaoyu yundong 1916, 82–83. For another article Li wrote on the same theme, see Li Shizeng xiansheng wenji 1980, 1: 220–225.
comparable to Confucian values such as ren 仁 (sense of compassion or humaneness). French officials, politicians and scholars in the early 20th century were as equally admiring of Chinese culture as the Chinese Francophiles were of French culture. Often positing a complementarity between French and Chinese cultures, they argued, for example, that in its respect for learning and intellectual endeavour, joie de vivre, and aversion to war, French culture had much in common with Chinese civilisation. A decade later, in a 1925 article, Li Shizeng again highlighted the intricate intellectual ties binding Chinese and French cultures when he observed that Voltaire’s praise of China in the 18th century as a humanist paradise had been reciprocated by early 20th-century Chinese revolutionaries who had derived inspiration from the thought of Montesquieu and Rousseau.

One year before the founding of the Sino-French Education Association, Li had already created the Diligent Work and Frugal Study Association (qingong jianxuehui 勤工俭学会) to promote and oversee education amongst Chinese workers in France; in 1916 he also opened a Chinese workers’ school in Paris. Cai Yuanpei gave a series of lectures at the school drawing attention to the ‘unseemly’ habits of the ordinary Chinese folk such as extravagance, lack of hygiene, cursing in public and adherence to superstitious beliefs, while emphasising the need for Chinese workers to adopt ‘civilised’ Western ways such as politeness, decorum (which included standing up for women on public transport), a love of animals, and concern for the public welfare. Li likewise prescribed a detailed set of behavioural rules for Chinese workers in France designed to make them more ‘civilised’ and thus less likely to damage China’s status and reputation in the world. Such rules included wiping shoes before entering a building, not to spit or shout in public, and not to pick a fight if pushed or shoved in a crowd. For Cai Yuanpei and Li Shizeng also, it was essential that Chinese workers be suitably ‘civilised’ so that they would avoid the fate of Chinese migrants in the US, who had frequently been the target of contempt and abuse.

46 For more on this, see Bailey 1992. For a collection of studies exploring aspects of Sino-French cultural, economic and political relations in the modern era, see Cesari and Varaschin 2003. As one French scholar has noted, France from the 17th to 20th centuries had its own myth of a ‘special relationship’ with China very much akin to how Americans perceived US relations with China in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Mengin 2001.

47 Li Shizeng 1925.


49 Huagong zazhi 1917, 2 and 3.
After World War One, Li expanded his work-study programme to include Chinese students, all of whom, he confidently believed, would benefit from living, working and studying in France. Between March 1919 and December 1920, 17 groups of Chinese work-study students left for France, totalling nearly 1,600. The work-study scheme, however, was just part of the Francophile lobby’s much larger agenda of deepening Sino-French educational links. In 1920 Li was involved in the establishment of the Sino-French University (Zhongfa daxue 中法大学), a system of interlocking higher and lower schools (four colleges and four secondary schools with attached primary classes) in Beijing and Guangzhou. For Li and others involved in the project, the new institution would be a catalyst in introducing to China the French idea of the university. The Sino-French University was also meant to constitute an element of a transnational university arrangement since it was envisaged that students graduating from the Sino-French University would be eligible to enrol in a new higher education institution in France, the Sino-French Institute, which was founded in 1921 (and of which Chu Minyi was to be vice-president) and attached to the University of Lyon. In fact, Li and his colleagues had been in negotiation with their French interlocuteurs since 1919, when the rector of Lyon University, M. Joubin, had visited Beijing. Li was keenly aware of Lyon’s history as one of the most energetic French cities in seeking to promote closer economic ties with China (the city’s Chamber of Commerce had sent an investigative commission to China in 1895–1897 to explore business opportunities, while in 1913 it had actually provided funds to enable Lyon University to create a Chair in Chinese, which was to be held by Maurice Courant). He was also personally acquainted with the mayor of Lyon, Edouard Herriot. In a 1922 article Li passionately supported the idea of Sino-French cultural interaction and the enhancement of French cultural influence in China; such a scenario was essential, Li warned, if China was not to be completely dominated by Anglo-American culture (if English achieved a monopoly in China, Li added, the country would be ‘cut off’ from other cultures in the world).

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50 On the work-study movement, see Bailey 1988.
51 On the Sino-French University, see ‘L’Association Universitaire Franco-Chinoise’ 1930.
52 Hayhoe 1985, 619.
53 On Courant’s role in establishing the Sino-French Institute, see Bouchez 1983. See also ‘Li-ang Zhongfa daxue’ 1991.
54 Li Shizeng 1922.
Significantly, in an interview with a French journalist in 1919, Li also agreed in principle with the idea that in addition to Chinese students going to France, French students should be encouraged to travel to China.\textsuperscript{55} For Li such potentially large numbers of French students in China would help halt the malevolent influence of German and Japanese cultures and further enhance the influence of French ‘liberalism’ (\textit{ziyou zhuyi} 自由主义), a process he seems to have assumed began with the 1911 Revolution. Li had to be pressed by the (one suspects, exasperated) interviewer to respond directly to the question of what concrete benefits French students might enjoy by coming to China; Li hinted that there would be opportunities for them as technicians, engineers, managers and teachers.

Although the Sino-French University in Beijing and the Sino-French Institute remained viable educational institutions until the 1940s (up to 1934 the Sino-French University had graduated 208 students and in 1934 itself 187 students were registered at the University’s three colleges, while between 1921 and 1946 a total of 473 Chinese students had passed through the doors of the Sino-French Institute),\textsuperscript{56} the ambitious agenda Li and his Francophile colleagues had in mind was never ultimately realised. A brief and eventually abortive attempt was made in 1927 by Cai Yuanpei and Li Shizeng to implement the French educational model with the creation of a University Council as the first step in the establishment of a university district system (in which Li would have been the rector of the Peiping university district). The initiative soon fell victim to an increasingly strident nationalism amongst Guomindang ideologues that insisted education had to be controlled and directed by the party through a highly centralised Education Ministry.\textsuperscript{57}

\textbf{Li Shizeng’s Philosophy of Work-Study: Space as Global Radical Community}

Li’s championing of work-study was underpinned by his anarchist-derived belief that mutual aid and coexistence were the logical end products of evolutionary progress (and not violent struggle and competition). In a series of articles on anarchism published in \textit{Xin shiji} before 1911, Li declared that


\textsuperscript{56} Hayhoe 1985, 692 (fn 82), 695–696.

\textsuperscript{57} Linden 1968.
only an ‘anarchist revolution’ (by which he meant a radically new kind of education aimed at bringing about social equality and harmony as opposed to state or government-controlled education that simply legitimised militarism, an oppressive legal system, and obscurantist religion) would sweep away all ‘classes’; typical of many of his contemporaries, Li defined ‘class’ as the division between both rich and poor, and the ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘ignorant’ but made the latter a consequence of the former. Thus for Li it was not a ‘natural’ law of evolution that the ‘educated and worthy’ exercise hegemony over the ‘uneducated’. Such differences only came about because of disparities in wealth. Significantly, Li suggested that workers were in fact more hardworking and potentially more intelligent than the educated, since they constantly had to use their wits in a daily struggle for survival, whereas the educated rich – with no challenges to exercise their ingenuity – spent their entire lives in idleness (Chu Minyi in a 1909 article criticising the ‘uncivilised’ French upper classes for opposing plans to abolish the death penalty highlighted the positive example of French trade unions to demonstrate how the ‘lower classes’ were so much more ‘civilised’ than the elites because their representatives in the trade unions were genuinely concerned with the public, and not private or selfish, interests).

Other members of the Francophile lobby likewise condemned the social inequality brought about by the division between intellectual and manual labour. Wang Jingwei, for example, referred in 1916 to a ‘dictatorship of scholarship’ (xueshu zhi zhuanzhi 学术之专制) to describe what he called a ‘class system’ in which an educated elite exercised unjustifiable hegemony over the rest of the population. A year earlier, Wu Zhihui had argued that, as long as such a division remained, the vestiges of imperial and official power would continue to exist and hence would bolster the authority of

58 Li Shizeng 1908.
59 Ibid. Li’s educational egalitarianism also drew upon a rich indigenous tradition. For example, the 18th-century poet Yuan Mei (1716–1798) advanced a literary theory of ‘nature and inspiration’ (xingling shuo 性灵说 or xingqing 性情) that assumed anyone (including illiterate commoners) could create great poetry, while the 16th-century dissident scholar Li Zhi (1527–1602) had argued that women were the intellectual equals of men.
60 Chu Minyi 1909. Chu also suggested that Chinese revolutionaries use traditional secret societies in China as the building blocks of modern trade unions. Xin shiji 1908, No. 42. Chu was from the same village as Zhang Jingjiang, and worked for the latter’s Paris business before 1912. At the Chinese workers’ school Li opened in Paris in 1916 one of the subjects taught was trade union organisation.
61 Wang Jingwei 1916.
the ‘rich capitalists’ who were taking over from more traditional elites. Wu’s radicalism prompted the expression of strikingly original views. In the journal published by Li and the others in France, *Lü’ou zazhi* 旅欧杂志 (Journal of Chinese Students in Europe), Wu suggested in 1916 that a new rural order should be created in China based on the unity of peasants and students. Long before the experimental rural schools and rural reconstruction movements championed by Tao Xingzhi (1891–1946) and Liang Shuming (1893–1988) in the late 1920s and 1930s, Wu Zhihui advocated the widespread establishment of agricultural schools, which would serve as the focal point of social and economic change in the village. Student labour, Wu noted, alongside that of the peasants, would help cultivate the crops that would ensure the school’s self-sufficiency, as well as symbolise the close living and working relationship between the previously urban-based students and the peasants. Li Shizeng also declared that the widespread education of workers would smash the ‘monopoly of knowledge’ held by a few, and thereby in the future would prevent ‘capitalists’ from hoodwinking and deceiving their workers.

As mentioned earlier, Li was confident that Chinese workers coming to France would derive enormous benefits from their sojourn. In particular, he claimed that they would be exposed to the ‘civilised’ habits of French workers, such as the proclivity to ‘save and accumulate money’ (chuji 储积) and the willingness to join a trade union. While it is true that much of Li’s discourse pertaining to workers bordered on the patronising and condescending, it is highly significant that in 1920 his Diligent Work and Frugal Study Association, planning for the arrival in France of large numbers of Chinese students looking for employment in order to fund their future studies, suggested that all those students employed in factories and who were found to be lacking manual skills or French language ability should

62 *Lü’ou jiaoyu yundong* 1916, 78–79.
63 On the educational thought and practice of Tao Xingzhi and Liang Shuming, see Keenan 1977 and Alitto 1979.
64 Such a relationship, Wu added, would be further strengthened by affiliating newly-created peasant associations (nonghui 农会) with the schools.
65 *Lü’ou zhouchon* 1919, No. 4. It should be noted, however, that Li’s emphasis on the importance of worker education and manual labour drew on educational ideas and practice expounded and acted upon during the last years of the Qing dynasty and early years of the Republic. On this, see Bailey 1990.
66 In 1914 President Yuan Shikai had banned all trade union activity in China. Zhao 1959.
be ‘assigned’ to an ‘experienced’ Chinese worker for instruction. Once the student had learnt the ropes, the Association declared, the worker might be transferred to another plant to perform a similar mentoring task for other Chinese students.\textsuperscript{67} Both symbolically and practically, such an arrangement represented a complete overturning of traditional hierarchies and a questioning of entrenched assumptions in Chinese culture about the superiority of the scholar/intellectual \textit{vis-à-vis} the rest of society. In a remarkable article written a year earlier, Li Shizeng described Chinese workers in France as a ‘new force’ (\textit{xinji 新击}) whose potential would be realised through education. The conventional social hierarchy in China – that of scholar, farmer, artisan, merchant (\textit{shinong gongshang 士农工商}) – Li argued, was now redundant since the times demanded that \textit{everyone} be a worker (\textit{gongren 工人}), in both the literal and metaphorical sense.\textsuperscript{68}

Li Shizeng very much perceived himself as an active participant in a \textit{global} utopian discourse of work-study. In the Chinese-language journal he started publishing in France in 1916 – \textit{Lü’ou zazhi 旅欧杂志 (Journal for Chinese Students in Europe)} – Li cited past and present work-study exemplars. Two historical pioneers whom he focused on were Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) and Charles Fourier (1772–1837). Franklin, despite lowly class origins, went on to become a world-class scientist because of his diligence and application, Li enthused. Yet Franklin was just one example, Li continued, of potentially millions of similar disadvantaged workers who could achieve equal success.\textsuperscript{69} (Li wrote a similar article on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, again highlighting his lower-class background and claiming that there had to be hundreds of ‘potential Rousseaus’ within the ranks of the labouring class.)\textsuperscript{70} In praising Charles Fourier as a pioneer of work-study, Li expressed his admiration for Fourier’s philosophy of the ‘mutual assistance society’ (\textit{xieshe zhuyi 协社主义}) in which everyone would perform different tasks at different times; there would therefore be no one group of people with a monopoly of knowledge

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Lü’ou zhoukan} 1920, No. 10.

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Huagong zazhi} 1919, No. 39. In France, Li reminded his audience, even teachers and state functionaries were known as ‘workers’ because they all belonged to trade unions (\textit{gonghui 工会}). For Li, the growth of trade union power was not to be feared since, in his view, it would automatically lead to the creation of a world community (\textit{Datong 大同}). \textit{Huagong zazhi} 1919, No. 41.

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Lü’ou zazhi} 1916, No. 1. A frontispiece portrait of Franklin in this opening issue described him as a ‘magnificent diligent worker and frugal study student’.

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Lü’ou zazhi} 1916, No. 4 and No. 5.
or skills, and competition would be replaced by harmony.\textsuperscript{71} Li often spoke of Fourier and Proudhon in the same breath, contrasting their advocacy of decentralisation and local community co-operation with Marx’s supposed stress on ‘state centralisation and dictatorship over the people’.\textsuperscript{72}

Another work-study pioneer Li wrote about in his journal was the Spanish educator, Francisco Ferrer (1859–1909).\textsuperscript{73} Ferrer, who came from peasant origins, was a Catalan free-thinker and anarchist who had been exiled to Paris in 1885. On his return to Spain he established a school in Barcelona (the escuela moderna) that banned religious instruction and made manual labour an important component of the curriculum; he was later a founder member of the International League for a Rational Education of Children before being executed in 1909 on trumped-up charges of treason following clashes between workers and the army in several Catalan cities.\textsuperscript{74} In his article, Li also claimed to have actually met and exchanged ideas with Ferrer in Paris. Whether he did or not (Ferrer apparently returned to Spain in 1901, while Li did not arrive in Paris until 1902), what is significant is that Li’s almost casual reference to his meeting with Ferrer was meant to indicate his role within a global community of like-minded radical thinkers and activists.

\section*{Conclusion}

For a long time the extraordinary intellectual and cultural role played by Li Shizeng and the Chinese Francophile lobby was virtually ignored, not helped by the fact that two members of the group (Wang Jingwei and Chu Minyi) became persona non grata because of their collaboration with the Japanese during World War Two (Chu was to be executed in 1946 by the returning Guomindang government). As far as post-1949 Chinese Communist historiography was concerned, Li Shizeng and his closest associates (Wu Zhihui, Zhang Jingjiang, Zhang Ji) were associated with the virulently anti-communist

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} \textit{Lü’ou zazhi} 1916, No. 8 and No. 9. \textit{Lü’ou zazhi} 1917, No. 10, No. 11 and No. 12. On Charles Fourier, see Zeldin 1969, espec. 21–26, 32–34, 108–109. Fourier also championed both co-education and the enrolment of school pupils from all social classes, two ideas that Li would have enthusiastically supported.
\item \textsuperscript{72} \textit{Lü’ou zhoukan} 1919, No. 2 and No. 3. Curiously, Li used Proudhon and Marx (whom Li identified as the champions of decentralisation and centralisation respectively) to represent France and Germany.
\item \textsuperscript{73} \textit{Lü’ou zazhi} 1916, No. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{74} On Ferrer’s educational thought and practice, see Chanel 1975, 38–42.
\end{itemize}
right-wing faction of the Guomindang, and hence were condemned as irredeemable reactionaries. In his 1958 memoir, He Changgong, a former work-study student who had later joined the Chinese Communist Party and worked for the government after 1949, referred to Li Shizeng as a capitalist ‘running dog’ whose work-study agenda encouraging Chinese students to come to France was aimed at cultivating ‘slaves’ for French capitalists. A 1962 journal article likewise condemned Li as simply the ‘lackey’ of French capitalists. For a time in the 1950s and 1960s Li Shizeng was even regarded with suspicion by non-communist observers. Li Huang (1895–1991), who had studied in France during the early 1920s (not as a work-study student) and helped found in 1923 the anti-communist China Youth party (Zhongguo qingniandang  中国青年党), wrote a series of articles in 1969 castigating Li Shizeng and the work-study movement for encouraging impressionistic and gullible Chinese youth to go to France, where many of them became radicalised and converted to Marxism.

Li Shizeng may be making a comeback, however. A commemorative volume dedicated to Li was published in Taiwan two years after his death and his collected writings were published by the Guomindang Committee on Party History in 1980. In France, meanwhile, the activities of Chinese intellectuals and students during the first two decades of the 20th century (and which, until fairly recently, attracted very little interest) have lately been highlighted by officials, municipal authorities and businesses keen to attract Chinese tourist money. A street sign, for example, near the school in Montargis which Li attended earlier on in the century has been redesignated ‘Carrefour Li Yu Ying [Li Shizeng], Étudiant Chinois 1904’; both it and the Town Hall (Hotel Druzy), where Li met the mayor

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75 He 1958, 18.
76 Jiang 1962. Both Li and Wu were described as ‘devious old scoundrels’ (laojian juhua 老奸巨猾).
77 Li Huang 1969. Li also remembered that he had met Li Shizeng when they were both on the boat sailing for France in December 1918, and referred contemptuously to Li’s ideal of ‘mixing’ the Western and Chinese races so that everyone would ultimately be of mixed blood (métis) and Li’s utopian vision of the Great Commonwealth (Datong 大同) would be realised. It is true that in Li Shizeng’s biologically evolutionary framework, the ideal human of the future would be of mixed race, see Müller-Saini 2006, 111. Müller-Saini is mistaken, however, in comparing Li’s ‘racial’ views with those of Kang Youwei. The latter’s views were marked by an arrogant contempt for all ‘races’ other than the Chinese and the whites. There is no evidence that Li thought along similar lines.
78 Li Shizeng xiansheng jinianji 1975.
in 1912 to discuss arrangements for the reception of Chinese frugal study students, have become popular tourist sites for the growing numbers of visitors from mainland China.\footnote{Later Chinese work-study students who also studied in schools in Montargis and who went on to establish cells of the embryonic Chinese Communist Party have also been celebrated by local Chinese community leaders. Peiwen Wang, head of the China-Montargis Friendship Association declared in 2006 that Montargis “played a crucial part in the development of the new China.” See the \textit{AFP despatch 2006} at \url{http://www.expatica.com/fr/life_in/feature/the-French-cradle-of-the-Chinese-Revolution}.} Li’s activities in France and China during the early 20th century, nevertheless, should be remembered for more than just the possibility of attracting tourist cash and contributing to public relations exercises. In terms of educational thought, Li was a pioneer in the promotion of Chinese worker education, a fact often ignored due to the credit conventionally attributed to the efforts of the Chinese National YMCA and, in particular, the American-educated James Yen (1890–1990) during the early 1920s to promote mass education in China.\footnote{A pioneering role that Yen himself was not inhibited from attributing to himself, see Buck 1945. Later studies of Yan’s Mass Education Movement similarly completely overlook the thought and practice of Li Shizeng, see Hayford 1990. A recent article exploring an ‘alternative revolutionary path’ by CCP activists in the early 1920s that focused more on worker education programmes than on fomenting violent class struggle totally overlooks Li Shizeng’s pioneering role in worker education. Perry 2008.} Perhaps more intriguingly than this, however, Li Shizeng in many ways symbolised a new and very modern kind of Chinese intellectual, one who, far from being the ‘subject’ of a ‘semi-colonised’ polity passively imbibing ‘superior’ knowledge from the West (and hence potentially crippled by a ‘Fanon-esque’ inferiority complex), saw himself as an active and equal member of a global community of visionary thinkers and activists, building on a global tradition of utopian educational thought and directly contributing to its further development.\footnote{There is an interesting parallel here to the thought and activities of a Chinese educational ‘lobby’ in the early 20th century, about which I wrote long before the current trend focusing on China’s role in globalisation during the 19th and early 20th centuries became fashionable. This educational lobby was involved in administration, teaching, textbook compilation and the introduction of ideas, concepts and innovations from abroad through the specialised journals on education they edited and contributed to. More significantly, in these journals they confronted and discussed educational issues and problems that were simultaneously being debated in the West. See Bailey 1990, 4–6.} As a cultural entrepreneur and broker, Li’s involvement in the creation of several Sino-French cultural organisations and institutions represented an extraordinary and pioneering episode in
transnational educational interaction. In the final analysis, Li’s ability to work and operate in different milieus and contexts (both in China and in France), and to advance different agendas at the same time, mark him out as an intellectual personality of the future rather than of the past.

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Writing from In-Between: The Transformative Space of Chen Hengzhe’s Fiction

Denise Gimpel

The era between the final years of the imperial system in China and the founding of the People’s Republic of China, approximately 1890–1949, was turbulent. This turbulence was, at times, violent in that there were wars, uprisings and ever-changing power structures and power struggles. Yet this turbulence also contained a huge creative potential. China, as Jerome Grieder has observed, was ‘between orthodoxies’ and this state of ‘inbetween-ness’ provided for some individuals and groups the chance to develop new vistas and imaginations both for their own futures and for that of the nation. China was at this time in the process of becoming a nation, a republic that was to be part of the modern world, and the visions and plans of these groups and individuals were largely concerned with what had to be done in order for China to enter the world and to be a strong and recognised member of the international community. The aim was to close the gap they perceived between a weak China and the strong nations of the world. Some of these groups and individuals were able to realise their plans and put them into practice; some were successful for a while but soon to fall into disgrace or non-relevance due to political developments. Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and the Communists can be said to be representative of the first trajectory. In 1949 they introduced a new orthodoxy and, for some time, silenced the discussion of the future path for China and brought to a temporary halt the cacophony of voices that characterised the late Qing and Republican era in China.

Many voices, however, were silenced forever or are remembered for particular activities that are little more than snapshots of their multifaceted undertakings. Chen Hengzhe (1890–1976) was one of these voices and the present chapter will discuss her life and work as an example of the kind of ‘inbetween-ness’ that ultimately failed in 20th century China. Her life

1 Grieder 1981, 289.
ran parallel to that of Mao Zedong in many ways: they shared the same
time, topics and vocabulary (such as renewal, renaissance and international
recognition), but their experiences and premises were quite different.
Mao developed his ideas from Chinese soil; Chen developed through her
experience of other geographies. Mao turned to the internationalism of
communist ideology, Chen Hengzhe eulogised the global significance of a
scientific culture (kexuewenhua 科学文化).

Chen Hengzhe was first and foremost a writer. She penned numerous
essays, short stories and poems as well as two history books. She was also
an educator. She was China’s first female professor and the first professor
of Western history at Beijing University in 1920. As friend and colleague
Hu Shi (1891–1962) noted in his diary, many felt it was unfortunate that she
relinquished this position when she became pregnant with her first child in
1921.² He felt that this was not sending the right message to other women
who had dedicated so much energy to gaining a modern education. And, if
we can believe Chen’s autobiographical writings, she had indeed expended
all her energy of her young years precisely on the quest to gain an education
and make something of her life.³ After her short employment at Beida,
however, Chen largely wrote fiction, essays and history books and followed
her husband, chemist Ren Hongjun (1886–1961),⁴ around China in his
various university and research posts.

Chen and Ren had been brought together by their common belief in
the need for a ‘scientific culture’ or science and culture. In 1915 they had
both been present at the founding of the Science Society, a group set up
in America by Chinese students there and with the intention of anchoring
what were conceived as universal scientific principles in China.⁵ In 1916 Ren
had been one of the first to appreciate Chen’s early poetry.⁶ She continued
to be involved in and to support the activities of the Science Society after
her return to China, and she contributed numerous articles to publishing
projects that she, Ren and Hu Shi were involved in. In the 1920s she embarked

³ See her Chinese article ‘Wo youshi qiuxue de jingguo 我幼时求学的经过’ (My early search
for education) in Chen 2004, 71–85 and her autobiography.
⁴ For an outline of Ren’s active and influential life as a scientist and researcher, see Chen
Yutang 1996, 170.
⁵ For a discussion of the Science Society, see Wang 2002. On Ren Hongjun’s idea of ‘scientific
culture’ and his special role in introducing it into China, see Li 2004, 193–208.
Denise Gimpel

on a number of educational projects such as writing China’s first history of the Western world in Chinese. Her *History of the West* (*Xiyangshi* 西洋史) was conceived as a textbook for upper-level schools and the interested public and addressed the history of the Western world from pre-history to World War One. She also published a *Short History of the European Renaissance* (*Ouzhou wenyifuxing xiaoshi* 欧洲文艺复兴小史) in 1930.\(^7\)

In many of her writings, Chen emphasised the idea of internationalism and she thus took a keen interest in international activities and groupings. Not only did she regularly report on her situation in China during the turbulent republican years for her alma mater, Vassar;\(^8\) she took on more official missions: between 1927 and 1933 she represented China at four international meetings of the Institute of Pacific Relations going to considerable lengths to ensure that she could take part in them.\(^9\) Moreover she edited a book titled *Symposium on Chinese Culture* in 1931 in connection with the Institute. Also in the 1930s she published the story of her life until she left for America under the title *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl* in order, as she wrote, to bring the realities (as she saw them) of Chinese life to an American audience.\(^10\) After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Chen and her husband decided to remain in the country despite opportunities to leave.\(^11\) However she did send her children abroad to study.\(^12\) Little is known of the years of her life until her death in 1976. Chinese sources and statements generally merely refer to the fact that she led a very secluded life in Shanghai and attribute her lack of activity to her failing health, especially the fact that she was suffering from cataracts.\(^13\)

\(^7\) See Gimpel 2011.
\(^8\) The essays are listed in Bieler 2009, 477.
\(^9\) See her letter to her husband’s elder sister, Ren Xinyi, of 1929 in which she is desperately looking for someone to take her children off her hands so that she can get ‘a little bit of freedom’. The letter is reprinted in Ren and Chen 2007, 100.
\(^10\) See the ‘Foreword’ to Chen’s *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl*. The Foreword is dated 1935.
\(^11\) In an essay of 2002, Yang Jiang provides insights into the discussions, see Yang 2009, 319–333.
\(^12\) Chen’s daughter, Ren Yidu (known under the anglicised name E-Tu Zen Sun, became a historian after her studies in America. Her memoirs are recorded in Chang et al. 1993.
\(^13\) See, for instance, Tan Xiaojie’s 2005 dissertation on Chen’s life and work. See also Yan 2000, 30–31 which discusses, without sources, the rumours surrounding Chen Hengzhe’s fate after 1949.
As has become clear, Chen Hengzhe was one of many young Chinese who left their country in the early years of the 20th century to gain an education and experience in foreign environments. On returning home she joined a group of intellectuals and activists whose main aim was to ‘modernise’ China, to make it part of the modern world as they saw it. Like many others, she was fully engaged with writing about change and in building a lobby to institutionalise the changes she envisaged. Such individuals have often been the object of research inasmuch as they contributed to developments in China in the 20th century. Frequently they have been seen as individual, successful or unsuccessful, instruments in historical developments deemed to be necessary for progress in China, as conduits of the inevitable inroads of superior Western culture. However there is more to their trajectories than illustrations of successful or unsuccessful historical instruments: they were all singular examples of what happens to individuals who engage with different cultures, who modify and adapt the assumptions with which they leave their homes when they encounter the foreign. They illustrate the mechanisms of ‘inbetween-ness’ particularly well because they return home altered in some ways and become active in attempts to introduce change. Thus their lives can tell us much about personal and public change, about the tensions between native and foreign modes of thought and life and the ways in which they coalesce. Knowledge of their lives can contribute to new insights into ‘transnational lives’ and the manner in which ‘individual identity and attachment have long been shaped by the global reach of culture and thought.’

In order to assess Chen Hengzhe’s life and work, in particular in the period up to 1949, I shall make use of the concept of ‘transformative space.’ This concept is understood, in the abstract, as the place of dynamic and creative interaction between the narrative of a ‘life-so-far’ with a different narrative. It is that area of friction, both creative and destructive, that opens up when new concepts meet, when different states of mind engage with each other, whether in hostile or friendly manner, and give rise to a different (not necessarily greater or better) vision of the world and its workings. This concept of space here is not conceived as a spatial framing that contains the

14 Bieler 2009 provides discussion and bibliographical references for those who went to America; Paul Bailey’s contribution to the present volume discusses Li Shizeng who went to France. See also Bailey 1990 on Sino-French connections.

15 See, for instance, Huang 2008; Bieler 2009.

16 Deacon, Russell and Woollacott 2010, 5.

17 Gimpel and Thisted 2007.
temporal but as a constantly productive dynamics of reception, negotiation and modulation that brings together a mindset with the challenges of other mindsets. It owes much to Doreen Massey’s idea of space as the product of interrelations, as ‘the meeting up of histories’¹⁸ and the ‘simultaneity of stories-so-far’. Space thus becomes, again in Massey’s words, a ‘happenstance arrangement-in-relation-to-each-other of previously unconnected narratives/temporalities’.¹⁹ This kind of space is thus not spatially or temporally limited. It is constantly productive in its blending of the old and the new, the understood and the misunderstood, the future and the past. Unlike Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of the ‘contact zone’, it is not predicated on the colonial engagement or imperial encounters, although it shares much of the dynamism Pratt envisages in her study of travel writing. The ‘contact zone’, as Pratt defines it, consists of ‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and “grapple” with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.’²⁰ The term, she writes,

invokes the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect. The term ‘contact’ foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader’s perspective.²¹

The term ‘transformative space’ is also different from Homi Bhabha’s idea of a ‘third space’²² or Salman Rushdie’s idea of ‘translated men’,²³ since these fall prey to postcolonialist visions of transcending boundaries and emerging from a melting pot of influences to become better and rounded beings. Transformative space is used to connote the dynamics of involvement with the different at all levels of engagement. It is a tool to reflect on the various changes and realignments that take place when intercultural encounters occur.

This present study is concerned with the micro-level of transformative space, that is with the manner in which an individual, Chen Hengzhe, utilised

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¹⁸ Massey 2006, 4.
¹⁹ Ibid., 39.
²¹ Ibid., 8.
Writing from In-Between

it and how it affected her life and activities and gave rise to the particular manner in which she wrote. This seems to me to be one of the most apposite ways of working towards a macro-level understanding of change in China in the early 20th century and thus avoiding sweeping statements about the mechanisms or oversimplifying them. After such micro-level studies, it should be easier to investigate the networks and lobbies that were created by various individuals to institutionalise their plans for a new China. For this reason the analysis of Chen's life to 1949 will be predicated on her entry into the realm of (the rather abstract) transformative space and the subsequent (and very concrete) transformative spaces that arose from it. In other words, I will identify some areas in which the effects of the rather broad concept of transformative space crystallised into action or activity or, if one will, the examples of its workings. Where and how did Chen Hengzhe enter a sphere of transformative space both psychologically and physically and where and how did her lifelong engagement with the outside world lead her to exhibit change or difference? How does it show in her writings and activities? These questions constitute the focus of the following pages. In particular I will concentrate on the manner in which I believe Chen Hengzhe's location between China and the world and her desire to act both as bridge and catalyst for change affected the fictional texts she wrote since these have not been discussed in research to date.24

Entering the Realm of Transformative Space

When Chen Hengzhe left China for America on a Boxer scholarship on 15 August 1914,25 she was 24 years of age. She was entering a new world, one that she did not really know but one that had been present in her imaginations and hopes for a long time. Many years after the event, she still recorded it as a momentous one, both for herself and for the world. She described her embarking for a new world as follows in her autobiography written in the 1930s:

It was significant that just as the world was waiting to be affected by the changes to be brought about by this tremendous armed conflict [World War

24 Generally only Chen's 'One Day' has been discussed in Western sources. See Hockx 1998. It has also been translated in Dooling and Torgeson 1998, 91–99. Chinese scholars who have looked at her fiction are discussed in the present article.

One], China was also preparing for fundamental change in her national life through the sending of her young girls by the government for the first time. For these young girls were not sent abroad to make military or political contacts with the western countries, as many young men as well as special commissioners had been sent for previously; but they were asked to study the cultural side of the western nations.  

We cannot know whether her rather hyperbolical evaluation of her trip was the *result* of her stay in America and her pursuant activities in China or whether it was indeed the significance she attached to the opportunities she imagined she would have through her studies in the United States. What is clear, however, is that she envisaged a new space of activity that was to entail transformations for herself and the world. She was to enter the space of the ‘special commissioner’.

What we also know is that she was a young woman who had previously enjoyed a relatively sheltered and privileged life in her home culture. She had travelled within China and had seen both treaty ports (Guangzhou and Shanghai) and inland areas. She had managed to gain an education both within her family and at educational institutions, and this education straddled both Chinese and Western learning. If we can believe her autobiographical writings, her maternal uncle introduced her to many texts of the classical Chinese canon and her stint at the Anglo-Chinese Medical School for Girls in Shanghai introduced her to the rudiments of Western science and mathematics as well as the English language. Chen, moreover, through her education, had access to the newspaper world of the late Qing and early Republican periods. She narrates her early life as one in which she avidly read the newspapers and identified with the modernising heroes in China (such as Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong) or with the heroic females of the Western world (Joan of Arc and Madame Roland). Thus even before she set foot on the *S.S. China* together with ‘over 100 boy students from Tsing Hua College and 14 girl students, nine of whom belonged to the Tsing Hua scholarship group,’ she had profited from the meeting of Western and Chinese narratives on Chinese soil.

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26 Chen 1935, 187–188.
27 She describes her travels with her family and relatives in ibid.
28 Ibid., 106–119.
29 Ibid., 48–63.
30 Ibid., 187–188.
This meeting of mutually foreign narratives gave rise to many a change in the everyday life of the Chinese, but it also transformed the manner in which the elite in particular thought about China’s present situation and how it should be in the future. Chen clearly realised this. She was told (by her uncle, her schoolmates, her teachers), she saw and she read of new visions for the course of the nation and of previously unknown possibilities of shaping a life.\footnote{Taking the responsibility for and shaping one’s own life was a \textit{leitmotif} in Chen’s work, especially in the fable of the Yangzi and the Grand Canal of 1924, which also functions, in English translation, as the first chapter of her autobiography of 1935. See Chen 1928, 131–134 and Chen 1935, 1–4.} As she noted in the opening paragraph of a text she wrote in praise of and gratitude to the uncle who had supported her in many ways, her life would have been charted in such a manner that she would probably merely have become some official’s wife.\footnote{Chen 2009, 71.} However, the meeting-up of Chen Hengzhe’s narrative-so-far with that of China’s and the intruding Western nations was precisely a juncture and a moment that enabled her to envisage a different trajectory for a female life in early 20th century China. Her relatively privileged position as the daughter of an official also made it possible for her to gain access to this different trajectory. She thus could and did enter the realm of transformative space from which her later writings and activities emerged.

Indeed one could well say that it was a clash of Chinese and Western narratives that financed Chen’s voyage abroad and opened up one particular and very concrete space for transformation in many young Chinese lives. She was sponsored by the Boxer Indemnity Fund, a fund that left a huge mark on higher education in China and offered young and promising Chinese a chance to engage with a very different culture in a direct manner. This fund, formally agreed upon in 1908, provided a generation of young and Western-oriented scholars with degrees from renowned American universities, first-hand knowledge of life outside China and scholarly traditions quite different from the Chinese curriculum. It also ultimately gave many of them the status and authority to take leading positions in China when they returned home.\footnote{Bieler 2009 has many examples of texts about and for the Chinese experience of America. See, for instance, 383–385 and 391–393.} This was exactly what the American government of the time had in mind when it set up the ostensibly generous fund. It was to open up a space for American manipulation of Chinese minds. Political leaders in China resisted...
the attempt of President Roosevelt’s government to impose the condition that the indemnity funds be allocated purely for educational activities. They sensed that this was an all-out attack on Chinese values, an attempt to further American political and economic efforts in China and create an educated class indebted to American society and open to American demands. As the president of the University of Illinois put it in a memorandum at the time, the educational use of the funds would lead to ‘the intellectual and spiritual domination of its [China’s] leaders.’ The American Third Assistant Secretary of State, Huntington Wilson, commented in 1907 that the return of the indemnity funds ‘should be used to make China do some of the things we want. Otherwise I feel her gratitude would be quite empty.’

Thus it is clear that the return of these funds, the amount of which had been purposely wrongly calculated by the American government, although still celebrated (as was certainly intended) in many a history textbook as a generous act of the United States towards China, was a calculated act of aggression, an attempt at intellectual colonisation and control. It goes without saying that it offered exactly the kind of opportunity that individuals like Chen Hengzhe had wished. Desires on both sides of the perceived East–West divide had managed to construct imagined spaces at the same time, spaces for transformation that aimed at benefitting each respective side, that were to be used for a variety of goals: to save China, to give America a firm foothold in and influence on China, to establish careers. Ironically enough, such spaces were also opened up by the Chinese government itself at the same moment. Scholarships for American universities were available through Chinese government grants, many of which appear to have been financed by funds dedicated to those who had contributed to the 1911 ‘revolution’ and were to be trained as experts in various fields. These government grants, for example, financed the foreign education of Chen’s husband-to-be Ren Hongjun.

A Different Kind of Fiction

It was in the context of the many personal and political narratives-so-far and with the psychological disposition to change that Chen Hengzhe travelled

34 Both quotations taken from Hunt 1972. The quotations are on p. 550 and p. 549 respectively.
35 See ibid., for a detailed discussion of the negotiations and the background to the Boxer Indemnity Fund remission.
36 For Ren’s description of the problems involved in getting the grant, see Fan and Zhang 2002, 712–713.
to the United States and an education at Vassar and Chicago. We have little concrete information about her years in America apart from her own short travelogues and the articles she produced for the Vassar yearbook. Yet it was obviously also in America that she began her creative writing. She appears not to have done any writing of fiction before she went to the United States. Her first poems as well as her first fictional piece in the vernacular were published in the *Chinese Students’ Quarterly* and they helped develop what was to be a lifelong partnership with both her future husband and Hu Shi, a partnership that also became a project to change China.

Chen’s first two poems with the titles ‘Moon’ (*Yue* 月) and ‘Wind’ (*Feng* 風) impressed both Ren and Hu Shi and were duly published in their student magazine in 1916. They describe in simple but impressively evocative terms a scene on a night with a new moon and a stormy night respectively. Each poem is very short and consists of two lines of ten characters each. These four lines of poetry, however, were hardly enough to excite the literary world, and they did not exactly exhibit any of the qualities of a changed Chinese youth that Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) had demanded in his stirring ‘Call to Youth’ (*Jinggao qingnian* 敬告青年) in the first issue of *Qingnian zazhi* 青年杂志 (Youth Magazine) one year earlier. They may have been ‘new poetry’ of a kind that appealed to Hu Shi and his developing ideas of poetry in the vernacular, but they were not progressive, enterprising, cosmopolitan or scientific as Chen Duxiu had demanded. However Chen Hengzhe’s poetic and fictional writings between 1917 and the late 1920s did illustrate many of the characteristics the more revolutionary thinkers were demanding. In this she was very different from other May Fourth writers.

Chen Hengzhe’s poetry and fiction could perhaps aptly be described as gently revolutionary. Unlike her contemporaries (Lu Xun, Ding Ling, Mao Dun, Ba Jin, etc.), they lack direct attacks on national and social ills, and on first reading they may appear negligible and childish to today’s reader. However, she did answer the call of the day: she was cosmopolitan and scientific and certainly new. This reflected the fact that she was writing from the outside, away from the overheated centres of debate in China, and

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37 See footnote 8.
38 See Hu Shi’s and Ren Hongjun’s prefaces to the collection *Little Raindrop* in Chen 1928, 1–15.
39 They are reproduced in Yan Chunde 2000, 32–33.
40 The article is reprinted in Hu 1990, 10–16. A translation of the article can be found in Teng and Fairbank 1979, 240–245.
in between the issues she saw as negative in China and those she saw as 
universal and applicable to the development of the country. The fact that 
they were published in two of the leading literary journals of the day (Xin 
ingnian 新青年 and Xiaoshuo yuebao 小说月报) testifies in itself that her 
stories also spoke to the editors and readers and their concerns.

Chen Hengzhe wrote eleven fictional texts between 1917 and 1931 and 
published them in a variety of journals and in a collection of stories entitled 
Little Raindrop (Xiaoyudian 小雨点) published in 1928. They can roughly be 
separated into two groups: fables or allegories and more realistic stories. The 
following will discuss typical examples from these two types to demonstrate 
the issues that occupied Chen's mind as a writer and to show how being both 
within and without the Chinese frame could liberate Chen from what C. T. 
Hsia somewhat crossly observed to be the characteristic mark of writers of 
the era, an obsession with China.41 Four of Chen's eleven stories could rightly 
be called fables: 'Little Raindrop' (Xiaoyudian 小雨点), 'West Wind' (Xifeng 西风), 'The Grand Canal and the Yangzi River' (Yunhe yu Yangzijiang 运河 
与扬子江) and 'The Cypress and the Wild Rose' (Laobo yu yeqiangwei 老伯与 
野蔷薇). All of these concern natural phenomena (raindrops, wind, swamp, 
rivers) or plants that speak and act as if they were human beings. Although 
the stories do not state it clearly, they all have a lesson to teach. The seven 
other stories are all written in a more realistic mode suggesting that the 
events depicted are real events the author has witnessed, events aimed at 
showing basic human characteristics. As such they all involve an element of 
timelessness or global application: the fables or allegories by their very nature 
and the more realistic stories in their portrayal of timeless human reactions 
to particular situations. In this the stories speak to a supranational audience, 
and this is surely what Chen Hengzhe had intended. In the introduction to 
her collection she had written that her only motivation for writing the stories 
lay in a kind of exorcising of the troubled souls that visited her and robbed 
er of her sleep until she had written them. These troubled souls were ones 
that, for one reason or another, could not or would not speak for themselves 
and the force that moved her was nothing more than the shared and very 
sincere emotion of the human race.42 It clearly did not matter whether the 
protagonists were Chinese or Western; they all shared the same humanity 
and she, the wanderer between the two worlds, the person in between the

42 Chen 1928, 18.
two sides that were frequently bickering and frequently misunderstanding each other, was sincerely intent on showing the bridge between them: universal human reactions and attitudes. There is, in fact, one aspect of Chen Hengzhe’s fictional writing that is quite conspicuous through its very absence: she never compares East and West, never fictionalises the life of the Chinese student in America, as so many other student writers did.\(^{43}\) She insists on a common humanity and a common logic to life and tries to portray these relatively objectively. It was a trait that also marked her interpretation of history.\(^{44}\)

### The Fables

Two examples of Chen’s fables should suffice to delineate her concerns: ‘Little Raindrop’ (小雨点) and ‘West Wind’ (西风). These are stories narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator that say something about the workings of nature and imbue their protagonists with feelings and allow them to have adventures. The other two fables in the collection, ‘The Grand Canal and the Yangzi River’ (运河与扬子江) and ‘The Cypress and the Wild Rose’ (老伯与野蔷薇), relate to human activities and attitudes and are written in the form of dialogue between the two characters in the story.

The plots of the ‘Little Raindrop’ and ‘West Wind’ are quickly told. In the first, the little raindrop of the title is swept out of his home in the clouds one day and lands first on the breast of a bird, which flaps its wings so vigorously that the raindrop falls off and onto a leaf. From there his journey takes him via a swamp into a river and finally to the sea. When the sea releases the raindrop to allow him to make his way back into the clouds, he interrupts his journey to rest on a lotus flower in need of water. Raindrop provides the water and the flower once again blossoms and becomes beautiful. However its beauty attracts a young girl, who picks the flower and wears it in her hair only to discard it again in the evening when the beauty has faded. The lotus releases the raindrop from her roots, telling him he cannot help her any more but that she will revive again the next year. Raindrop ends up in a stagnant pond where he learns that he need only wait until the sun rises the next day to be transported back to the sky and home. The story ends with

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\(^{43}\) See, for instance, Bieler 2009, 383–385 and 391–393.

\(^{44}\) See Gimpel 2010 and 2011.
the raindrop reunited with his siblings in the cloud and vowing to go down and visit the lotus again the next autumn.45

‘West Wind’ also describes how natural phenomena go down to earth. This time, however, they are shown to be making conscious decisions rather than being transported by forces beyond their control. Moon and West Wind are two inhabitants of Red Maple Valley who have the freedom to decide what they wish to do. Moon feels sympathy for the poor inhabitants of the earth and regularly goes down to visit them and console them. West Wind does not share this opinion initially but is soon shown how the inhabitants of the earth, in the figure of a beautiful young girl longing for the autumn and life in Red Maple Valley, do appreciate his presence. Thus, much to the joy of those on earth and those in Maple Valley, he takes up his job as the bringer of autumn and the remover of the colourful leaves from the trees, the one who gives momentum to clouds and watercourses. He suddenly realises that, unlike the leaves, the clouds or the rivers, he has the power to start things, to set processes in motion. They must wait to be set in motion. He also realises that he is an envoy of freedom, something that brings joy. He realises that the people on earth need his help and thus he decides to go down to earth once a year to bring a little freedom and a sense of beauty to the people there. This is why there is autumn once a year.46

In the few discussions available, this pair of stories has been celebrated by Chinese critics as a glorification of love and sacrifice. Writing in 2000, Yan Chunde praises the self-sacrifice Raindrop is willing to endure in order to save the lotus flower: ‘How lovable, how magnificent is Little Raindrop who prefers to sacrifice himself to save another person!’47 Like other commentators, Yan also insists that this is ‘symbolic fiction’ (xiangzheng xiaoshuo 象征小说),48 but fails to inform the reader where the symbolic quality lies or what actually is the significance of these natural phenomena that act like human beings. Similarly Qiao, writing in 2004 and from the perspective of women’s writing and insisting that Chen Hengzhe had majored in Western literature – even though her major was Western history – also feels that she had very early been influenced by the art of the Symbolists (xianzheng pai

46 The story is reprinted in ibid., 8–19.
47 Yan 2000, 35.
48 Yan 2000, 34.
She continues that Chen Hengzhe communicates her ideas in a number of her fictional works by means of symbols and metaphors with a slight hint of Romanticism and that both ‘Little Raindrop’ and ‘West Wind’ reflect these particular traits.

Qiao, moreover, is of the opinion that one of Chen Hengzhe’s contributions to the new literature of the day consisted of a consciousness of a new form of love (xinxingde aide yishi 新型的爱的意识). It was not the narrow female love of the ‘feudal’ era constricted as it was by the narrow confines of female life and addressed to members of the immediate family. Neither, she continues, did Chen Hengzhe dwell on the love between the sexes that women of the new era tended to describe. Hers was a female compassion towards the world born of a consciousness of the true human being. By ardently mapping out modern female compassion for humanity, she thus hinted at how degraded society was.

Both ‘Little Raindrop’ and ‘West Wind’ are cited as examples of these traits. She reiterates the comments made by Yan – Raindrop is a lovable figure, evidence of the author’s powers of imagination, and all the places visited by Raindrop are teeming with warmth and fragrance. When Raindrop offers itself to the lotus flower to keep it alive, the critic remarks that ‘the realization of love and the quality of self-sacrifice are unified’. This is not the self-sacrifice that has a slavish, feudal character; ‘it possesses the nobility of human integrity.’

In the same vein both Moon and West Wind are willing to sacrifice their happy lives in Red Maple Valley on behalf of human beings on earth and become envoys of freedom and bringers of joy.

Such analyses strike this reader as sentimental, superficial and rather beside the point. Moreover they seem to be imbued with a critical sense that is overly influenced by the so-called May Fourth spirit: sacrifice for the greater cause was not an unusual trope in Chinese literature, but it gained urgency and centrality since the fiction of the final years of the Qing and long into the second half of the 20th century. In particular women’s sacrifice for the greater good was much appreciated. The unspecified Symbolist

49 Qiao 2004, 239.
50 Ibid., 239.
51 Ibid., 232.
52 Ibid., 234.
53 Ibid., 233–234.
54 Ibid., 234.
55 Gimpel 2001, 81–89.
and Romantic borrowings would be hard to prove and to some extent they reflect previous Chinese scholarship that had similarly, and without illustration, insisted on Symbolist qualities in Chen Hengzhe’s writings and that she had learned this from Western literature. Such comments also indicate a critical stance predicated on a narrative of borrowing and catching up with Western trends rather than the possibility of the kind of creative friction and development involved in transformative space. The stories ‘Little Raindrop’ and ‘West Wind’ are certainly allegorical in that they have a message and the actions and the figures in the narrative can be read as having a broader meaning that lies outside the narrative itself, yet this does not qualify them for the Symbolist camp. In the latter case the analysis also links up with other attempts to push Chen Hengzhe into a feminist camp purely and simply because she was a woman and many of her protagonists were women. However this cannot make of her a feminist. Rather it aligns her with a host of writers and reformers of the day, both men and women, who began to take an interest in women in life and fiction and portray them differently.

How can we then make a less emotional and more contextual analysis of these two stories? In ‘Little Raindrop’ the author gives us no hint. It is a simple narrative reminiscent of a children’s story, and yet it was published in what could well be termed the avant-garde journal of the day, New Youth. In the second story, ‘West Wind’, Chen does give a hint. The final paragraph is a statement explaining the whole point of the story: ‘This is why we have autumn each year, the reason why West Wind pays us a visit each year because, before he met that young lady in search of freedom, he did not often pay visits to the world down here.’ The message of the story thus brings together the quest for freedom and the explanation of the laws of the universe, laws that apply the world over where the seasons are regular and predictable. Yet the fable interestingly predicates this universal law on one woman’s desire for freedom and the West Wind’s appreciation of it. This is very much like any creation narrative that hangs on the interaction of individuals and the outcome of their meeting.

The final paragraph, moreover, also frames the narrative in the language of science and its laws. As mentioned above, throughout her career, Chen shared her husband’s quest for a culture of science or a scientific culture

57 Chen 2004, 19.
since the founding of the Science Society in 1915 at Cornell University. As part of the project to change China and integrate it into what they perceived as global processes, the Society also founded a journal whose main aim was to align China with what they understood to be global processes. The editorial of the first issue stated that ‘science, and only science, will revive learning in China and provide the salvation of the masses’, and in the same issue Ren Hongjun explained why China lacked science, and the editor-in-chief, Yang Xingfo (1893–1933), explicitly related the founding of the Science Society to globally/universally pertinent processes and China’s entry into the community of leading nations when he wrote that ‘[a]ll civilized countries have established scientific societies to promote learning’.

Like Chen’s fiction, this journal was a product of the transformative space that Chinese students embraced through their experiences abroad. It was also a concrete space of transformation. Articles linked science, broadly defined, with all aspects of Chinese society and the need for reform: chemist Ren Hongjun wrote in 1915 that China lacked analytical methods that could be used to solve problems; in 1922 biologist Bing Zhi (1886–1965) could speak on the connection between biology, women’s education and the eradication of superstition; meteorologist Zhu Kezhen (1890–1974) criticised the lack of rational scientific methods for dealing with problematic weather conditions in China.

Chen’s fable about Little Raindrop and West Wind are part of this drive to a culture of science in China in that she too is contributing to this perceived need to explain and provide a general understanding of natural occurrences as a prerequisite for social progress and a modern nation. In fictional form she is explaining the cycle of water, from raindrops that fall to the ground, enter rivers and then the sea and are finally raised again to the skies through the activity and heat of the sun. The personified raindrop and his ‘sacrifice’ are part of the normal cycle but they are heightened as a part of the fictional narrative. The sacrifice is in no way central to the narrative, and Chinese critics’ celebration of this sacrifice may say more

59 The article is reprinted in Fan and Zhang 2002, 19–23.
60 Cited in Wang Zuoyue 2002, 301.
about them than about the story they are reading. ‘West Wind’ explains the seasons or, more correctly, the advent of autumn and the natural occurrence of falling leaves, higher rivers and wind. Moreover, Chen makes freedom the catalyst for the establishment of such natural laws: the beautiful autumn leaves pile up in West Wind’s home longing to be freed to waft down to the ground;\(^{63}\) West Wind acts as he does in response to the young girl’s appeal to him in a song in which she expresses her desire to leave the earth and soar into the skies like a ‘free bird’ (\textit{ziyou zhi niao} 自由之鸟). This very same ‘free bird’ had been the topic of a poem Chen Hengzhe had published in \textit{New Youth} in 1919.\(^{64}\) In the poem, a free bird observes a bird in a cage and imagines its desire to leave the cage and be free (\textit{zuo yi ge ziyou de feiniao} 做一个自由的飞鸟), ignoring all extremes of weather, to soar on the wind and be transported through the free air (\textit{zai ziyou de kongqi zhong} 在自由的空气中). Freedom is again aligned with the seasons and their regular appearance when the girl asks West Wind whether it is correct that Red Maple Valley was a place of complete beauty and complete freedom. His answer is telling: ‘That’s correct, that is true. In our valley winter has white snow, spring has safflowers; in summer green trees are cool and shady, and colours are bright and full. But the most appealing time in the valley has to be the autumn.’\(^{65}\) Freedom is nature. It is not locked up in a cage like the bird or shackled to the earth like the girl. Those who wish to be free wish to soar into the air and join the elements and enter into the freedom accorded by the natural organisation of the world.

The two stories, each in its own way, illustrate some of the points called for by Chen Duxiu in his ‘Call to Youth’ of 1917. Self-awareness and initiative replace the slavish mentality of the past: West Wind does not want to be bound by habit to the earth, a place he despises, but he is drawn and conquered by the desire for freedom exhibited by the young girl. Despite the fact that these are fantasy stories in that raindrops, winds, clouds or leaves do not speak, they are based in science and reality and the observable forces of nature. Furthermore the stories generalise an experience of the world and are not narrowly national in any way. There is a newness to them that would have impressed the readers of \textit{New Youth} since such fables were not

\(^{63}\) Chen 2004, 13–14.

\(^{64}\) See \textit{Xin Qingnian} 6, 5, 1919, 485–486.

\(^{65}\) Chen 2004, 16.
commonplace in Chinese literature.\textsuperscript{66} They may well also have appealed to the very young readers of the magazine as a form of children’s literature, a genre also very underdeveloped in China.\textsuperscript{67} Thus we can see Chen Hengzhe writing between China and the world, writing from the transformative and creative space she had entered through her early experiences and her stay in America. She is acting as a bridge that does not join two different entities but is the link that shows that human experience of the world is shared just as natural phenomena are universal. Writing for a Chinese audience and using a Western genre she created stories whose appeal did not depend on nationality, was not overly pathetic or patriotic or linked to specific and momentary social ills. The stories are cosmopolitan, a quality also demanded by Chen Duxiu, since freedom is a universal desire closely linked with the universal laws and cycles of the natural world.

**Stories of the World’s People**

The other group of stories that do not unfold in the form of fables and offer a more realistically drawn picture of individual aspects of life comprise seven stories written between 1917 and 1926. Only two of the stories are situated in China (‘Brother Meng’ and ‘Woman in the Wu Gorges’). The others portray situations outside China, presumably all in the United States. Each of them very unpolemically explores aspects of life and society that were pertinent to discussions in China at the time but which also share a timelessness that relates them to the kinds of questions people have always pondered over: relations between partners in marriage and love, isolation and fear, decisions and their consequences. Here only three stories will be discussed as examples of Chen’s writing from in-between. These are her first attempt at fiction, ‘One Day’ (\textit{Yiri 一日}), ‘The Old Couple’ (\textit{Lao fuqi 老夫妻}) and her story ‘Luoqisi’s Problem’ (\textit{Luoqisi de wenti 洛绮思的问题}). The first was originally published in the \textit{Chinese Students’ Quarterly} in 1917, the second and third appeared in one of the most important literary periodicals in 20th-century China, \textit{Xiaoshuo yuebao 小说月报}, in 1918 and 1924 respectively.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{66} See, however, Nienhauser 1986, 946–948 on the types of allegory traditionally to be found in Chinese literature.

\textsuperscript{67} On children’s literature in China, see Farquhar 1999.

\textsuperscript{68} The stories were all included in Chen’s 1928 collection \textit{Little Raindrop}. On literary periodicals, see Gimpel 2001, Hockx 2003.
Chen Hengzhe’s earliest story is perhaps more aptly described as a kind of essay or sketch largely in dialogue form. The author herself points to its problematic nature at the opening of the text when she says that it has no structure and no aim but that it describes the ‘new life’ at a girls’ college in America. However, she insists, it is an absolutely faithful description and it was her first attempt at a portrayal of human feelings. As such, she decided to keep it in the 1928 collection.\(^6^9\) Thus, apart from somewhat sentimental reasons, Chen Hengzhe felt that this true description of a day in the life of an American college girl in her dorm and outside it did have something to tell to a Chinese audience of the late 1920s. ‘One Day’, however, was originally published in the *Chinese Students’ Quarterly* in 1917, and at that time it was aimed at Chinese students in America who could find confirmation of their own observations in a foreign academic environment as well as insights into things they had yet to see.

There are two interesting aspects to this otherwise rather trivial sketch of girls’ problems. One concerns the appearance towards the end of the text of a Chinese student and the reactions she causes and the manner in which she relates to her American classmates. The other concerns how this text could speak to Chinese readers some ten years later.

The various scenes in the text show exclusively American girls involved in their daily routine of oversleeping, missing breakfast, forgetting their homework and being behind with their studies, missing home and longing for dances instead of class work, volunteering for service in field hospitals in France, getting in trouble with the headmistress, suffering the cold, electing prefects and practicing fire alarm drill. All of this is a natural and familiar discourse to any American or European student even today. Only after the evening meal does an outsider in the form of a Chinese student named Zhang enter the picture. She is approached by an American girl and asked if she would like to dance with them. She answers that she would very much like to, but that she is not very adept at dancing. The conversation continues in the following manner:

Aimila: ‘Do you dance in China?’

Zhang: ‘No.’


\(^{69}\) Chen 1928, 17.
Before Miss Zhang can reply, the other students come up and gather round her in a semicircle.

Beitian: ‘What do you eat at home? Do you have eggs?’

Miss Zhang: ‘We do.’

Maji: ‘Well then, you must have chickens, too. How strange, how strange.’

Meili: ‘I have a friend whose mother is a missionary in China. Do you know her?’

Lusi: ‘I was reading a book on Chinese customs last night and it said that the Chinese like to eat dead rats. Is that true?’

Yunisi: ‘What are Chinese rooms like? Do they have tables too? I’ve heard that the Chinese eat, sleep, read and write on the floor. Is that right?’

Yani: ‘Do you have a brother in America? My brother knows a Chinese student called Zhang. He must be your brother.’

Miss Zhang answers them one after the other.

Aimila: ‘Do you mind us asking all these questions?’

Miss Zhang: ‘Not at all.’

The dialogue continues with the American students asking to be taught a few words in Chinese, mispronouncing them terribly and believing that they can now speak Chinese.

This is the extent of the intrusion of the Chinese student into the American girls’ daily discourse. The dialogue form of the text underscores her exclusion from their daily life. She hardly speaks and then only to answer an array of questions which, in themselves, fail to constitute a part in a conversation – or an invitation to join a group. The list of queries illustrates well that the American girls have no way that they can integrate a Chinese girl into their daily chatter. She is so very different (does not dance, probably has only now learned to sit at a table, most likely eats rats). Moreover her country is the target of missionaries and thus, by definition, backward. For Chinese girl

Chen 1928, 29–31. There is also a translation of this story in Dooling and Torgeson 1998, 91–99. My translation differs from it in some parts. I have also chosen to use the pinyin transcription of the English names rather than to choose English names in order to retain the strangeness for the reader of names from a foreign country.
students in America in the early days of the 20th century, this must have seemed a familiar pattern and would have elicited a mixture of mirth and disappointment. They had come to America to open their minds to new ideas and were confronted with a culture that could not and would not easily accept them. How can you join in on an equal footing if you have not been socialised to dance, cannot relate to the thrill of attending dances, etc? Moreover they were constantly faced with the stereotype kind of question that still today is asked of the Chinese as well as being mistaken for Japanese.

Significantly Miss Zhang is only included in this short interlude in the text, which otherwise is dedicated to the experience and lives of American girls. She plays no part in their daily lives otherwise. What, then, did Chen Hengzhe mean when she said that her portrayal was faithful? It is easy to detect a certain anger beneath the surface humour of this interlude, an inkling of the isolation and embarrassment that must have attended Chen and the other girl who accompanied her to college when they first arrived. They would have been so prominently visible and, despite all training en route to America, still unaccustomed to the ways of college life. This is a much more insecure Chinese girl than Chen Hengzhe as she portrays herself two years later in 1919 taking a camping trip with friends in Canada and managing all the red tape and paperwork that the trip entails for a Chinese citizen.\footnote{See ‘Report on a Camping Trip in Canada’ (\textit{Jianada luying ji} 加拿大露营记), Chen 2004, 86–96.} Her humour in the latter text reveals her self-confidence and familiarity with the society she is living in. In the former text it reveals an insecurity that was only natural, and it is here that she is writing from in between the expectations she had of America and the reality she found. She was no longer the rebel or unusual girl in her homeland; she had become a representative of an exotic and strange culture that was considered backward. Managing these two extremes must have been quite a psychological feat for a young girl in her late twenties.

When published in China in 1928, the story must have appeared quite exotic to Chinese readers whose world, like that of Miss Zhang, still ran according to different principles. And yet it must also have opened up a window onto the manner in which apparently free young ladies speak and act. This was not the kind of serious study that many a young Chinese person was envisaging as a key to a better future for self and country. Despite the topic of the history class the girls attend – the second French constitution – they
are not fascinated by it. It is not without irony that the thinkers the girls are encouraged to base their arguments on – Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire – appear to evoke little enthusiasm among the American girls, whereas they would have been almost household names among the reform-minded youth and elite in China. Here we have a story in which Chen Hengzhe acts as the bridge between expectations and reality, and the exoticism provided for the American girls in the story by Miss Zhang is now replaced for Chinese readers by the strange American students and their habits and interests.

Chen Hengzhe’s next attempt at fiction was the story ‘The Old Couple’. Again, reading this story today, it is hard to imagine why it should have made its way onto the pages of New Youth in 1918. The text is once more largely in the form of a dialogue between an old man and his wife. The story takes place in America and the scene is set in a descriptive first sentence that tells the reader there is a downpour. The wife is at home ironing and the husband comes in soaking wet. There ensues a conversation about a cake he had promised to bring back with him and that he had forgotten because he had so many other things to carry. She nags at him and the well-known scenario of mutual accusations between man and wife follows until a neighbour comes in to borrow a newspaper. She is a widow and remarks that the extra ironing is not so bad; it means there is someone else in the house, and she also explains that now her husband is dead she often thinks back fondly to the quarrels they had and the fun they had had together. She leaves and the couple sit down to dinner. She remarks that his shoes are wet and that he should change them. While he is out of the room she takes out an apple pie that she had made for dessert. He then reminds her of the apple pie he had eaten when he had been courting her over 30 years previously. She remarks that she could never forget it because he had almost eaten the plate as well. At this, the old man says that since the plates now belong to him, he has no intention of eating them. The two of them burst out laughing.

Like many of Chen Hengzhe’s stories, this one also gains a certain dramatic immediacy through the use of dialogue uninterrupted by a narrator’s voice. Many of her texts could easily be imagined on stage. The themes addressed here are marriage and communication between partners as well as widowhood. The first two topics were central to the concerns of young people during the early years of the 20th century in China. There was a demand for a free choice of partner in opposition to the arranged marriages of the past. Marriages should be based on the partnership of equals and on mutual respect. They should also be monogamous. In Chen’s story we see a
partnership that has lasted over 30 years, from the time the man had been so in love with her and enthralled by her apple pie that he had eaten it all up to the present of the story, a time when, as the wife states, the children have left the house and do not need her anymore and, once again, there are just the two of them.

In view of Chen’s constant reassurances that she writes from her experience and to depict the situations of those who have no voice, we can assume that this was a situation she had encountered in America. And for her readers this would be an interesting illustration of the type of companionate marriage that was being demanded and that had been so highly elevated in the past.\(^72\) Many of the writers of the day were forced into arranged marriages or found no way to avoid them. Hu Shi was one such case.\(^73\) Chen, however, had rejected the idea and then gone on to reject the idea of marriage completely before choosing Ren Hongjun as her lifetime partner.\(^74\) The dialogue shows a well-worn marriage but one in which there remains respect for the partner and enjoyment of shared moments even after daily routine has softened the brilliance of love. Love here is not equated with sexuality and desire, neither is it linked with female emancipation. The core of the story points to a deeper sense of responsibility for one’s life partner. This has nothing to do with femininity or feminism. There is indeed no particular focus on women in any of the tales or stories created by Chen Hengzhe and thus, even though Qiao Yigang is right in pointing to Chen Hengzhe’s different vision of family, a vision that could and should replace the traditional patriarchal power structure, she is wrong in assuming that Chen was concerned with women in the family.\(^75\) In all of the texts there is an overriding element of partnership that should not be overlooked. Family was important to Chen Hengzhe as a place of companionship and trust. It was not a place for women to assert themselves. In a letter to her sister-in-law of 1924, the same year she wrote the story of the old couple, she explained:

When Ren Hongjun proposed marriage to me in the United States, he told me that he had two great wishes for our marriage. Because he was not at all in agreement with the old family structure, his first wish was to create a small family so that his various dreams could become reality. The

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\(^73\) See Grieder 1970, 11–12.

\(^74\) Tan 2005, 37–38.

\(^75\) See Qiao 2004, 235–238.
second was that, because he deeply believed that I had a natural talent for literature, he wanted to create a small, quiet and peaceful family for me so that I could concentrate on developing my talent. As yet his two wishes have not come to fulfilment and that is something I am deeply ashamed of. But the direction in which we have channelled our energies could not be altered.  

A small family was synonymous with a new or modern family, a nuclear family that allowed each member to develop its potential. However there was also another side to Chen Hengzhe's portrayal of women, one that could well be interpreted in a different and more feminist vein. Yet the story makes more sense if one sees it as an illustration of a mature decision by a mature human being. In 1924, the same year as Chen Hengzhe wrote the letter to her sister-in-law about her husband's wishes for a small family with the possibility for her to realise her talents and develop them, she wrote a story of a woman who adamantly refuses to become a member of a family for reasons she is quite able to formulate.

‘Luoqisi’s Problem’ relates how two successful scholars meet, fall in love and decide to marry. However before the wedding Luoqisi tells her fiancé that she will not marry him because marriage would mean children, a household and chores that would make her academic career impossible. After some discussion the fiancé accepts her decision and the marriage is called off with an agreement that this decision will not harm their sincere friendship and respect for one another. Luoqisi never marries and does indeed become a respected scholar of philosophy whose works are translated into many foreign languages. The man, however, does not manage to remain single. He marries a young physical education teacher and has children. He writes to Luoqisi to explain his decision and tells her that, even though he has married, there is a secret place in his heart that no one but her has access to and that his feelings for her have never changed. He never sends the letter. Luoqisi meanwhile reflects on her success and dreams of a wonderful place where she sits with her husband and their children on a balmy summer evening. All is peaceful and everyone is content. This dream threatens to spoil her sense of professional success and cause Luoqisi to feel she has missed something in her life until she realises that this dream

76 Ren and Chen 2007, 99.
77 Chen 1928, 99–130.
has only been made possible by the fact that she had rejected domestic life and chosen to concentrate on her career and academic interests. If she had chosen otherwise, the dream would doubtless have been about a successful and independent scholar.

As Qiao rightly remarks, this story treats an issue that occupied the minds of young women at the beginning of the 20th century and continues to do so today: the question of how to combine marriage/family and profession.\(^7\) However, as in her other stories, Chen refuses to make any polemical statement. She merely shows that these are the issues facing women and that, if the individual makes a mature decision, she can rest within it, even when dreams threaten to question the rightness of that decision. They are, after all, just dreams of the grass that may perhaps have been greener if she had chosen another life. The story is obviously situated in America, a setting that lent itself to the portrayal of radical new ideas and actions in Chinese fiction of the time, usually through translation.

Like one of her later stories, ‘The Story of a Pin’, ‘Luoqisi’s Story’ is the tale of a road not taken: in the former, second marriage and love and partnership are rejected for the creation of something important to the protagonist within a family environment; in the latter family is rejected completely in favour of professional life. As in the poem ‘The Road Not Taken’ by Robert Frost, which interestingly enough was written during the period that Chen Hengzhe was in America, the two roads are really of the same quality. It is the choice that makes the difference and creates the illusion of having taken ‘the one less travelled by’. Chen Hengzhe’s characters, however, are only temporarily tempted to sigh over the choice that they have made. Unlike natural phenomena which, despite the fables explaining their regularity, really have no choice in the path they take, the human individual does, and it is the weighing up of the situation and the conscious and unregretted choice that makes the difference. West Wind is controlled by natural laws; Little Raindrop will always be part of the natural cycle of water, be it as small raindrops, ponds, swamps, rivers, seas or condensation. It is people who have to make decisions and they need to make informed decisions based on knowledge of themselves.

\(^7\) Qiao 2004, 236.

\(^7\) Compare the 1926 ‘Story of a Pin’ (Yízhì kōuzhēn de gùshī 一支扣针的故事) in which Chen illustrates exactly the opposite position: a woman who has chosen not to marry the man she actually loves and how she accepts this decision and is able to lead a happy and fulfilled life. The story from the Little Raindrop collection of 1928 is reprinted in Chen 2004, 51–65.
In these stories we see none of the protest at the position of women in society that characterises other stories of the time, protests against the situation in China. Chen is offering an image of the manner in which women outside China have solved the issue of the choices facing them. Neither family life nor the professional life is glorified and there is no evil character exerting pressure or symbolising the evils of ‘feudal’ society. This is very much in character with Chen’s general attitude to the situation of women in China and her view of the road ahead for Chinese women. In ‘The Chinese Woman in the Modern World’ of 1929 and ‘The Influence of Foreign Cultures on the Chinese Woman’ of 1932,\(^80\) she discusses the question of Chinese women between tradition and something new, between East and West. In the first essay, she celebrated certain aspects of the traditional Chinese woman and the fact that, on occasion, she had excelled outside the family circle. These were, she admits, exceptional woman and not the rule and she offers Li Qingzhao as an example. However, she rightly remarks, ‘was not a Joan of Arc or a Jane Addams\(^81\) also a rare specimen in her own country? Let a nation produce just one extraordinary woman, and the great potentialities of all her sisters will be proved. And in the long history of China such proofs are certainly far from lacking.’\(^82\) After describing the ordinary woman who, despite her early talents, settles for a life of domesticity within the traditional set up and is happy in her own way and, to some extent, echoes the kind of choice she had depicted in ‘The Story of a Pin’,\(^83\) she discusses exceptional women using the example of the poet and scholar Li Qingzhao and Madame Cao (Ban Zhao), ‘who finished the famous *Annals of Han*’ as well as such figures as Empress Wu Zetian and heroine Hua Mulan. These exceptional qualities, she continues, mean that the modern Chinese woman ‘has roots that make her the equal of any other women in the world and that she will not be merely a Westernized person, but is to be a woman with the stamp of individuality that she has inherited from her predecessors,

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80 ‘The Chinese Woman in the Modern World’ was first published in *Pacific Affairs* in 1929 under the name Sophia Chen Zen (Zen 1929). It was then included in the collection of essays she published herself in 1933 and 1934 under the title *The Chinese Woman and Four Other Essays*.

81 Jane Addams (1860–1935) was an American feminist and social worker. Chen Hengzhe wrote a short biography of her. See Chen 1995, 289–300. Chen referred to Addams in the subtitle of her sketch as someone with a wish to save mankind (*jiushizhe* 救世者).

82 Ibid., 1.

83 Ibid., 2–8.
in addition to the opportunity that the modern world is offering her for the broadening of her personality.’ She continues:

Such a combination of the old virtues of China with the new culture of the modern Western world will not be a medley, nor merely a compromise, but will be a harmonious product of elements which are fundamentally congenial to each other. To put it more concretely, what is that sense of independence that is so highly valued by the modern woman but the same moral courage and strength that have distinguished many a Chinese woman in the past?\(^8^4\)

In these few stories we get the sense of what Chen Hengzhe seems to be illustrating in her fiction: it does not matter whether one lives in America or China, the issues facing us are the same and we neither need a ‘medley’ or a ‘compromise’ of two putatively opposite cultures. The two have certain differences, but the friction caused by the meeting of these two facets, which are ‘fundamentally congenial to each other’, will lead to a ‘harmonious product’ of the modern woman who will share similar characteristics, challenges and problems throughout the world. In other words, somewhere between the cultures, in what I have termed transformative space, a process of natural interaction is taking place that can produce something equally natural that is neither a copy of something Western nor particularly Eastern. It is not a case of the ‘modern woman with Chinese characteristics’; it is a case of the international or, better, the transnational modern woman.

However, as she makes clear later in the text, there are some factors required to support this process of creative friction between cultures. In order to underscore the intrinsic roots of the modern woman in China, Chen, as on so many other occasions, particularly in her historical texts,\(^8^5\) turns to an image from the natural world. She likens the situation of Chinese women to a tree:

The tree has been growing for hundreds of years, but it has been confined to a narrow courtyard whose share of moisture and sunshine is limited, and whose soil has been impoverished through lack of care and attention. Though the potential strength for growth in that tree is still unimpaired, yet the tree is facing a great crisis in its life: either the courtyard must be

\(^8^4\) Ibid., 15.

\(^8^5\) For a discussion of Chen’s historical writings, see Gimpel 2010.
widened, and the soil enriched, so that the tree might receive enough sunshine and rain and nourishment from the earth for an unlimited growth, or it must stop growing at all.\textsuperscript{86}

The situation of Chinese women is likened to a universal and natural phenomenon that adheres to the laws of nature: with enough light and water, it can develop. Without these factors, it will shrivel and petrify. This is a situation located in China in this particular example, but it could, by definition, be anywhere else in the world. Throughout this text and throughout her stories, she calls upon a situation for women and human beings in general that is transnational. There is no special defect in China, just as there is no special advantage in the West. The conditions for development have, it would seem, merely been more favourable in the West. Just as in her understanding of the ‘natural laws’ of history, she is saying that China can be part of global processes if conditions for the organic development of its society are respected, if the possibilities inherent in scientific culture are realised.

All of these texts show Chen Hengzhe to be between China and the West (or the developed world) in a place without national or local cultural claims to superiority. It would seem that she is saying there are simply conditions of human nature that must be accepted, since they are universal and binding. Ignoring them means giving up the chance for development and progress; accepting and understanding them signifies participation in a transnational reality. She sees this transformation in China already with the appearance, for instance, of female lawyers, doctors, nurses, educators and athletes as well as with the right to vote and to participation in the political realm in some provinces of China. In all of this, she writes, one can see

the Chinese lady is now being transformed from the cultured lady of the home to a world citizen; and where there was only one cultured woman to perhaps a thousand ignorant ones, now the light of knowledge and the opportunity for developing one’s talent is casting its rays on an ever-widening area; and the time may soon come when the other thousand inhabitants in that dark region will also be enveloped in those illuminating rays.\textsuperscript{87}

Doubtless she counted herself as just one such world citizen and her stories gave illustrations of the manner in which world citizens took on the

\textsuperscript{86} Chen 1934, 16.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 19.
responsibility for their lives and made their decisions in difficult circumstances. Knowledge was the light that would feed the tree, knowledge that was a universal possession and only needed to be grasped to nourish and cultivate innate ‘potential strength for growth that is still unimpaired’.

In the same text, moreover, she does see the changes in marriage in China as rather radical at the time, stating that women and men are simply choosing their own partners and that this can lead to problems with the family if taken to great extremes. One consequence, however, was the growth of the small family, the ‘modern family’ that is built upon the individual love of a man and a woman who had chosen one another.88 Here we can also see reverberations of her stories and of her own husband’s wishes for his ‘modern family’.

Thus Chen Hengzhe closes this particular text with the insight that Chinese women must be able to make wise choices when they select elements of the old and the new to develop their potential. This they need to do in order to avoid the moral, intellectual and social chaos that can ensue when the old meets the new.

It is well to consider the audiences for the texts so neatly put together above. On the one hand Chen was writing for a Chinese audience when she published her stories; on the other she was addressing a foreign audience. The booklet of her essays, which she had printed especially to give to those of her friends and acquaintances with whom she had, on occasion, discussed issues of Chinese women or the influences of foreign cultures and the like.89 Thus she was again a mediator for both Chinese and Western audiences. For the Chinese audience she was providing images of a kind of freedom that was anything but revolutionary, although Luoqisi’s decision was certainly radical. Like the bird in her poem, Chinese readers gained a picture of how they could free themselves from the cage of stifling tradition without throwing away the good parts of that tradition. They could flee the cage, the heteronomy of a past social regime, but flying free on the wind can demand much of you. That was the freedom she depicted for her Chinese readers. Freedom with a sting in its tail, but the slings and arrows of autonomy are presented as the ultimate joy, for instance, in her fable of the meeting of the free Yangzi River and the manmade Grand Canal, especially in the Yangzi’s

88 Ibid., 20–21.
89 See Chen’s preface to the collection in Chen 1934.
final and triumphant song of pain and struggle that lead to a self-determined existence:

Ah, the pain of the fight! Tendons crack and bones split;
Ah, the sorrow of the fight! The heart breaks and the lungs crack;
Ah, the joy of the fight! Overcoming resistance, repulsing shaming jibes, conquering doubt.
The consolation of pain, the pleasure of sorrow, to take the true meaning of life from volcanic flame!
Tears are bitter, blood is red, the battle of life goes to the marrow!
The battle of life goes to the marrow, life that issues from battle is beautiful!

There was a reality to Chen’s stories that would not allow wild dreams of endless freedom: her old couple may have remained bound to one another, but their love was not the exciting or thrilling love of youth; it remained bound to the humdrum chores of daily life and hardships and it called for a deeper commitment than that of sexual attraction. In fact none of the stories, most of which were placed in a foreign setting, glorified that setting or presented it as better. Yet they did present individuals either making their own choices and decisions in life or having those decisions forced upon them: Luoqisi decides not to marry but to pursue a career instead; the old couple had decided to marry and remained married despite their quarrels. There was no call to emulate the particular society in which these foreigners live; there was a depiction of the common problems of humanity.

Conclusion

In her fiction Chen Hengzhe had set out to give voice to those who could not or would not give voice to their own problems or situations. Nature certainly cannot and in the fables discussed she provides explanation, albeit in rather pathetic mode, of the universal cycles of nature. In her more realistic stories, here exemplified through ‘The Old Couple’ and ‘Luosiqi’s Problem’, she tackles the universal questions of love, relationships and life decisions and their concomitant responsibilities. All of her protagonists were sufferers of one kind or another and would be unlikely to write down

90 First published in 1924 in Dongfang zazhi (Eastern Miscellany), Vol. 21, No. 13, the text later became the preface to Chen’s autobiography.
their experiences. They are ordinary people who help her depict the realities of life anywhere in the world.

This assessment of Chen Hengzhe as a writer who wanted neither to emphasise nor detract from the positive or negative sides of cultures on either side of the East-West divide is underscored in her 1931 review of Pearl S. Buck’s recently published *The Good Earth*. In the review she states that there are three types of foreigner writing about China: those who see China as a heathen and uncivilised place and thus paint a negative picture; those who wish to counteract this image and thus go too far in the opposite direction. The third type is the realistic picture based on knowledge because China is neither a land of devils nor of angels; she is composed only of plain human beings, capable of laughter or tears, of love or hatred, just like any other human beings on the surface of the earth. This is the attitude that characterizes the present tendency in the writings upon the ever-fresh subject, China. It is the only sane and scientific attitude that may lead to a better understanding between nations.

The attitude she praises here is the kind of attitude that Chen herself was aiming at in her writing: a lack of national prejudice, an awareness of the commonality of human experience and a ‘sane and scientific attitude’ that will create an organic bridge between different geo-cultural areas. Unfortunately Pearl Buck did not share other characteristics with Chen, ones that Chen also emphasises in the review. To her mind, a writer must have experienced ‘an intimate association of minds and hearts such as could be obtained only from the free and frank comradeship of everyday life’. These are characteristics which Chen surely felt she had gained through her stay in the United States, and her stories are at pains to tell the reader that she is sincerely portraying events that she herself has experienced or witnessed. Buck, she feels, lacks this experience. Her long residence in China has not stopped her from remaining a ‘foreigner’ with little contact with the everyday life of normal Chinese: ‘she always keeps herself apart from the nation of which she writes, and never becomes a part of it.’ Thus Buck’s characters are types and not individuals. Yet she praises the writer for her ‘sincerity of purpose’ and her ‘genuine sympathy for the characters’. These are qualities that Chen

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91 Chen 1931, 914–915.
92 Ibid., 914.
herself had named as motivating forces for her own writing. Thus, in her review of Buck, we can see reflections of her personal attitude to writing.

As we have seen, Chen Hengzhe entered transformative space even before she left China in 1914 on a Boxer Indemnity scholarship. Her mind had long left the confines of the typical trajectory for elite Chinese women of the day. She envisaged a new path. This transformative space, as outlined above, is envisaged as the place of tension where different cultures interact and where new personal and national visions are conceived and cemented. On the one hand, this was a physical space, the space that Chen occupied both during and because of her six years of study in the United States and that constituted a location for comparison and inspiration. But it was also a productive mental space: like any individual setting out for a lengthy stay abroad, Chen took with her ideas and pre-conceptions both about where she came from and where she was going to. Her studies and her contacts in the United States modified these pre-conceptions and cemented them into a new view of the workings of the world and of China’s place in it. Chen Hengzhe, in a sense, was a migrant: she migrated to America and then back to China and this double migration had a profound effect upon her both intellectually and personally. On the topic of the migrant, Salman Rushdie has observed that ‘the migrant is not simply transformed by his act; he also transforms his new world. Migrants may well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge.’

Chen Hengzhe’s fiction and essays discussed here could be conceived as an attempt to ‘hybridize’ the views of her readers, but a better way of putting it could be simply that Chen was broadening horizons. She occupied a unique position as a transnational female individual and her experiences had not made her American or ‘foreign’ to China nor un-Chinese; they had made her something other, something located between the two and creatively combining aspects of both. From this position she tried to portray the world and its issues with the ‘sane and scientific attitude’ she advocated. It is perhaps the very ‘in-between-ness’ of Chen’s position that enabled her to avoid the ‘obsession with China’ to which C. T. Hsia objected many years ago. Moreover, the lack of this position for Chinese writers through much of the


94 The term has already been discussed in the Introduction to this volume. What many researchers seem to mean when they use it is something akin to adding even more components to the cocktail that comprises each and every life. This would also be an appropriate description of Chen Hengzhe’s writings.
20th century may also account for the continued ‘obsession’ and narrowness of subject matter. As Peter Damgaard’s contribution to the present volume shows, contemporary Chinese writers may again be seeking that space for transformation and debate.

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The Narrator in Transit: Writing Between Self and Others in Ma Yuan’s ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’

Peter Damgaard

Ma Yuan (b. 1953) was at the vanguard of the so-called ‘modernist’ fiction that emerged in China after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms materialised in the mid-1980s, and he has not uncommonly been singled out as the innovator of ‘formalist fiction’ in post-revolutionary China or ‘initiator’ (shizuoyongzhe 始作俑者) of Chinese ‘avant-garde fiction’ (xianfeng xiaoshuo 先锋小说). Literary critic Wu Liang commented in 1987 – in one of the emblematic statements that came to define criticism of Ma Yuan and other avant-garde writers at the time – that the purpose of Ma Yuan’s fiction was ‘not to narrate a . . . story, but to narrate a . . . story,’ thus indicating a precedence of form over content. Ma Yuan was also, however, one of the first independent Chinese travellers who went to Tibet after its opening in the early 1980s, after travel restrictions were lifted, and wrote about it. The majority of his works set on the Tibetan Plateau somehow fall between the type of experimental fiction that made his name and what appears like random travel sketches – not radically dissimilar to what Gao Xingjian (b. 1940) did in Soul Mountain (Lingshan 靈山) (1990). The element

1 The term ‘modernism’ (xiandai zhuyi 现代主义) had a variety of implications in China in the 1980s depending on social and disciplinary positioning. In political discourse, for instance, it was largely interchangeable with the concept of ‘spiritual pollution’ (jingshen wuran 精神污染), whereas to the alienated and disenfranchised artist it represented a set of powerful aesthetic principles that were fit to challenge the creed of realism (critical, revolutionary, socialist) that had dominated modern Chinese literature since its inception in the early 20th century, see Larson 1989.
2 E.g. Zhao 1995.
3 Hong 2007, 293. The phenomenon of Chinese avant-garde fiction in the 1980s was a somewhat loose definition, including a variety of writers, for example, Yu Hua (b. 1960) and Su Tong (b. 1963), whom in the 1990s moved on to realist fiction and both produced national bestsellers. For anthologies of Chinese avant-garde fiction in English translation, see for instance, The Lost Boat: Avant-garde Fiction from China 1993 ed. by Henry Zhao and China’s Avant-garde Fiction 1998 ed. by Jing Wang.
of travel and the writing about others and other places in Ma Yuan, however, has generally only received scant or ad hoc attention.

The ‘imperial eyes’ or ‘privileged visions’ that often guide conventional travel writing generally tell us more about the subjective conditions of the narrator – and indeed the social and discursive conditions that made that particular subjectivity and form of narration possible – than it does about the narrated object.\(^5\) Despite the fact that Ma Yuan’s Tibetan works are abundant with these ‘visions’, this aspect has generally been sidetracked, perhaps due to its dissimilarity from conventional travel writing: the ‘vision’ is rarely located within a single subjectivity (the ‘I’, the traveller) but is displaced instead at strategic moments and distributed among various more or less reliable narrators. This feature is particularly evident in his breakthrough work ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ (Gangdiside youhuo 冈底斯的诱惑) from 1985,\(^6\) although it appears in other forms in other works as well. ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ does, in fact, betray or represent a narrative vision that is inherited from a particular socio-cultural background, but it also rebels against this background by challenging the reader’s engagement with the translated other through a continuous disruption of the narrative point of view that accordingly obstructs the reader’s familiarisation with these privileged visions or ‘imperial eyes’.

A great deal of Ma Yuan’s fictional work, then, can be seen as taking as its theme the condition of ‘transit’ – both in the sense experienced by the traveller moving between cultures and territories, but also in the sense of a ‘narrative transit’, indicating movement between focalisers and visions that obstruct the apparent continuity of both travel and text. It will be argued that Ma’s ‘avant-gardism’ to a large extent rests upon the author as traveller and that the restless movement of the journey inscribes itself at the core of the text and generates a quite unique critique of the public and political narratives that usually determine discourses of cultural relativism. The narrative is in various ways suspended, or ‘in transit’, between established positions.

**The Political Potential**

The incorporation of Tibet into the People’s Republic of China is an issue fraught with contestation – depending on whether it is designated as a case

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5 E.g. Pratt 2008.

6 The work was originally published in *Shanghai Literature (Shanghai wenxue 上海文学)* 1985, No. 2.
of ‘liberation’ or ‘occupation’. Traditionally in the People’s Republic, Tibet has been infamous for its disgusting and dirty habits – a society that valued serfdom and barbarism rather than socialist and civilised values emanating from the Chinese state – but in the wake of the great ‘revaluation of values’ that occurred along with the ‘Reforms and Opening’ (gaige kaifang 改革开放) in 1978 it has gained an exotic appeal that, while not cancelling out its image as ‘backward’, has made it into one of the most desired tourist destinations among the emerging middle class in China. Tibet, however, continues to be a sensitive political issue, and the narratives that inform the discursive constitution of China and Tibet respectively or comparatively, have thus been subjected to heavy political meddling.

After the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the narrative of national homogeneity that had dominated previous decades was to some extent reinterpreted by Party ideologues and public opinion-makers in a new discourse predicated on ethnicity and territory rather than the overarching issue of ‘class’ that had prevailed in previous decades. The void left by the loss of revolutionary rhetoric gave rise to an apparently contradictory set of public narratives of cultural identity that, on the one hand, advocated the promotion of China as a multi-ethnic nation-state encompassing all the territorial claims made by the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and essentially rendering all the various minorities or ‘nationalities’ (shaoshu minzu 少数民族) defined during the ‘ethnic identification’7 project in the 1950s and living within the political boundaries of the PRC as Chinese.8 On the other hand, both state-sponsored and popular media were implicated in a seemingly deliberate exoticisation of the ethnic groups on the peripheries of cultural and territorial China as radically ‘other’ – presumably in order to establish the majority Han as relatively modern, progressive, and civilised.9

To date, studies of narratives of identity in China have largely been approached from an anthropological perspective with regard to minorities. They have illustrated how, in order to sustain a narrative of a modern national identity after the devaluation of the revolutionary rhetoric associated with

7 The ‘ethnic identification’ or ‘classification’ project (minzu shibie 民族识别) was initiated in 1954 in order to differentiate and consequently assimilate ethnic communities living in the PRC according to Stalinist criteria (common language, economic base, psychological make-up, territory, etc.) The project resulted in the identification of 54 ethnic minorities by 1957 and the current number of 55 by 1979, see Mullaney 2010.
8 Baranovitch 2010a.
the Mao administration, it was essential for the state to portray ethnic minorities living within the boundaries of the PRC as embracing the party-state’s civilising project, but also to accentuate the requirement for exactly this project. Dru Gladney in particular has emphasised that the representation of minorities in popular and state-sponsored media in the PRC throughout the 1980s as ‘ethnic others’ (exotic, colourful outfits, traditional practices) played straight into the hands of the State’s nationalist discourse insofar as it constructed the majority as homogeneous and modern and thus performed a critical function in ‘influencing and constructing contemporary Chinese society and identity’.10 This constructed homogeneity demands a stable subject position and a continuous reiteration of the discursive hierarchy between self and other.

Louisa Schein has called this mode of representation ‘internal orientalism’, a term intended to denote a set of practices that occur within China but bear a resemblance to the discursive structuring of the Oriental other described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. As Schein writes,

> By the twentieth century, China’s representation of internal others was implicated in a complex mimesis that both struggled with being the Orient to Europe’s modernity and in turn echoe Europe’s othering modalities in its own colonizing discourse. What we are engaged with here are the broad strokes of Said’s theoretical intervention – the placing of the conjunction between power and representation in the context of colonial relations of domination.11

The term ‘internal orientalism’, then, should not be understood as a parallel to the East–West orientalism described by Said: ‘It took place in an arena that was not spatially bifurcated and that was discursively cross-cut by imported modes of orientalist “knowledge” production, from western anthropology to Soviet ethnology to transnational advertising.’12 While China itself had served as the underprivileged other in Eurocentric discourse at least since the middle of the 19th century, a variety of politically engaged narratives throughout the 20th century – and particularly since the reforms in 1978, when the party-state experienced a surge in national self-confidence – had constructed their own ‘exotic others’.

10 Gladney 1994, 94.
11 Schein 2000, 106.
12 Ibid., 104.
At the same time as it was in the ‘collective interest’ to uphold the representational system that rendered the ethnic minorities ‘as less evolved branches of people who need[ed] the moral and political guidance of the “Han” in order to ascend on the scales of civilization’, this system of representation also offered a set of preconfigured narratives that were essentially blue-stamped by the political leadership but ironically worked well in the project of displacing exactly this idea of a collective ‘we’. The fact that this narrative frame was pretty much sanctioned by the Deng administration also allowed for a greater degree of movement within politically sensitive areas of cultural critique – such as the discursive constitution of the Tibetan other and the Han Chinese self, and the ‘cultural chasm’ between these two areas of the same state.

Accordingly, from the mid-1980s onward there was a growing production of and public interest in fiction about Tibet (as well as other ‘exotic’ minority areas and peoples) and notably authors who could claim some sort of ethnic affiliation with this imposing image of internal otherness. One of the better known among these writers, at least to an English-speaking public, is probably the ‘Chinese-Tibetan’ writer Alai (b. 1959) – a writer who managed with great success to inscribe his own ethno-cultural ‘hybridity’ into his works, and thus allowed for a destabilisation of the narrative point of view in the pursuit of cultural selfhood and ‘belonging’. Besides Ma Yuan, other Han Chinese travellers went to Tibet in the 1980s and wrote fiction or travelogue inspired by their experiences; Ma Jian (b. 1953) in particular gained notoriety in the PRC through the publication of ‘Liangchu ni de shetai huo kongkongdangdang’ – published in English as Stick Out Your Tongue in 2006 – in a 1987 issue of the nationally circulated literary journal People’s Literature (Renmin wenxue 人民文学). The work was, like many of Ma Yuan’s, structured around a journey to Tibet by a Han Chinese narrator, but was accused by the state censors of creating a vile and untrue image of Tibetan culture and ‘our Tibetan compatriots’, and all copies of the issue were accordingly withdrawn, the editor sacked, and the writer put on ice for future publication. Although Ma Jian was apparently already at loggerheads with the authorities, the case clearly illustrates the controversial nature of

13 Dikötter 1996, 598.
15 Alai’s parents are allegedly Hui and Tibetan, see Yue 2008, 550.
16 Choy 2008, Yue 2008 and Baranovitch 2010b.
the topic; and it is not always clear when and why deviation from the official doctrine is deemed intolerable or admissible by the state.

The Lure of the Land of Snow

Tibet appears to inform Ma Yuan’s works largely according to the state-sponsored discourse of difference and homogeneity laid out above; an ideal contrast – or ‘serviceable other’17 – both to Chinese culture and tradition as it has been handed down and reinterpreted by the Communist Party, but also to the alienated post-Maoist subject struggling with its own identity crisis in the face of a deteriorating ideological system.

A Han Chinese from Liaoning, Ma Yuan travelled to Tibet in 1982 and stayed until 1989; and his publications in fiction are almost all concentrated within this same time-span. He often employs the metaphor of ‘oxygen’ to express the socio-cultural chasm between Tibet and China, but he also sometimes draws on this metaphor to indicate a form of ‘creative oxygen’, from which he was cut off when he left the plateau – as for instance in this passage from a preface to a collection of short stories published in 2001:

At the time I was extremely privileged. To follow one’s heart’s desire and not stray from one’s path is the predicament of the age of seventy [according to the Analects, 4:2]; how, then, could it be that when I had merely passed thirty, my hand already followed my mind like shadow follows form. The ascent into the heavens had no small effect on me (shangtian daiwo bubo 上天待我不薄), it also allowed me to forget myself and to uncontrollably indulge my individual endowments. In fact Tibet is far too abundant, and accordingly gave me too many false impressions (cuo jue 错觉). I came to think that it was exclusively mine – my own private garden with inexhaustible resources.

When I had just entered Tibet for the first time, the overpowering impression was that of a lack of oxygen. But when I left Tibet, and as time

17 A ‘serviceable other’ is defined by Edward Sampson as ‘others constructed so as to be of service to the dominant group’s own needs, values, interests and point of view. [. . .] And so, if the self is to be rational, it is defined as such by virtue of considering all that is not-self (not-me) as lacking rational qualities. The female becomes the not-male; the “primitive” native, the non-European. Through this process, the other is made serviceable to the self, a creature constituted by the dominant self to represent what it is not, to be used and then discarded until it is needed once again’. Sampson 1993, 4–5.
gradually passed by, I experienced – how should I put it – also a lack of oxygen.\textsuperscript{18}

In an interview with \textit{New Century Weekly (Xin shiji zhoukan)} from 2006, he elaborated:

Had I not gone to Tibet, my works would probably have been completely different [. . .] Tibet made manifest my formally highly individualised tendencies, and what I wrote was henceforth enlivened and ignited. Tibet is an unusual place; it can provide you with imaginative power and a unique perspective and mindset. No place can compare to Tibet.\textsuperscript{19}

This creative relationship that Ma Yuan enjoys with Tibet was not unique to this writer: in the mid-1980s Lhasa became something of a hotspot for Chinese writers and artists disenfranchised with the crowds and political surveillance in the big cities, and in search of radical difference and spiritual stimuli. Although his motivation was somewhat unlike that of Ma Yuan, Ma Jian writes in a postscript to the English translation of \textit{Stick Out your Tongue}:

In 1985, after three years of running from the authorities in China, I finally headed for Tibet. At the time the Tibetan Plateau was the most distant and remote place that I could imagine. As my bus left the crowded plains of China and ascended to the clear heights of Tibet, I felt a sense of relief. I hoped that here at last I’d find a refuge from the soulless society that China had become. I wanted to \textit{escape into a different landscape and culture}.\textsuperscript{20} (my italics).

‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ is also a comment on this idea of Tibet as a spiritual and magical place, removed in both time and space from the rest of China. Exoticisation is also a form of discursive colonisation, but Ma Yuan appears to circumvent this by turning the narrative back on itself. The work has been characterised as ‘a milestone marking the rise of avant-garde fiction in China’,\textsuperscript{21} and stands as central in Ma Yuan’s oeuvre. The plot seems deliberately incoherent: one storyline breaks off and leads into another and

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{18} Ma Yuan 2001, 2.
\bibitem{19} Xu 2006, 90.
\bibitem{20} Ma Jian 2007, 82; trans. by Flora Drew.
\bibitem{21} Zhao 1995, 312.
\end{thebibliography}
is then resumed at a later point or abandoned altogether. Although the plot appears initially to proceed randomly along these different routes, it gradually becomes clear that they are loosely stitched together around two Han Chinese characters named Lu Gao and Yao Liang, who have also been ‘lured’ onto the Plateau by expectations of the extraordinary and exotic. Characters bearing these two names had already appeared in Ma Yuan’s debut work from 1982, ‘There is Another World by the Sea’ (Haibian ye you yige shijie 海边也有一个世界), and would reappear in several subsequent works. Although there is no reason to assume any continuity between these characters, they are nevertheless invariably Han Chinese settlers with shared past experiences; they generally seem to have spent quite some time in Tibet yet invariably speak no Tibetan.

Although intertwined in a labyrinthine plot structure, one can define at least four different ‘minor’ narratives in the work that are vaguely sustained by an authorial meta-narrative. One of these is a first-person narrative by a character known as the ‘old writer’ and is related in unmarked direct speech to Lu Gao and Yao Liang and mainly based on his personal experiences during his 30 years’ residence in Tibet (chapters 2 and 5). Another is a third-person omniscient voice relating the circumstances surrounding a trip made by Lu Gao and Yao Liang to a Tibetan sky burial (chapters 4, 8, and 10). It is, as such, the most conventional part of the work and showcases in a realistic tone the search for ‘radical alterity’ by Chinese tourism.

Probably the most interesting sections of the work are related in the second person and concern a hunter named Qiongbu 穷布 who lives in the Gangdisi Mountains (chapters 3, 6, and 7). The final storyline is the only one presented coherently (chapters 11–15), before two poems attributed to Lu Gao and Yao Liang respectively, and it appears to be a so-called ‘authentic story’ written by the character Lu Gao that is discussed elsewhere in text. In addition to this there is a compulsive urge for ‘self-exposure’ on the part of the ‘meta-narrator’, which appears as intrusions into the text such as: ‘Now I am going to tell a different story’, as well as sections that appear as unmediated addresses by the author to the reader or perhaps himself: ‘(Another note from the author: In a work of fiction this kind of elaborate

22 In Herbert J. Batt’s English translation of the work ‘Under the Spell of the Gangtise Mountains’ (Ma Yuan 2003), these fragmented parts have been rearranged so that they appear in cohesion as individual stories.

23 Ma Yuan 1997, 63.
display of emotion is very annoying, but since it has already been uttered, the
author himself is not inclined to remove it. This will not happen again.)

The ‘Other’ Frame

The epigraph to ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ quotes Swedish Nobel laureate
Selma Lagerlöf (1859–1940): ‘You are of course at liberty to believe it or
not, as ought to be the case with all true hunting stories.’ The passage
originally appears in Gösta Berling’s Saga from 1891, in a chapter about an
old one-eyed bear from Gurlita Cliff that troubles the local population and
is hunted down by the unattractive yet compassionate Anders Fuchs. It sets
the frame for what initially appears to be the main motif of ‘Lure of the
Gangdisi’ – bear hunting. In Lagerlöf’s original the sentence appears after
a long passage describing nature’s fundamental hostility to human settlers
on the peripheries, and how the wilds – the woods and mountains – are
inherently inhospitable to domesticated and civilised humans. In ‘Lure of
the Gangdisi’, however, it soon becomes clear that it is not a bear like the
one in Gösta Berlings Saga, but rather the ever-elusive ‘Wild Man’ (yeren 野
人) – or, as it is known around the Himalayas, the Snowman or Yeti.

The Himalayan Snowman, the narrator informs us at one point later in
the story, belongs to the ‘tales of the fantastic’, and although rumours of
it have spread to several parts of the world, ‘no reader believes in these
fantastic anecdotes’.

Traces of the Wildman have been discovered in several parts of the world,
and many countries have dispatched specialised scientific investigation
teams and spent large amounts of money on study, all without discovering
either a live or a dead Wildman; all that has been accomplished is a few
rumours and fragmented so-called ‘material evidence’.

In the spring of 1985 Gao Xingjian’s play Wild Man (Yeren) premiered at the
Beijing People’s Art Theatre and, as the title indicates, it made use of a similar

24 Ibid., 70.
25 In the English translation this quote is mistakenly attributed to Lagerkvist. Ma Yuan
2003, 169.
26 Ma Yuan 1997, 55 and Lagerlöf 1910, 143.
27 Ma Yuan 1997, 78.
28 Ibid.
frame for addressing conflicts between nature and civilisation. In Gao’s text, as in Ma Yuan’s, ever-changing modernity is defined against the continuity of tradition as the scientific verifiability of concrete facts – the so-called ‘material evidence’. In Gao’s play an ecologist is sent to a remote region along the Yangzi River to work for forest preservation but is immediately caught up in the local craze for the Wild Man. Eventually he is joined by Wild Man ‘experts’ and ‘investigation teams’ although without ever finding any factual evidence. At the end of the play, however, the Wild Man is seen playing around with a child, thus indicating that the ‘existence’ of such a creature, although belonging to ‘tales of the fantastic’, is able to materialise in the ‘unspoiled’ imagination of a child. The link between the child and the Wild Man is not accidental; both are ‘other’ to scientific reason, and the trope of the Wild Man functions also in ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ as an exaggerated analogy to the hierarchical relationship between the Tibetans and the Han as envisioned from within the confines of cultural chauvinism.

The initial theme in ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ is thus framed as a clash between civilisation and spirituality, the progressive and backward, that in popular wisdom supposedly constitutes the basic difference between China and Tibet in the PRC. The character known only as the old writer addresses this in specific terms in chapters 2 and 5. Based on a proposed expedition to the Wild Man, these chapters, in first-person unmarked direct speech, are those that most obviously resemble the discourse found in contemporary cosmopolitan travel writing.29 The old writer’s categories of analysis are largely informed by the idea of the ‘civilising project’ advocated by the Communist Party, but his long sojourn on the Tibetan plateau seems to have cooled his enthusiasm for revolutionary rhetoric and turned him into something of a ‘cosmopolitan traveller’.

Writing and travelling at more or less the same time as Ma Yuan, Paul Theroux, for example, would describe the Tibetan capacity for resistance against the intrusion of Chinese settlers as follows:

The whole of Buddhism prepared the Tibetans for cycles of destruction and rebirth: it is a religion that brilliantly teaches continuity. You can easily see

29 Debbie Lisle defines a ‘cosmopolitan vision’ in contemporary travel writing that does not necessarily cancel out the traditional ‘colonial’ vision. Lisle writes that: ‘Romanticising the other is the flip side to colonial judgements: instead of reading the ignorance of others negatively, better to read it as an expression of ancient wisdom that has been lost in the modern world. In this case, others should be valued because they are closer to the mysteries of nature, spirituality and the universe’. Lisle 2006, 85.
the violence of the Chinese intention in Lhasa; but it was a failure because the Tibetans are indestructible.\textsuperscript{30}

The same discourse of indestructibility and continuity is taken up by the old writer, the main difference from Theroux being that, after some 30 years on the plateau, he still cannot completely disown his ‘roots’ on the central plains: ‘At the same time as my 1.8 million [Tibetan] compatriots entered socialism, at the same time as they entered science and civilisation, they still, in their idiosyncratic fashion, continued to live in their own mythological world (\textit{shenhua shijie 神话世界}).\textsuperscript{31} And further:

Not only do they [the Tibetans] live their life entirely in a mythological age (\textit{shenhua shidai 神话时代}), but their daily lives are also inseparable from myth and legend (\textit{shenhua chuanqi 神话传奇}). Myth is not an ornament of their life, but is their life in itself; it is the rationale and foundation of their existence.\textsuperscript{32}

While both Theroux and the old writer are clearly sympathetic to the Tibetans, they also deny them the capacity for change. Tibet appears locked within an ancient religious practice that not only prevents outsiders from penetrating ‘their’ world, but also apparently bars the Tibetans from entering ‘modern’ society.

While Theroux appears relatively secure in his ethnocentric ‘vision’, the old writer is conscious of his own perceptive limitations. He is invariably an outsider: ‘Although I am able to speak Tibetan, capable of drinking butter tea, scooping tsamba, and drinking barley wine with my Tibetan compatriots, and even though my skin has been tanned so that it is dark-red like theirs, I am still not a local.’\textsuperscript{33} He wants to understand them; wants to ‘walk into that world of theirs’,\textsuperscript{34} but cannot enter. Despite intimate knowledge of society, culture, and custom, the cultural space rejects him: ‘because I cannot understand life the same way that they do’ (my italics).\textsuperscript{35}

I am only able to use rationalism and goddamned logical measures to form my conclusions; us and them – the people here – even at the highest level

\textsuperscript{30} Theroux 1988, 437.
\textsuperscript{31} Ma Yuan 1997, 70.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 69.
of integration it amounts to no more than this. Nonetheless we consider ourselves intelligent and civilised, and consider them stupid and primitive and in need of our help and guidance.\textsuperscript{36}

On the one hand, then, the old writer is in opposition to the public and official narrative in the PRC insofar as he questions the rhetoric of progress and liberation – the civilising project; on the other hand, however, he is implicated by his very narrative in the construction and exoticisation of the ‘authentic’ other. While seemingly celebrating the other, the old writer is also implicated in the production of new forms of power by ‘translating’ the exoticised other from a privileged position.

**Tibet as Fiction**

The old writer goes on to vent his frustration on the tourism industry and explains that, when visitors arrive in Tibet for the first time, they marvel at the colourful way of life and ritual practice that abounds on the plateau and find everything ‘fresh’ (novel; strange: \textit{xinxian} 新鲜); but in fact nothing is ‘fresh’ – it has been the same way for thousands of years. The reason outsiders find it thus is because

Life here is completely different from their own; in this place they meet those already too distant memories of fairytales they heard when they were children. It is impossible for them to grasp, and consequently they find it intriguing – as if it were an imitation of an ancient castle in Disneyland.\textsuperscript{37}

The old writer compares the average east-coast Chinese tourist’s impression of Tibet with the one they would experience in a replica Tang-dynasty city in Xi’an; what these ‘outsiders’ – or, like Lu Gao and Yao Lang, the newly arrived – fail to grasp, however, appears to be the fact that, in the case of Xi’an, history is forced upon a contemporary condition: even though people wear Tang-style garments and live in Tang-style houses they continue to be modern people. In other words, what is implied by the old writer is that in the case of Xi’an signifier and signified are separated by the gulf of history (the past and the present do not share the same ontological basis); to Tibetans, however, this gulf is absent – the past, as he argued, is already

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{37} Ma Yuan 1997, 68–69.
part of the present. While Chinese narratives of centralisation throughout
the 20th century, with peaks during the May Fourth movement (1919) and
Cultural Revolution, we are led to understand, have repeatedly tried to sever
metaphysical links to the past, Tibetan culture has managed to keep a sense
of continuity despite accelerated modernisation.

The two relatively recent émigrés, Lu Gao and Yao Liang, venture on
two occasions into the hinterland of Tibet in search of their own private
Disneyland – one in order to witness the Tibetan sky burial, and the other, as
mentioned, in search of the Himalayan Snowman. On neither occasion do
they achieve their objective; nonetheless we are informed on two occasions
that after this latter ‘futile’ expedition they both wrote books based on their
experiences and that Lu Gao furthermore composed ‘an authentic story
about a lyrical performer (shuo-chang yiren 说唱艺人).’

The Tibetan sky burial is a radical manifestation of otherness. It involves
the dismemberment and partition of the corpse and its subsequent feeding
to eagles and vultures. The birds devour all remnants of the deceased.
The practice was banned in the PRC in the 1960s, but became tolerated again
during the early 1980s. While being essentially off limits to outsiders, the
quite grotesque spectacle of the ritual has become a somewhat absurd target
for tourism.

The ceremony is initially related through a series of photographs scruti
nised by Lu Gao on a previous occasion:

The dead person is taken to the sky burial platform by relatives. Before
dawn the Burial Master cuts the body into pieces (including the bones);
afterwards he ignites the bone oil to attract the eagles. As the first rays
of dawn illuminate the mountain ridge, the deceased has already been
carried to heaven by the divine eagles (shenying 神鹰). This is a solemn rite
of rebirth, a staunch faith in the future; it is a celebration of life.

The Tibetan sky burial is a recurring motif in several critical works of fiction,
film and poetry in the mid-1980s, and it is clearly a symbol of the absolute

38 Ibid., 83–84, 89.
39 In Tibetan Buddhism the spirit enters the cycle of rebirth at the moment the body dies,
and the corpse is consequently nothing but an empty casing. The idea of feeding the body to
the birds of prey is thus both practical and economical due to the scarcity of firewood on the
plateau and the fact that the soil is not suited for digging graves; at the same time it provides
food for living beings.
40 Ma Yuan 1997, 65.
margins of Chinese cultural influence. Several other Chinese writers have used the Tibetan sky burial in some way or other in, or as a pretext to their works.\textsuperscript{41} Ma Jian’s \textit{Stick Out Your Tongue}, for instance, provides an almost identical imagery:

The Burial Master hacks all the flesh from the corpse and slices it into small pieces. He grinds the bones into a fine powder and adds some water to form a paste (if the bones are young and soft, he will thicken it with ground barley). He then feeds this paste, together with the flesh, to the surrounding hawks and vultures [. . .] When everything has been eaten, the master presents the scalp to the relatives, and the burial is considered to be complete.\textsuperscript{42}

The 1986 film \textit{Horse Thief} (\textit{Daoma zei} 盗码贼) by Tian Zhuangzhuang (b. 1952) also opened and ended with long shots of the Tibetan sky burial. Dru Gladney has remarked that these radical measures for establishing cultural alterity, as exemplified by Tian Zhuangzhuang, are designed to dig a vast trench between the majority self, the most likely consumer of the work, and the exoticised minority other: ‘His [Tian’s] purpose is that of alterity: by contrasting naturalized, primitive, and even barbaric minority life with the viewer’s domesticated, modern, and civilized existences, Tian calls into question the very basis of that contrast’.\textsuperscript{43}

In ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ Lu Gao vomits for two consecutive days after viewing the photos of the sky burial proceedings for the first time; the gore of the act of dismemberment and the abundance of intestines and body parts is a spectacle that not only constitutes a practice quite different from traditional Han Chinese funeral rites; it also conjures up vivid associations to violence or medieval capital punishment.\textsuperscript{44} The associations to violence

\textsuperscript{41} These range from Misty poet Yang Lian (b. 1955) to pro-Tibet activist Wang Lixiong (b. 1953) to exile feminist Xue Xinran (b. 1958).
\textsuperscript{43} Gladney 2004, 93.
\textsuperscript{44} While the practice of the sky burial as a \textit{funeral rite} poses a distinct contrast to Han Chinese funeral tradition, its outward appearance is in fact not a far cry from ancient Chinese practices of penal mutilation; practices where the human body, according to the severity of the crime committed, was disfigured or dismembered to an extent virtually leading to the destruction of the human form. In addition to the element of torture, the practice was also intended to render the perpetrator unrecognisable even as a ghost in the afterlife, thus in effect damming the soul to eternal torment. A rather straightforward method would be beheading, but more ingenious tactics, such as ‘death by a thousand cuts’ (\textit{lingchi} 凌迟, \textit{qiandaowangua} 千
in the representation of the sky burial, however, are displaced and made part of the naturalised make-up of the exotic other; the actual implications of the event for the people involved, however, are not necessarily transferred to the external spectator. Soon after Lu Gao’s sickness subsides, for instance, he begins to imagine his own bodily remnants being disposed of in a similar fashion; although nauseating as a mere visual spectacle, its symbolic significance appeals to him: ‘It is not that he believes in the legends (chuanshuo 传说) of ascent into the heavens, it is rather that he enjoys this kind of magnificent imagery (xiangxiang 想像); this ceremony of abundant imagery leaves him captivated’.45 Lu’s vision represents the commoditisation of the exotic as well as the emerging ‘ethno-tourism’ available to Chinese urban residents after travel restrictions were loosened and general mobility encouraged during the Reforms and Opening. It is not a funeral but rather the ‘Disneyland’ outlined by the old writer.

Lu Gao is attracted to a local girl who is accidentally killed in a traffic accident in the week leading up to the date set by the Chinese ‘explorers’ for their trip to the burial site, and speculation ensues as to whether she might in fact be the corpse hidden in the hemp sack awaiting dismemberment by the Burial Master. Lu Gao’s object of desire is brought together with his secret fantasy, the ‘magnificent imagery’ of the sky burial. The girl is to him a ‘symbol’, which ‘just like flowers, eagles, the ocean, and snow-clad mountains represents something spiritual’ – it makes one ‘experience the value and meaning of life’.46

In Ma Jian’s far more controversial work Stick Out Your Tongue it is also a young, beautiful and sexually open girl who is buried (formally married to a pair of brothers). The first-person narrator is obsessed with the sky burial ceremony; several times already he has tried to witness a burial, but has failed in each attempt: ‘it would either be finished by the time I’d arrived, or relatives of the deceased would spot me from afar and tell me to stay away. Sometimes they even threw stones at me’.47 When Ma Jian’s narrator eventually gains access to the ceremony, however, he proceeds to eroticise the naked corpse of the girl: ‘She looked as though she was asleep. I...
my camera down her body. Soft arms, palms upturned to the sky, a red mole under her breast, smooth thighs.’48 Ma Yuan’s narrator, too, eroticises the ritualistic practice of dismemberment, although not quite to the point of necrophilia. Even though the ‘explorers’ never get close enough to the action to assert the actual identity of the corpse, the miniscule possibility of it being the girl of his dreams excites Lu Gao immensely. The distance between the observer and observed is vast, and the sky burial fulfils its double purpose of ‘uncivilised’ feudalistic practice and exotic tourist site – both, however, misrepresentations of its actual function of burial.

Lu Gao and Yao Liang are finally not allowed to approach the sky burial ceremony. At first their jeep is denied access by a Tibetan demanding an ‘introduction letter from the Autonomous Region’s public security bureau.’ When Lu Gao pleads ignorance of any such letter, the other violently turns them away. ‘Suddenly Lu Gao understood: they did not want people to watch, and they especially did not want outsiders to watch.’49 Lu Gao nonetheless fails to reflect further on the question as to whether anyone, in any culture, would appreciate the presence of tour groups at the funeral of their relatives. Tibetan culture and tradition are available for consumption, not interpretation, by the Chinese tourist in the 1980s, and Ma Yuan’s text emerges as a stern reproach to the Disneylandesque nature that the old writer attributes to Chinese tourism. The narrator even expresses a slight disappointment with the show: ‘The sky burial platform was not as they had envisioned, protruding on the top of a mountain; it was merely a big rock platform half way up the mountain.’50

Just before their disappointed departure, Yao Liang manages to reflect on the solemnity of the ritual; and while never really approaching any comprehension of its implications – since this was probably never his intention in the first place – he seems to be able to draw a kind of parallel to a context with which he is familiar: ‘This made Yao Liang think of the time one went to the graveyard; at such times even those usually very talkative women would keep quiet of their own accord.’51 This had not only to do with respect for the deceased or the ritual in itself:

If one, for instance, supposes that there ought to be a boundary between life and death, that boundary is usually too diffuse in people’s minds; however at

48 Ibid., 102, 116.
49 Ma Yuan 1997, 84.
50 Ibid., 85.
51 Ibid.
times like these it becomes manifest. Certainly, when people come to a place like this, they clearly perceive this boundary. It might be called having one foot inside the door and one foot outside the door – straddling the boundary.\textsuperscript{52}

This ‘boundary’, however, is not only a boundary between life and death, but could, in this case, also be extended to the perceived boundaries between civilisation and nature, the modern and the primitive, the reality and fictionality that circumscribe Chinese and Tibetan cultures.

### The Rational Savage

The second attempt by Lu Gao and Yao Liang to ‘straddle the boundary’ is their expedition to the Wild Man with the old writer. In order to encounter this trope of the mystic and exotic – associated with the absolute margins of human civilisation – the three Chinese ‘explorers’ need to employ a guide. For this purpose the old writer chooses his friend of many years, the Tibetan hunter Qiongbu – the ‘son of the mountain’.

Qiongbu features as the main character in chapters 3, 6, and 7, relating some biographical information as well as the proceedings leading up to his first encounter with the Himalayan Snowman. These sections employ the second-person pronoun in the narration of the Tibetan hunter, sometimes in the purely objectifying narrative of a Chinese ethnographic observer and at others making the narrative appear ‘subjectified’ – narrating the psychological processes of the hunter, sometimes in a language made to represent the subjective reasoning of a bear hunter from the Gangdisi Mountains and at other times utilising a decidedly ‘scientific’ discourse to explain Qiongbu’s motives. These sections showcase an attempt – or rather a highly stylised \textit{flawed} attempt – to speak ‘on behalf’ of the objectified other. The hunter is put on display for the Chinese spectator in the same way as the sky burial – his subjectivity is, in effect, commoditised.

The narrative in these chapters constantly ‘slips out of character’ and exposes, on the one hand, a fractured narrative subjectivity – the ‘narrator in transit’ – and on the other, the instability of objectifying representation of the minority other within the referential framework available in the mid-1980s. The use of the second-person pronoun furthermore exaggerates the power relations and hierarchy of representation; it is clear that the owner

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 85–86.
of discourse is the majority subject, and the exotic object is, by virtue of its
established otherness, made incapable of self-narration and must ‘speak’ in
the registers of the dominating subject.

Qiongbu is from a lineage of famous hunters; he is at home in the
untamed wilderness and enjoys a relationship of mutual respect with the
animals in the mountains (a fact that makes him closer to animals than so-
called civilised man): he only hunts the large predators and never touches the
smaller animals. This representation is more or less in tune with the public
narrative that renders Tibetan males potent and sturdy, but also valiant and
noble – a ‘macho minority’.53 ‘You often encounter wild rabbits between
the two mountain streams’, the narrator observes, ‘but your rifle is always
left reclining over your shoulder; you only knowingly blow a whistle in
their direction’.54 This part, as others, reproduced the mode of speech of
the ethnographic observer, keen on having Qiongbu appear as a righteous
hunter – the noble savage – with ideals rooted in nature: ‘Of course you do
not revel in the splendour of the highlands, you are a hunter of the Gangdisi
Mountains – you are a son of the mountain’.55 Even the possibility of a fast
profit on musk does not motivate him to even consider breaking his pact
with nature: ‘It is not that you do not know that musk is very valuable, that
it can be sold for a lot of money and exchanged for a lot of bullets; but how
can it be that, when you watch that beautiful male river dear walk timidly
close by you, you do not even touch your rifle?’56 We are told that it is only
the large predators that are of interest to Qiongbu: the brown bear, the snow
leopard, and the lynx.

The representation of Qiongbu’s internal reasoning (that which ‘you’
know) is filtered through a domesticating vision that silences the constructed
other. In this instance the Tibetan hunter is able to conceive of musk’s value
only in terms of money’s exchangeability for bullets – a currency presumably
intelligible to ‘a son of the mountain’. At other times, however, Qiongbu’s
internal reasoning is represented as adhering to the laws of science: ‘The
mountain slope ascends directly upwards, it appears as if the snow-covered
mountain top is not at all very tall, as if it were just opposite and not very far
away. But you know that this is merely due to the fact that the air is so thin

54 Ma Yuan 1997, 59.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
in this place and visibility accordingly extraordinarily good.\textsuperscript{57} The thin air would, of course, have no implication to a ‘son of the mountain’; he would naturally be unaware of the fact that the air here is about 60 per cent of that in Beijing and that visibility accordingly would be better than in a polluted metropolis in the lowlands.

This kind of ‘slip’ inscribes ambivalence in the representational code, which is taken further still when the narrator slides into a decisively literary discourse. It seems that the narrator is not really interested in the other as an object of representation, but rather in the act of representation itself:

I am not going to tell the story of you hunting the bear; there are so many great writers that have told stories of bear hunting before. The American writer Faulkner, the Swedish writer Lagerlöf; there is also a Japanese movie about an old man who writes about hunting bears. But all the people in your village and in the neighbouring village cannot forget the way you subdued that mountain king that spread fear in the vicinity of a hundred li\textsuperscript{58}. That was the most glorious moment of your life. You saved that bear skin for yourself, it covers one of the walls in your small stone cottage completely. You cannot forget that it beat your two companions into bloody pulp; you cannot forget the exhaustion and restraint of the twenty days of pursuit and attack. I said I was not going to tell the story of you hunting the bear.

In the first part of this paragraph the narrator exposes him- or herself as a writer of fiction, and one that is furthermore concerned with the originality of the work that he or she is producing. The narrative is still relating Qiongbu’s story, but it is momentarily indecisive as to whether or not to proceed along the line of his hunting story. It then slips back into the descriptive mode, only to proceed to speak on behalf of the object of representation – relating that which ‘you cannot forget’ – until the point where the narrator seems to realise that, despite his/her intentions, he/she did in fact proceed along the line of the hunting story after all. It is clear that this indecisiveness in the narrative voice is intended to highlight its artificiality and thus form an assault on the security of objectifying representation: while being seemingly in tune with the public and political narratives that render the Tibetan hunter a ‘macho minority’ in order to constitute the majority self as normative and

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 60.
civilised, the continuous slips in the narrative vision turn the narrative back on itself and highlight the inherent flaws in this type of cultural relativism.

Qiongbu is subsequently confronted by a series of seemingly contradictory accounts offered by a group of frightened herdsmen regarding a tall thin bear with long fingers that moves with immense speed on its hind legs and possesses extraordinary physical strength. It has been seen tearing a yak’s head in two with its bare hands and, on one occasion, snatched the rifle from a petrified herdsman and snapped it like a dry twig. Qiongbu is not convinced by these accounts; naturally there could be no such bear. Everyone knows that the bear’s paws are not suited for ‘grabbing’ things, and although it can stand on its hind legs, it certainly does not run in this posture. However, eventually the accounts spark his interest and he accepts the responsibility of confronting the mystical bear-like creature.

As he sits alone in the disquieting stillness and awaits the bear, he is made to rationalise the creature on the basis of his presumed knowledge of the woods and mountains. Five witnesses have given similar accounts of the bear, yet none of them have suffered any injuries. Besides breaking a rifle, the creature also broke a large stick carried by the herder on another occasion. He asks himself whether it knows that these instruments might hurt it. And if that is the case, how come it did not avenge itself on the carriers of these instruments?

You begin to realise that this is not a bear. But if it is not a bear, then what else could it be? Of the large predators in this place, besides the bear there is only the tiger; but the tiger is only to be found in the woods at the southeastern foot of the Gangdisi mountain range. If, according to their accounts, it could not be a bear, then it is even more unlikely that it is a tiger.59

Qiongbu resolves to stop speculating and instead ‘seek truth from facts’: ‘forget about it; I will just have to see it for myself – only then I will know what it is.’60 This sudden display of rational interpretation by the exoticised hunter destabilises the ‘credibility’ of the representation of the ‘macho minority’. Qiongbu continues to rationalise:

It does not want to make an enemy of man. This is obvious. But then why does it attack livestock on which humans depend for their existence? There

59 Ma Yuan 1997, 75.
60 Ibid.
can only be one explanation: it has no ability to comprehend the necessity of livestock for humans. You do not understand the principles of the food chain, but you know that only humans possess pasturelands, possess oxen and sheep. You also know that it does not understand these things. It attacks livestock and wild beasts all the same; it is all to support its own existence. It cannot differentiate between wild beasts and livestock, and it does not know that because of this it becomes the enemy of humans. It does not want to be the enemy of humans; in other words, it has unintentionally caused damage to humans.\(^6^1\)

The objectifying narrative no longer ‘securely’ subordinates the exoticised other since Qiongbu essentially displays the same rhetorical abilities as the subordinator. Whether he is represented as savage or rational, the whole representational system employed by the narrative is already invalidated by the continuous ‘slippage’ of codes. The first two sentences in the above quotation might represent the subjective psychology of Qiongbu: it is a voice that rationalises the bear-like creature within the supposedly epistemic territory of a Tibetan hunter and concludes, ‘It has no ability to comprehend the necessity of livestock for humans’. Directly after this the narrator is decisively outside the psychology of the ‘son of the mountain’, and objectifies the hunter with a scientific vision that concludes that ‘you do not understand the principles of the food chain’ – a knowledge that the narrator certainly is in possession of, and one that is able to rationalise Qiongbu as an object of observation parallel to Qiongbu’s own rationalisation of the bear-creature.

While the old writer’s narrative initially appeared as an at least plausible representation of the experience of a Chinese subject in an entirely alien cultural setting, the narrative of Qiongbu displaces the security of narrative integrity; one is no longer ‘convinced’ by the neat circumscription of cultural identities drawn up in the previous section. Through this de-familiarisation of subjectivities the narrative not only exposes the fictionality of the text but also the fictionality of discrete ‘cultural identities’: ‘This time it is you who are right; you are a son of a proud hunter, you are a bear hunter, but most importantly you are human; once again your intellect has made you the stronger.’\(^6^2\) Qiongbu eventually faces the creature, and indeed it resembles the herdsmen’s description. It is definitely not a bear, and in its eyes Qiongbu

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\(^6^1\) Ibid., 76–77.

\(^6^2\) Ibid., 77.
sees the gaze of a human being. He lets it slip away and informs the old writer. Rather than subduing the creature with the physical endowments inscribed in his character, he defeats the Wild Man with his intellect.

**The Double Frame**

The final coherent prose section of the work (before the two poems) is supposedly, although not necessarily, Lu Gao’s ‘authentic story about a lyrical performer’, alluded to on two previous occasions in the text. It takes place in the area around the Gangdisi Mountains where the ‘exploration party’ set up base camp in their search for the Himalayan Snowman and the home of Qiongbu. The presumed narrator of the piece initiates by alluding to a work of Tibetan drama based on an old legend involving the brothers Dunzhu and Dunyue – the historical Tibetan play, *Chungpo Dhonyoe Dhondup* (*Dunyue Dunzhu xiongdi* 頓月頓珠兄弟). In Lu Gao’s story the two main characters bear the same names: ‘I do not know whether ordinary people can also be reincarnated, but this pair of twins is in fact also named Dunzhu and Dunyue.’

In the present story Dunyue is the lively one and recites lyrical poetry; he is originally a shepherd like his brother but dreams of abandoning this occupation: ‘I want to go out and have a look around, go to the interior (neidi 内地) and tour various places; to Chengdu, to Xi’an, to Beijing and Shanghai – I also want to see the ocean.’ Eventually, after he has fulfilled this thirst for adventure, he would like to come back to the village and marry the local girl Nimu. His twin brother Dunzhu, on the other hand, has no desires outside the daily routines of collecting yak dung and herding sheep. He is clumsy and ignorant and not capable of imagining anything outside the apathetic stasis of tradition and routine around the local community.

Dunyue pursues his dream and leaves to join the army – where he soon dies in the line of duty (although this remains unknown to the rest of the characters and initially also to the reader). Nine months later Nimu gives birth to their child, the outcome of a single night’s fleeting embrace. Dunzhu and Dunyue’s father was allegedly a vagrant blacksmith who had also only dwelt in their mother’s tent for one night. The fact that both these generations of women can be considered ‘loose’ (or paying less heed to

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63 Ma Yuan 1997, 91.
64 Ibid., 92–93.
the normative conduct of family organisation in the invented traditions of 'central' China), while essentially managing households by themselves without the interference of males, situates them in opposition to the majority 'Chinese' not only in terms of morality but also in terms of temporality. Their representation as 'promiscuous' minority women acting as heads of families ideally evokes a century-old disciplinary narrative of 'primitive promiscuity' and 'matrilineal society' – concepts denoting early stages of social evolution (predating a 'partilineal' and eventually a 'class' society) in the theoretical framework developed by Lewis H. Morgan (1818–1895) a hundred years earlier. Morgan's theoretical framework, however, was still prevalent in China in the 1980s primarily due to its general misconception as Marxist. Tong Enzheng (1989) has shown that the evolutionary approach to the study of primitive societies that Morgan developed in his 1877 book Ancient Society: or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization – which to some extent informed Friedrich Engels' (1820–1895) classic The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State from 1884 – had been a cornerstone in ethnological research in China since long before Liberation. Morgan's evolutionary approach allowed for a 'historical comparison' between contemporary primitive tribal systems and ancient forms of social organisation; thus facilitating an analysis of the ethnic minorities in the PRC (the Tibetans) as 'representations of earlier forms of society' or, indeed, 'living fossils'.

Throughout the work the mystic appeal of Tibet is constantly linked to this idea of temporal displacement – a distant 'mythological world', far from modern socialist civilisation; and even though 'civilising' values from the political centre relentlessly penetrate this world, it follows its ancient ways unobstructed.

This 'mythological world' is further underscored in Lu Gao's story by an emphasis on the claim made earlier by the old writer, that 'myth is a part of their existence'. In the story Dunzhu experiences a series of strange events: 'It is said that Dunzhu and his sheep herd once disappeared for a month; it is said that it was after this that Dunzhu became a lyrical performer (shuo-chang yiren) and started reciting the Epic of King Gesar (Gesa’er Wangchuan格萨尔王传) to the locals'.

65 Gladney 1994, 100.
66 Tong 1989, 185.
67 Ma Yuan 1997, 96. The Epic of King Gesar is an ancient lyrical epic with origins in and around present-day Tibet (although these cannot be firmly established) and is supposed to have taken shape through oral traditions around the 7th to 9th century, and spread throughout
traditional storyteller, offers two possibilities to the mysterious and sudden acquisition of superior literary skills by the illiterate Dunzhu: one is that he accidentally had ventured into a ‘divine territory’ (shendi 神地) after which he ‘fell asleep on a large flat rock (this detail is important, please take note)’; after he awoke he went to have a drink of water and suddenly felt an irresistible urge to sing The Epic of King Gesar. He considered the reciting of this epic the most natural thing in the world – as natural as breathing. This, the narrator insists, is the most popular version of the events, and it corresponds to a local myth on the plateau to the effect that the singers of The Epic of King Gesar do not acquire their skill through lengthy study and memorisation, but rather through a case of ‘divine intervention’. The other version proposes that his talents were inherited from his father, who was allegedly also a ‘lyrical performer’ (in addition to a blacksmith); however, this interpretation ‘smacks a bit of modern science’ and ‘genetic engineering’, and is dismissed by the narrator as ‘transcendental philosophy’. The narrator concludes:

It can thus be seen that the majority of people prefer to believe in myth. Although there might be more idealistic (weixin 唯心) and spiritualistic (weiling 唯灵) elements in the myth, it is beautiful; obviously legends of this kind are not suited for the interference from too many rational elements (weili chengfen 唯理成分).

If the exoticised Tibetan other is too infused with these ‘rational elements’ he or she would, like Qiongbu, no longer be properly ‘other’ to either the stand-in narrator Lu Gao nor the intended receiver of both Lu Gao’s and Ma Yuan’s stories located, ideally, at the cultural centre on the Chinese east coast.

central Asia after the 10th century. There exists no definitive versions of the legend, and it has presumably never been recorded in its entirety due to the fact that it is continuously and cumulatively expanding as well as varying considerably across different narrative traditions; however, it is supposedly the longest single literary narrative in the world and could be made to resemble a sort of Tibetan creation myth. The epic is continuously added to by minor narratives from different perspectives, but this essentially does not make it complete; it remains open-ended, and in this sense parallels ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ itself. On the nature and significance of this epic, see, for instance, Samuel 2002.

68 Ma Yuan 1997, 97.
69 Ibid., 98.
70 Ibid.
It was Dunyue who originally loved song and poetry; Dunzhu was illiterate, but now, it seemed, he had somehow been blessed with the natural endowment of his brother (who in the meantime had lost his life in the army). Nimu discovers that her child resembles Dunzhu rather than its father: ‘Clumsy, somewhat slow reactions, and with a distinctive facial outline; Dunyue was certainly not like this.’ The locals love listening to Dunzhu reciting those ‘ancient, intimate, and stirring stories’; and the story about how Dunzhu came to sing The Epic of King Gesar ‘naturally became an organic part of the life that these Tibetan herdsmen had lived since ancient times.’

Eventually, however, the attempt by the stand-in narrator to represent the minority other perishes, and he pleads inability to fully structure the events he is relating, ‘because the outcome greatly surpasses my anticipations; I especially do not know what ethical or moral criteria to use to evaluate this outcome.’ He finally has to step all the way out of the narrative’s initial claim to verisimilitude and present a sort of pseudoscientific metanarrative explanation to the incoherencies within the story: ‘The story has now more or less been told, but evidently some readers will point out a series of technical (jishu yiji jiqiao 技术以及技巧) problems; let us consider these for a moment.’ He then proceeds to list certain issues he perceives of as relating to the structure and continuity of the story. Eventually the story of Dunyue and Dunzhu reaches a similar ambiguous conclusion as the preceding storylines and is ultimately left hanging unresolved despite the narrator’s ‘effort’ to make it otherwise.

71 Ibid., 101. In the historical Tibetan play Chungpo Dhonyoe Dhondup that, as mentioned earlier, is initially used as a pretext to Lu Gao’s story, a strong emotional bond also exists between the two brothers (sons of King Topyvylha and different mothers). Dhondup (Dunzhu) is banished into the wilderness after his stepmother convinces the king that he is possessed by a demon; Dhonyo (Dunyue), however, follows his half-brother into banishment (Ross 1995, 50–58). Dunyue also dies in this story, but is brought back to life by a lama; in Lu Gao’s story he lives on through letters that his commander in the regiment, out of pity for the young man, has kept on sending to his mother signed in Dunyue’s name. Here Dunyue ventures into self-imposed exile in the ‘wilderness’ of modern society; he performs the opposite journey of Lu Gao, but is no less attracted by the ‘mythologies’ of the great cities and the ocean.

72 Ma Yuan 1997, 103.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 104.

75 Ibid.
Concluding Remarks (‘Double Framing’)

The move to make a character in a work function as a stand-in narrator establishes a link between the limits of representing the other and the act of representation itself. The sudden display of self-consciousness – stepping out of the narrative and formulating comments on it – is similar to the main narrative, as mentioned above. However, the difference in the present case is that this exposure occurs in the ‘minor’ narrative by a character that has already been narrated and furthermore a character whose exoticising vision has already been laid bare in the preceding narrative in relation to the Disneylandisation of the Tibetan sky burial. Yang Xiaobin (2002) has applied the term ‘mise-an-abyme’ – a term originally coined by André Gide (1869–1951) in 1893 – to aspects in other works by Ma Yuan, but it seems even more relevant in the present case.

Following Gide, the original idea of mise-en-abyme is an ‘aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it’. Lucien Dällenbach points out that Gide intended with the term to indicate ‘the influence the book has on the author while he is writing it’. In Gide’s words: ‘A subject cannot act on an object without retroaction by the object on the subject that is acting. It is this reciprocity that I wanted to indicate – not one’s relationship with other people, but with oneself’.

In the present case this ‘retroaction’ might consequently be formulated as the influence the representation of the objectified other has upon the construction of the narrative subject. In other words, the narrative self is constructed actively through its construction and narration of its other. In the words of Dällenbach: ‘the secondary narrative [. . .] reflects the primary one in so far as the process of retroaction requires an analogy between the situation of the character and that of the narrator’, which then amounts to ‘a coupling or a twinning of activities related to a similar object’. Lu Gao’s ‘work within the work’ ‘mirrors’ the work that surrounds it. Central to ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ is the disclosure of the structures of objectifying narrative: the cosmopolitan ‘outsider’ narrative by the old writer, unable to penetrate ‘that world of theirs’; the ‘othering’ modalities exposed in the representation and silencing of Qiongbu by a colonial vision; the cultural voyeurism and

76 Dällenbach 1989, 8.
77 Ibid., 14.
78 Ibid., 18.
ethno-tourism of Lu Gao and Yao Liang at the sky burial. The confined vision of ‘secure’ ethno-cultural identities is confronted throughout the work by this continuous attention to the registers of representation. The character as narrator reflects the narrative perspective of the posited author, the ‘narrator in transit’: one that is ambivalent with regard to the categories of self and other and constantly must question the legitimacy of representation.

The ‘double frame’ can thus be said to point to a ‘double framing’: The narrative in ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ is structured around the ‘internal orientalism’ that renders the minority object exotic and other in order to construct the majority subject as homogeneous and normative. However, it is clear from the reading of the work that what exactly this majority subject is, or was, or might be turned into is highly uncertain. It amounts instead to a negotiation between ‘standpoint’ and ‘discursive’ understandings of subjectivity: a subject-in-transit that refuses to succumb to the discursive pigeonholing in popular and state-sponsored media. In representing ‘others’ Ma Yuan is able to negotiate the contingencies of his own subject position, a position that shows itself to be under continuous renegotiation. By highlighting the privileged subjective position through various displays of objectifying ‘visions’ he is able to confront and contest the ‘secure’ subjectivity that allows for the hegemonic exercise of power in the ‘translation’ of others.

The relentless heterogeneity of narrative subjectivities exposes and displaces the discursive power structures built into the representational system, and by invalidating itself as ‘authoritative’ it discloses the crevices in the discursive construction of the homogeneous self. By reading the work as a bizarre but engaged form of travel writing rather than as a detached stylistic exercise, ‘Lure of the Gangdisi’ furthermore emerges as a strong comment on the socio-political function of travel and tourism in China since the reforms as well as a critique of the discursive practice of rendering others in various hierarchical relationships to a self that appears unchanging even while moving. Tibet is still relatively sealed up and controlled compared to other parts of the PRC, but the ‘lure’ of its mysteries and spectacular scenery have never ceased to entice travellers.

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Introduction

Everything is changing in Beijing. When I leave Beijing from one of my travels I know that it will not look the same when I return a couple of months later. The cosy hutong café I frequented will probably have been demolished and a new space will occupy the place. There will be fewer bicycles than the month before and probably more cars and railings trying to control the never-ending hordes of pedestrians crossing the road at undesignated places. New means of transportation, new residential areas and specific zones for specific development are the reality for most inhabitants of China’s cities. The declining number of bicycles and traditional hutong areas are among the more evident signs of the reconfiguration of space happening in Beijing. The old hutongs are being replaced by high-rises, business centres, and oversized hutong replicas representing the perceptions of the past, rather than what the past actually looked like.

The above are only the changes to the physical features of the metropolis Beijing. David Harvey argues with his description of time-space compression that the process that transforms a physical space ‘revolutionizes the objective qualities of time and space’; in other words ‘he [David Harvey] stresses how social processes shape space, but also how architects and planners seek spatial forms that shape social behaviour’. The ongoing transformation of a city is thus composed of a simultaneity of processes, which involve people,
places, history, and politics. As Yomi Braester succinctly puts it: ‘Navigating the city [Beijing] is also a journey across time’.5

In the autumn of 2009 I did fieldwork in Beijing in the environment surrounding Beijing Film Academy (BFA). Artists and filmmakers would approach me asking me to participate in various projects. One of these artists asked me to be a part of his art performance, which was to be a chess game between him and me set on the main street of 798 art district in Beijing. I was to play with Western chess pieces and he with the Chinese *weiqi* (围棋) pieces.6 He only had a vague idea of the rules of Western chess and I had only played Chinese chess a few times. What happened during the performance was that we slowly and silently negotiated our way through the game. We did not create a set of rules beforehand, nor were we allowed to speak to each other during the performance. Hence the rules of this fusioned game of chess were negotiated on the spot by doing, disagreeing, and finally settling on a set of rules we could both agree on, at least until we played the game again. We both came with different stories and knowledge about chess and each other and right there, on the street in the art district, we created a ‘transformative space’ alongside all the other spaces of transformation in a neighbourhood consisting of Chinese artists, poor as well as rich, and foreign gallery owners and tourists. I am aware that this highly constructed situation is just a singular instance of a phenomenon, but nevertheless I argue that what happens during the chess performance can be seen as a microcosm of what is happening in many transforming societies.

As I have described above, Beijing is changing and so are its inhabitants. They negotiate their daily lives, just as filmmakers negotiate when making movies in China. To understand some of the transformations and negotiations Beijing and its inhabitants are going through, I will analyse the 2001 feature by Wang Xiaoshuai *Beijing Bicycle* (*Shiqi suide danche* 十七岁的单车). *Beijing Bicycle* describes the conditions for a young migrant worker and the problems of a middle-class boy both living in the centre of Beijing’s hutong area. The hutong areas are a distinctive feature of Beijing that is slowly but surely transforming or disappearing. The conflict and problems addressed in the film not only affect the film characters; they constitute reality for most citizens (and non-citizens) of Beijing.

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5 Braester 2010, xi.

6 *Weiqi* is known in the West as the Japanese *Go*, but it does have its roots in China originally.
In my analysis of *Beijing Bicycle* I am using the concept of transformative space, a new term coined by Denise Gimpel that includes a concept of space related to the geographer Doreen Massey’s work. It is a space where things meet and change, a space within which things transform into something else. Doreen Massey understands space as ever changing, as a product of relations between [. . .] it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far.7

Thus space is conditioned by relations, by the stories we produce, or that are produced with us. With the emphasis on stories and narratives composing space, space comes to embody change, if we suppose, as Massey does,8 that ‘trajectory’ and ‘story’ imply an emphasis on ‘the process of change in a phenomenon’. The term trajectory thus embodies an object, a narrative, or a story’s path in time and space. My proposition is to allow Beijing to have multiple trajectories seeing the urban as a weaving of a multiplicity of stories, places and spaces. The transformation of Beijing thus represents a weaving of multiple nationalities, of rural or urban migrants, of building sites and demolition sites, of exclusion and inclusion of people, spaces, and places and of oppositional cultural production, underground cultural production and official cultural production.

Denise Gimpel incorporates Massey’s understanding of space and relates it to the transformative: ‘Transformative space covers the places (personal, physical, textual, intellectual, historical, etc.) of manoeuvring between the registers of the old and the new both at particular moments in history and over time in general’.9 The transformations of a person or a culture or the like within such a transformative space are sometimes negotiated and sometimes contested and sometimes the transformations are not even noticed. In Gimpel’s understanding, the present is composed of this dynamic between the past (nostalgia, longing, cultural orthodoxies) and the future (dreams, perceptions, visions of change).

Transformative space can thus offer us a wider analytical tool when looking at the changes people and places undergo in general. In this present study

8 Massey 2005, 12.
9 Gimpel forthcoming. I thank Denise Gimpel for allowing me to read the manuscript of her forthcoming book on Chen Hengzhe. See also her chapter in the present volume.
I am concerned with a number of levels of such spaces: the transformative space *Beijing Bicycle* has been produced in and that it produces itself, as well as the transformative spaces depicted in the film. I try to understand how and what is transforming in *Beijing Bicycle*. I want to understand how *Beijing Bicycle* came to describe society the way it does. In this chapter I will argue that *Beijing Bicycle* has grown out of a transformative space and depicts and problematises transformative spaces throughout the film. It becomes a vivid comment on the creative frictions that characterise the globalised city and allows us a snapshot of a constantly changing and negotiating Beijing.

In a limited sense, *Beijing Bicycle* can be understood as a Chinese paraphrase over the Italian neo-realist classic *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri de Biciclette*) from 1948 and Akira Kurosawa's film noir *Stray Dog* (*Nora Inu 野良犬*) from 1949. In my analysis I will be dealing with different questions: What happens when these old classics, Western and Asian, are translated into a Chinese context? Why is it relevant to use these stories to depict the transformative circumstances of present-day Beijing? How does the director Wang Xiaoshuai manage to depict the changes and transformations that are the conditions for many people in a globalised metropolis like Beijing?

Letteri argues that *Beijing Bicycle* and its protagonist can be understood as hybrids, pointing to the different genres the film is composed of and the ‘double’ nature of the protagonist Guei. I will later on discuss and contest this notion of hybridity concerning *Beijing Bicycle* in particular and Chinese cinema in general, hopefully offering a more nuanced explanation to how we can understand the films and their starting points. In order to structure the discussion, I will first briefly introduce the director Wang Xiaoshuai. The introduction is also an underlining of the importance I bestow on the director as an active agent imprinting his work, without neglecting that within filmmaking it is difficult to establish a simple one-to-one auteur-ship. The ‘making’ of Wang Xiaoshuai later becomes the making of *Beijing Bicycle*. In line with this, Braester argues that ‘the filmic event is predicated on political, economic, and ideological forces that channel cinematic production and predispose the audience’. In this view the audience is not to be understood

10 *Stray Dog* is not the only film by Kurosawa that has been translated into a Chinese context. Wang Xiaoshuai’s newest feature film *Chongqing Blues* (*Rizhao Chongqing 日照重庆*) (2010) relates closely to *Rashomon* (*Luoshengmen 罗生门*) (Kurosawa 1950), and the 2002 feature *The Missing Gun* (*Xun qiang 寻枪*) by Lu Chuan is a remake of *Stray Dog* in contemporary settings.


12 Braester 2010, 5.
as *tabula rasa* ready to be imprinted, but as equally coloured and predisposed as the director. Braester’s quote leads me to the second section of this chapter, which is concerned with the spaces of production. Here I will trace how the different forces of a society influenced *Beijing Bicycle*. The section ‘Stolen Bicycles and Borrowed Stories’ contains a brief synopsis of the three films primarily dealt with in this brief study.

In the analysis of *Beijing Bicycle* I use the bike as a prism to understand the two protagonists and the changes they undergo. The story of the bike becomes a narrative of transformation both for the boys and the city of Beijing. Lastly I try to map some of the transformative spaces captured in the film and offer some possible understandings of *Beijing Bicycle* as a product of relations between.

**Wang Xiaoshuai**

Wang Xiaoshuai was born in 1966 in Shanghai, but he spent most of his youth in Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou. Wang moved to Beijing when he was 15 years old and entered the Central Art Academy Middle School to study painting before joining the Beijing Film Academy and finally graduating in 1989.¹³ He made his first feature film in 1993 called *The Days* (*Dongchun de rizi* 冬春的日子), a film that was produced outside of the system (*tizhiwai* 体制外). Wang’s films have been widely accepted at international film festivals, and he is generally regarded as one of the most important directors of the last ten years of independent filmmaking.¹⁴

The environment around Beijing Film Academy has been and is fairly progressive. Prominent directors and scholars such as Tian Zhuangzhuang and Zhang Xianmin have both been involved with the school on different levels and they represent a relatively progressive line of filmmaking and film criticism.¹⁵ Through his education Wang has encountered film classics from all over the world and of course Chinese cinema from almost all eras. Wang himself has therefore been educated in a space and a time full of change and an increasing flow of transnational and translocal currents. The creative environment in China in the 1980s was relatively unrestricted. Of course

¹⁴ Zhang Zhen 2007, 2.
¹⁵ From discussions with students from BFA, I know that Tian Zhuangzhuang has been producer on several works of students graduating there.
the crackdown of 1989 marks a political change, but this could still not undo the massive input of foreign films and media throughout the period. The neo-realist cinema of post-war Italy and the infamous aesthetic style of Akira Kurosawa is basic curriculum at BFA, along with innumerable other ‘classics’.

Wang Xiaoshuai was earlier notoriously known for his problems with the Chinese authorities. On 12th March 1994 the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (Guojia guangbo dianying dianshi zongju 国家广播电影电视总局) promulgated the following circular: ‘Notice on not to support or assist Zhang Yuan and similar people filming or making television as well as not to employ them in the period afterwards’ (guanyu bude zhichi, xiezhu Zhang Yuan dengren paishe dianshian ji houqi jiagong de tongzhi 关于不得支持, 协助张元等人拍摄影视片及后期加工的通知). This banned seven film directors – Zhang Yuan, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Wu Wenguang, and Wang Xiaoshuai amongst others – from filmmaking in China for ten years. In the meantime Wang made the film Frozen (Jidu hanleng 极度寒冷) under the pseudonym Wu Ming 无名, literally meaning without name. With So Close to Paradise (Biandan guniang 扁担姑娘) (1998), Wang tried to co-operate with the authorities, but unfortunately the film had to go through three years of revisions. After Frozen, Wang alternated between the official and unofficial realm of filmmaking and it is therefore very difficult to place him solely within one realm. Beijing Bicycle is the second of Wang’s films that was made in relatively successful compliance with the Chinese authorities as it was produced within the Beijing Studio system (tizhinei 体制内). After the successful Beijing Bicycle he returned to independent filmmaking and made Drifters (Erxiong 二兄) in 2003. He has gone from underground to above ground to underground (dixia-dishang-dixia 地下-地上-地下). Wang is thus a good example of the in-betweenness that constitutes a transformative space. He connects different spaces of production and alternates between them

16 Zhang Xianmin 2005, 2.
17 The Chinese authorities contested the somewhat gloomy atmosphere and strange ‘taste’ (weidaowuqiu 味道怪怪的) of So Close to Paradise and consistently asked Wang to change the underlying mood of the film. According to Wang, the end product hasn’t been changed all that much, he suggests that the authorities end up getting tired of it and simply give up. Wang Xiaoshuai interviewed in Berry 2008, 160.
18 Wang eventually failed to get the final approvals and sent the film to the Berlin International Film Festival without, which resulted in a ban of the film in China. The ban was lifted in 2004, three years after it was shown in Berlin.
19 Zhang Xianmin 2005, 7.
erasing, combining, or ultimately transcending their putative difference, and he does so partly through his own choices and partly through the limitations, exclusions and obstacles set by others. As Zhang Yingjin describes Wang:

He is an underground, independent, semi-official, and transnational filmmaker all at the same time. Significantly his trajectory is not a linear progression from A to B [. . .] but one of crisscrossing lines and intersecting points.20 Wang thus exemplifies the permeable boundaries between what we identify as separate spaces, but what could maybe more precisely be described as different sets of narratives that Wang connects.

**Spaces of Production**

When understanding cinema, we need to look not only at the film itself but also where and how it was produced and how it was received by the audience. Filmmakers all over the world make a series of choices when producing and making a film. These choices are determined by economic, political and physical conditions as well as by artistic aspirations, chance, and so forth. Likewise the audience carries with it its own sets of narratives and perceptions when watching the film either in the dark room of the theatre or in the private space of a living room.

I have identified four different transformative spaces within the space of production in regard to *Beijing Bicycle*. The first is the space of the capital: *Beijing Bicycle* is a Taiwanese, Chinese and French co-production. It is a part of the ‘Tale of Three Cities’ project that deals with urban life in Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. Basically it is a film that was aiming at addressing both a Chinese and a Western audience, hence it had to incorporate different cinematic traditions into the outcome. The second space is that of the market, which is closely interlinked with that of the capital. The Chinese market is characterised by politically controlled accessibility,21 whereas the Western markets are characterised by the uncritical promotion, by both Chinese and Western agents, of Chinese films as dissident, forbidden and

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20 Zhang Yingjin 2010, 50.
21 The Chinese government has a set quota for foreign films of 20 per annum. This quota is heavily contested by the WTO where several countries have submitted complaints. The Chinese government has yet to respond to these complaints. Jaffe 2011, 1.
Beijing Bicycle is certainly aware of satisfying the requirements of both markets. The third is the space of the political. Beijing Bicycle has negotiated its way through the jungle of rules, regulations, and permissions in order to satisfy the political agenda of authorities and that of the capital and the market. Therefore it has undergone many transformations in order to access the much sought-after Chinese and international markets. We must to a certain extent assume that Chinese filmmakers, no matter how ‘apolitically’ they present themselves, do need to take the political climate into consideration. Zhang Xianmin refers to the political climate as structure (jieguo), and argues that the reasons for the banning of films is not only ‘political or administrative or ideological, but it goes deeper, it is a matter of spirit (jingshen) and a matter of the nature of the structure (jieguoxing), thus proposing a less political reading of the films. But as Braester argues, ‘filmmakers and playwrights confront the same obstacles architects know as “planning in the face of the power”, the need to think professionally and act politically at the same time’, in other words they need to take the combined spaces of the professional and the political into consideration. Shelly Kraicer, on the other hand, questions the tendency to interpret all Chinese films as political. Kraicer still recognises the need sometimes ‘read Chinese movies through a political prism’, but he still opposes this strategy by saying that it is ‘a lazy, worn interpretive strategy that too easily reduces complex, allusive art to manifestos of resistance’. Kraicer’s statement is referring to the end product, detaching it from the production itself. I argue, that we should find the answer somewhere in-between these two notions; remembering that filmmakers are active agents

22 Pickowicz 2006, 11–13. Geremie Barmé 1999, 194–195, describes this phenomenon as packaged dissent, where the recipe for success for a Chinese artist is an official ban of the movie, the music etc. Given the changed circumstances today you would not need an explicit official ban, but it would suffice to lack the official approvals. Zhang Xianmin 2005, 1.

23 Film director Zhang Yuan contests the term underground (dixia), he believes it invokes feelings of fear and insecurity with the Chinese audience and claims that he just wants to make films, see Zhang interviewed in Berry 2008, 137. Zhang Xianmin on the other hand writes that Chinese filmmakers simply don’t care whether their films get ratified or forbidden (paishe zhe duiyu tamen pizhun huo jinzhi yingpian ye wusuowei), the outcome is the same: you are not allowed to screen the film in public, see Zhang Xianmin 2005, 1.


25 My translation.

26 Braester 2010, 6.

27 Kraicer 2009, 1.
who make conscious choices. A film production like *Beijing Bicycle*, which is produced within the system, clearly needs to be highly aware of the political climate, but still it is problematic to read the film solely through the ‘prism of the political’.

The fourth space is that of the creative. As I have mentioned earlier, Vittorio de Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves*, and Akira Kurosawa’s *Stray Dog* are evident sources of inspiration for *Beijing Bicycle*, and of course other genres and films as well. Wang Xiaoshuai draws on different genres as cinematic tools to invest the story with certain feelings of nostalgia, excitement, thrill, desperation, and so forth. I will later on dig deeper into the discussion of the use of different genres.

Moreover as Zhang Yingjin and Yomi Braester both argue, the audience is predisposed when watching a film. Each member of the audience brings his or her past narratives (stories) to the encounter with the film, and therefore the particular circumstances of the encounter will give rise to a range of different interpretations determined by where, when and how the film is shown.

### Stolen Bicycles and Borrowed Stories

Moving from the space of production to that of the influences, I will give a short introduction to the different films I discuss in this paper. *Beijing Bicycle* tells the story of two 17-year-old boys living in Beijing. Guei is a migrant worker, the other, Jian, is a middle-class boy; they both live in the hutong area of the city. Guei lands a job at an express bicycle delivery company and is given a bike. The bicycle is later stolen by unknown perpetrators and is afterwards sold at a second-hand market to Jian. *Bicycle Thieves* tells the story of Ricci who has finally landed a job as a poster deliveryman, but is robbed of his bicycle while on duty. Ricci begins a nerve-racking search throughout the city of Rome to find the bike in order to continue supporting his family. *Stray Dog* portrays the young homicide detective Murakami whose gun is pick pocketed on the bus, and when he discovers the gun is being used to commit murder, Murakami sets out to find the thief in the dark and chaotic underworld of war-ravaged Tokyo.

Vittorio de Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) was long ago established as a classic, and it has formed and inspired many film directors; Kurosawa’s *Stray*
Dog (1949) is considered one of the first Japanese films noirs and police procedurals on film in Japan. Kurosawa’s distinctive films were some of the first Japanese films to break through to the Western festival markets.²⁹ It is, however, important to note that in Japan Kurosawa’s films from the 1950s and 1960s were viewed by some film critics as Westernised, while his later films from the 1970s and 1980s are accused by Western critics of pandering to the Japanese.³⁰ There was a discrepancy between what the Western audience experienced as explicitly Asian and what the Japanese audience interpreted as Western influence.

Kurosawa’s Stray Dog owes a lot to Bicycle Thieves and American film noir. These two films are also results of being produced under highly unstable and unpredictable circumstances. Post-war Italy and Japan underwent massive change in this period, and both films reflect a man’s attempt to cope with and overcome the drastic changes that have a comprehensive impact on his life.

The main focus of three of the films is the loss of the artefact. The artefact is used as a means of translating the protagonists into something else, be it a man, in the case of Murakami, or a member of the working society in the case of both Ricci and Guei. Murakami loses his manhood, symbolised by the gun, as Jian lacks social acceptance through the absence of the bicycle. Galbraith writes about Murakami: ‘without his pistol, Murakami is just another displaced man, a stray dog’.³¹ Without the bike, Jian thinks he will lose the girl and his friends, and thus become a stray boy.

Beijing Bicycle – a Narrative of Transformation

In Beijing Bicycle the city itself becomes a protagonist conditioning the narrative, and the boys of the story are conditioned by the city. The city shapes them and they shape the city in their own ways. The past is very present in Beijing Bicycle though it is never explicitly mentioned, but the choice of location (the central hutong area) as well as the on-location shooting gives prominence to Beijing as setting. We never forget that the film takes place in Beijing, which is also clearly indicated by the English title of the film. The Chinese title can be translated as ‘The bike of a 17-year-old’ (Shiqi suide

²⁹ Galbraith 2002, 136–138. In 1951 Rashomon was awarded the Golden Lion at Venice Film Festival. Rashomon had been entered into the competition without Kurosawa’s knowledge.
³⁰ Galbraith 2002, 601.
³¹ Ibid., 109.
danche 十七岁的单车) thereby not implying any direct connection to the city of Beijing. Such differences clearly illustrate that there are different sets of narratives conditioned by the receiving market: The Western markets need an explicit reference to Beijing, whereas it is not urgent when selling the film to a Chinese audience, which is painstakingly aware of the fate of the Beijing hutongs.

The Bicycle

The bike is the pivot of *Beijing Bicycle*, the vehicle of the narrative. The bike pulls the story forward and symbolises the constant movement of the boys, the city and the changes around them. The narrative of transformation in *Beijing Bicycle* is centred on the bike, and therefore it is important to understand the changing positions and values invested in the bicycles of Beijing through the last 20 years, as well as the reconfiguration of spaces in Beijing. The space of the city ‘both reflect[s] underlying social structures and shape[s] them in unpredictable ways’\(^{32}\) if we assume that ‘place is space filled by people, practises, objects, and representation’.\(^{33}\) Thus it matters in what ways the space of the city of Beijing changes.

Bicycles are often seen as the epitome of traffic in Beijing, sometimes even Beijing itself. Despite this historical attachment to bicycles, the number of bicycles in Beijing is rapidly decreasing. Endless lines of cars are replacing the hordes of bikes one used to see, and bicycles are restricted by white railings making sure that they do not interfere with the cars.

At the beginning of the 1980s the bicycle was seen as a symbol of development and progress; now it is more often seen as something backward. As early as in 1995 Beijing city planners referred ‘to bicycles as a problem, not a solution’;\(^{34}\) now, as Gakenheimer\(^{35}\) draws to our attention: ‘All over China, municipal governments have begun to suppress or prohibit the use of bicycles in certain places’. This fact indicates that the reconfiguration of the space of the city is not only a matter of the inhabitants being economically able to purchase the cars. The reconfiguration of the space is invoked both by the increasing income of the population and by the policy of the local governments and of course by other predictable and unpredictable

\(^{32}\) Zukin 2006, 105.
\(^{33}\) Gieryn 2000, 465.
\(^{34}\) Gaubatz 1995, 92.
\(^{35}\) Cited in Dahl 2005, A240.
factors as well. What happens when we no longer use the bike, when the supermarket next door is not good enough and we drive to the better one a bit further away? The reconfiguration of the physical space mirrors the frictions of present-day Beijing, a Beijing composed of multiple stories-so-far, stories that change and transform with the space.

The bicycle does not only carry references to economic considerations or political choices but is also invested with ambiguous meanings and stories. In *Beijing Bicycle* in particular the bicycle connotes longing, nostalgia, admiration, social status and backwardness. Thus the bike is more than the physical object; it is also a projection of the narrative of Beijing invested with stories of the past and the future.

In *Beijing Bicycle* the two boys are only beginning their lives and thus the bike can still represent progress. Yet maybe their loss of the bike also represents Beijing’s loss of bikes in the cityscape? The bike itself is translated and understood differently by the two boys and thus represents different wishes and hopes; the bike becomes the means by which the boys can transform into new or better or different persons or enter different levels of society. Guei understands (translates) the bicycle as a means to interact and enter the society of the city. To own a bike is a common benefit for the city-dwellers, and through the bike Guei will gain access to a world he has previously been unfamiliar with. It is a tool for him to map the city, both literally and figuratively. The translation of the bike into this specific value gives Guei the opportunity to transform into something else. Jian on the other hand understands (translates) the bicycle as something containing social value and recognition. Jian needs the bike to gain social acceptance from his schoolmates and yet it also becomes the symbol of the lack of attention from Jian’s father. Guei and Jian encounter, crisscross between and link different spaces of Beijing, where they change and translate

36 As I write this paper the Beijing Municipal Government has taken measures to restrict the number of new cars registered in Beijing to 240,000 cars (this year over 700,000 new cars were registered) and promoting the use of bicycles by putting up 1,000 stations for 50,000 public use bicycles. At the mere hearsay of these new restrictions Beijingers have rushed to the car dealers and made the price of a car escalate before the new regulations will be effective by 2011. Wines 2010, 1. We have to wait and see to learn the consequences of these new measures, measures that prove that there are indeed too many cars in Beijing.

37 In Jiang Wen’s 1994 feature *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi* 阳光灿烂的日子) we follow a group of boys during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) on their bikes through the streets of Beijing. What could at first seem like a nostalgic representation of teenage-hood and the freedom they enjoyed (amongst other things), Jerome Silbergeld 2008, 65, argues, is ‘not some nostalgic eroticization of politics but rather the politicization of erotica: in other words, anti-nostalgia.’
into something else. They are somehow headed for an unknown land invested with the creative imagination of a 17-year-old.

**Coming of Age**

The two 17-year-old boys are slowly and unstably coming of age. They are trying to find their own ways to navigate Beijing as a transformative space, but also within themselves. The bike is an excellent tool for entering and exiting different spaces, and therefore the bikes become a crucial device in the mapping of themselves and the city. The bike brings Guei from his migrant hutong existence into the crowded streets of modern Beijing in the same way as it brings him from his former childhood in the countryside to the grown-up world of a workingman in Beijing. Through the bike Jian can leave the realm of the dysfunctional family and enter that of the equally dysfunctional group of friends; a group of friends at a liminal stage mimicking the world of the grown-ups.

**City-Scape**

Within the city we experience a creative friction in the encounter between the past and the future, a friction which composes the present. The juxtaposition of the old, traditional hutong areas with the modern city also represents the transformative stage at which the boys find themselves. Beijing is equally fragmented, chaotic and maze-like, and sometimes seems to be grown up and at other times seems to only be at the beginning of its possible development. Basically it is a transformative space. Building sites represent this unfinished stage, while the maze-like hutong represents the struggle and despair of the transformation. As Guei yells when he is followed by the bicycle gang through the hutong maze: ‘I can’t find my way out’. Guei manages to find his way out in the end, but only with the reminiscence of what was once a bike. The bike thus mirrors the transformations of the boys. There is a way out of the maze, but we might come out battered on the other side. In other words, and to alter Salman Rushdie’s insight a little, we lose and gain something in the transformation.  

**Encounters**

Simultaneously with the main story, Wang Xiaoshuai tells a parallel story about Guei and his landlord’s meeting with a presumably rich girl. Guei sees

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38 Rushdie 2010, 17.
the young girl from the fancy apartment next door, and she becomes the image of a city-dweller for him and his landlord. They look at her through a hole in the wall from the space of their closed courtyard into another space. Their worlds are clearly divided, though it is important to note that the wall between them is permeated by little holes thus symbolising the manner in which we seep into each other’s lives. In the following shot we see the girl in her apartment; but we look at her through an interpretive filter, the window, which frames both our and their insight into her life as well as the ability to know her. Sometimes the girl enters the small shop of Guei’s landlord to buy soy sauce; she enters the shop not as an equal, but as a high-class girl dressed in beautiful clothes and high red heels. She never says anything, but she intimidates them by her mere presence. In the end Guei realises that the girl is wearing the clothes of her rich employer; the fancy girl next door is nothing but a low-life migrant worker like them. They discover that the girl next door is not what she is supposed to be. The wishes and perceptions of the future that migrant workers share are contested and tried out in their meeting with the city and its inhabitants. This is the only story in the film not directly linked to the bike; these three people are linked by their common low-status existence and not by a middle-class commodity like the bicycle. The parallel story of the girl next door reflects the parallel existence led by many a migrant worker in Beijing, an existence full of misconceptions and defeats.

Guei and Jian come to a temporary agreement about sharing the bike; the bike thus becomes the link between two very different socio-economic layers. They negotiated more or less peacefully in order to come to an agreement concerning the bike. By sharing the bike and thus creating a link between them Guei and Jian depict a negotiation between stories and spaces, which is a central component of a transformative space. There is a meeting-up of stories-so-far that will lead to another story. Jian ends up discarding the bike, realising that the bike itself is not going to bring him the girl he courts. But even though Guei and Jian go their separate ways, neither of the two young boys ends up with the bicycle, which is smashed, seemingly without reason, by a group of bullies. Guei and Jian are so closely interlinked by the bike that they both get beaten up because of it. Their stories cannot be disentangled, they are however not forever connected, but they will have left a mark on

39 The scenes of them watching the girl are clearly invested with sexual undertones. In one of the scenes the landlord is eating a huge cucumber while commenting on Guei’s continuous staring at the girl.
each other’s trajectories that cannot be erased. The city is likewise becoming more and more entangled in stories and marked by different circumstances.

**Film Noir and its Stray Dogs**

Film noir is often pessimistic in character, a view that seems to suit Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Beijing Bicycle* well. The film does not give us any solutions, but merely presents a rather depressing snapshot of the reality as Wang Xiaoshuai wishes to present it.

The maze is a returning aspect of film noir in general, and Wang clearly makes the city behave as a maze around the two boys. As one author has commented:

> In ancient Crete [...], the labyrinth’s maze and spiral configurations were directly associated with the internal organs of the human anatomy and the spiritual underworld, the one seen to be a microcosm of the other.\(^{40}\)

Thus the maze is not only a physical maze, but also mirrors the interior of the boys. The maze of *Beijing Bicycle* is a microcosm of the lives of the Beijingers in general. In the film, we never see the hutong area from above, but can only look so far as the hutong maze allows us. Only when Jian’s father discovers that Jian had stolen money from the family to buy the bike at a second-hand market are we allowed to see the full context of the maze. Jian withdraws to a quiet place on the roof of his house from where there is an overview of the hutong maze. This overview does not leave us with a clearer understanding of the maze; it appears as a mere temporary break from the pressure the maze of life puts on Jian.

In a maze there are dead-ends and wrong choices, and Guei also encounters dead-ends in the maze. One is when he is mistakenly sent into a bathhouse, only to realise it is the wrong Mr Zhang inside. Another is when he and Jian are chased through the hutongs and make a wrong turn and end up in a dead-end getting beaten up by the bullies.

The two girls of the story constitute another ‘typical’ film noir aspect. The mysterious, seductive femme fatale as we know her from ‘classical’ film noir is represented in *Beijing Bicycle* as the girl-next-door pretending to be someone else and the target of Jian’s courtship, a beautiful and quiet girl, who in the end shows her true self by discarding her former so fond

\(^{40}\) Christopher 1997, 18.
relation with Jian in favour of the new, hot guy from the rival bicycle gang. As Nicholas Christopher writes about the hero and the women: ‘The hero thinks he is rescuing a woman who in truth is not only in control of the situation, but is imperilling his own life.’ These film noir aspects of *Beijing Bicycle* may well simply be interpreted as cinematic tools to invest the story with a more dystopic view of the world juxtaposed by the softness of the teen-movie and the sympathetic feelings invoked by the neo-realism.

A Western audience might recognise the film noir features of *Beijing Bicycle*; some will also link the film with *Bicycle Thieves* while others will leave the theatre with *Stray Dog* on their minds. A Chinese audience will perhaps recognise the story of Camel Xiangzi from the movie *Rickshaw Boy* (*Luotuo xiangzi* 骆驼祥子) (1982), an adaptation of the early 20th-century novel by Lao She, as well as the new Chinese realism also evident in the film and of course the bike as a clear indicator of Beijing society. In other words Wang employs a recognisable story as a shortcut to the audience, disguising something new as something we know. By using the recognisable as shortcut to the audience Wang manages to touch upon nostalgia juxtaposed by the future in the form of skyscrapers and unfinished building sites.

*Beijing Bicycle* becomes an addition to the trajectory of co-existing transformative spaces and an addition to the simultaneity of stories-so-far. Wang is telling a story of present-day China using the framework of old classic cinema. The fusion of the different cinematic expressions leaves us with an outcome that is more than the starting point. You could call *Beijing Bicycle* a new, green branch on the ‘family tree’ of contemporary Chinese cinema, neo-film noir or teen movie, but with deep roots into Italian neo-realism.

**Conclusion**

With *Beijing Bicycle* Wang Xiaoshuai places himself in the crossfire between voicing a critique of globalised society and embracing globalised reality at the same time. Wang does not present any answers to how we should handle the obstacles we come across, but rather observes that we deal with the problems individually. There is no family, as in *Bicycle Thieves*, to support us

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41 Christopher 1997, 20.
42 Raymond Durgnat uses the term ‘family tree’ about the film noir ‘family of films’ instead of determining certain fixed features that must occur in a film noir. Durgnat cited in Naremore 2008, 6.
when things turn bad, nor is there any just policeman to undo the wrongs, as we see in *Stray Dog*. Whether this 'neutral' standpoint is a political choice or not is difficult to answer. Nevertheless, Wang presents a vivid snapshot of present-day Beijing, a snapshot that would have changed even before the movie was shown.

In his article ‘Realism, Hybridity, and the Construction of Identity in Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Beijing Bicycle*’ Letteri writes:

I correlate the film’s hybrid style to Wang’s construction of Guei’s hybrid identity and read both as Wang’s negotiated response to China’s emerging capitalist economy and consequent social upheaval.43

Letteri’s use of hybridity corresponds to that of Homi Bhabha or Salman Rushdie, who are both deeply concerned with not only the hybridity of the migrant but also the hybridity of themselves. Young similarly describes hybridity as involving processes of interaction that create new social spaces to which new meanings are given. These relations enable the articulation of experiences of change in societies splintered by modernity, and they facilitate consequent demands for social transformation.44

This understanding of hybridity comes strikingly close to the characteristics of a transformative space, but I argue that, since hybridity infers that it is possible to identify the different established entities a given hybrid is composed of, we will encounter problems in the identification of these entities. In the case of Guei, he would be reduced to the culture of the countryside and that of the city. The anthropologist Jonathan Friedman contests the notion of cultural hybridity and argues:

Similarly, the wave of discourses on cultural hybridity […] consists of the analysis of cultural elites and their discourses. World music may be taken up as an example of hybridization, but in spite of the name of this popular genre, a closer examination reveals that it is a metropolitan product and a media industry creation rather than a street phenomenon. In other words, it can be argued that the ideology of hybridity is primarily an elitist discourse in a world that is otherwise engaged in the opposite;

43 Letteri 2007, 72.
44 Young 2003, 79.
the drawing of boundaries to be defended, not just from land or region
to land and region.\textsuperscript{45}

As an academic it is difficult \textit{not} to try to identify where things come from
and why, but as Friedman draws to our attention, we have to be aware when
we talk about people and cultures that we do not reduce the processes to
classifications and boxes just to ease our understanding and consequently
become part of an elitist and maybe political discourse.\textsuperscript{46}

My second objection to hybridity is that if we look to the biological world,
hybrid animals can often not reproduce themselves.\textsuperscript{47} No matter whether we
call \textit{Beijing Bicycle} ’a new green branch on the family tree’ or ‘an addition to
the trajectory’, common to both statements is that they embody some sort
of reproduction. There is an inherent possibility of future trajectories, which
\textit{Beijing Bicycle} adds to and gives rise to. The story does not stop here, but
continues its own unpredictable pattern. \textit{Beijing Bicycle} is not the last green
branch, nor the last addition to the trajectory of a transforming Chinese
cinema. Perhaps theorists of hybridity should concern themselves with
what comes \textit{after} the hybridity they have identified in the present.

To return to my introductory story about the art performance with
the chess pieces, I suggest that the constant negotiation that constitutes a
transformative space is evident in \textit{Beijing Bicycle} in particular and Chinese
cinema in general. I note that this negotiation does not necessarily contain
a critical discourse, but ought also to be understood as the negotiations
and frictions between the past and the future, the East and the West, or the
capitalist mode of society and the socialist.

Transformative space gives us a wider analytical tool when looking at the
changes people and places undergo in general. It helps us understand that
inspiration is more than one or two encounters; it is a constant, dynamic
being in-between. There are no boundaries of a transformative space, only

\textsuperscript{45} Friedman 1998, 246.

\textsuperscript{46} Doreen Massey similarly connects the discussion of hybridity to that of the political left,
where hybridity is celebrated as a means of not being able to claim authenticity (we are all
hybrids). Massey 2005, 163. But no matter whether hybridity becomes a project in itself
(through multiculturalism), it will still be a matter of constructed discourses and underlying
political and elitist choices.

\textsuperscript{47} Mules are a good and famous example of hybrids that cannot reproduce. It does happen,
but very rarely. As Albert Leighton 1967, 47, writes: “The sterility of the mule is proverbial.
Herodotus says that Babylon will fall when the mule has a foal. The mule has been described
as having “no ancestry, and no hope of posterity”.”
that of our relations and stories. Transformative space does not call for static models of encounters, translations or clashes; it is much more an, often unpredictable, trajectory of ‘things’ in flux or in transit. *Beijing Bicycle* is produced in a transformative space, it represents a transformative space in the encounter with the audience and depicts and problematises these spaces. Likewise the city of Beijing, with its influx of people and information, is undergoing constant transformations of its spaces and its people.

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**List of Films**


7

A Western NGO Goes East and Meets Up with Other Stories

Cecilia Milwertz and Wang Fengxian

So I am trying to explain about the Ford Foundation and Henry Ford – about first philanthropy in his home state of Michigan and then how it became international. And now there was nobody from the Ford family on the board, just to try to show that it actually isn't the same as what you are thinking when the rich guy leaves the village. There was this academic in the room, a woman, who really was trying to follow me. She asked me: 'Did Henry Ford have a Chinese wife?' I thought I wish I could say yes, because then it would make sense. You know either you are a spy or why would you care if there are poor women in Yunnan who don’t have a place to eat or what business is it of yours.


Western governmental and non-governmental development aid agencies were among the many organisations and institutions that entered the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the 1980s with their ideas, funds and activities. In the vivid language of Hsia and White they practically rushed into China in a veritable ‘development invasion’ with a desire to ‘rescue’ China which resembled the mentality of European colonialists from earlier centuries, the difference being that now most contacts were being made through social organisations and business associations, rather than missionary agencies.¹ This chapter examines the initial interaction of a Western development aid NGO that supports and engages in the work of two gender and development organisations – the Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association (Yunnan shengyu jiankang yanjiuhui 云南生育健康研究会 – YRHRA) which was established in 1994 and the Qianxi Women’s

¹ Hsia and White 2002, 330.
Legal Aid Centre (Qianxixian funü faliu fuwu zhongxin – QWLAC) established in 1995 in Hebei province.  

Fieldwork for our qualitative study, mainly in the form of collection of documentary sources and creation of interviews with social entrepreneurs – that is the local people who initiated and/or were active in the organisations, was carried out in 2004–2006. In this chapter our focus is on the framework we are developing for analysis of this empirical data. We speak to Elaine Jeffreys’ critical reflections on contemporary China studies. Jeffreys has provocatively argued that there is a tendency in Anglophone China studies to reject Chinese governmental practices, and that this has led to an implicit valorisation of Western liberal conceptions of democracy, citizenship and modernity. Drawing on the work of geographer Doreen Massey we attempt to put into practice what Jeffreys speaks of as ‘the critical imperative to reveal the difference of China’. Our aim is to broaden and deepen the understanding of the relationship between Western and Chinese actors and their joint practice in the geopolitical entity of the People’s Republic of China by striving to grasp the coevalness and open-endedness of these relations. We offer initial ruminations on the usefulness of the application of Massey’s concept of space as an approach to understanding the joint involvement of Western and Chinese actors in establishing two non-government initiated gender and development organisations.

The use of the term ‘meets up’ in the title of this chapter relates to our use of Massey’s conceptualisation of space. A quote from Massey’s book For Space frames our argument: ‘To travel between places is to move between collections of trajectories and to reinsert yourself in the ones to which you relate.’ As part of her conceptualisation of space as relations Massey uses the term trajectory or story to emphasise processes of change and movement in relational social phenomena. Massey’s work provides an innovative perspective to understanding the relations involved when Western non-governmental development aid organisations engage in supporting the

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2 In 2006 the YRHRA became the Yunnan Health and Development Research Association Yunnan jiankang yu fazhan yanjiu 云南健康与发展研究会.
3 Our research was supported by the Danish Social Sciences Research Council. The project was originally conceived in collaboration with and benefitted from the insights of Dr. Maria Jaschok, Oxford University.
4 Jeffreys 2004, 110. We are grateful to Professor Min Dongchao, Shanghai University for recommending Doreen Massey’s work to us.
5 Massey 2005, 130.
establishment and work of non-government initiated organisations in the People’s Republic of China. Drawing on Massey’s concept of space as relations and grounded theorist Adele Clarke’s understanding of context we will argue that, while Western development aid NGOs may attempt to position themselves as external to what is taking place in China, they can, on the contrary, be viewed as centrally internal to the construction and existence of the phenomenon of non-government initiated organising. In other words we argue that when a trajectory travels into China it inserts itself into that context and is no longer external.

Throughout our interaction with the people who were involved in establishing and running the organisations we were studying we had an unsettling sense that what they were leading us to focus on was somehow not what was really most significant to the ways in which the organisations were being formed and were functioning. Based on a grounded theory approach our collection, production and analysis of data are inductive and somehow our focus was continuously drawn to organisational and institutional issues rather than towards the content, substance and relations of organising. We seemed to be focusing on what and why questions and trying to reveal some kind of ‘real reality’ of an objectively existing standard of non-governmental gender and development activity that was being introduced from the West to China and was being copied more or less successfully. One possible explanation of why interviewees were focusing on institutional and organisational matters may have been that, during the years that we visited the organisations, Euro-American donor organisations were teaching them something social entrepreneurs talked about in Chinese as ‘SP’. We learnt that this was an acronym for ‘strategic planning’. Donor organisations were also offering, and the organisations under study were undergoing, so-called ‘capacity building’ interventions. Capacity building can be defined as ‘an explicit outside intervention to improve an organisation’s performance in relation to its mission, context, resources, and sustainability, achieved through a process-oriented approach of assisting the organisation to acknowledge, assess, and address its external environment’. Interviewees from the two organisations were very focused on organisational structures and on their ability to form ‘real’ non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In our inductive analysis we tended to adopt their focus on organisational activity as a somewhat static

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6 Hudock 1999, 10.
format that they could and should learn from Western organisations and subsequently emulate.

What may have been taking place can perhaps be illustrated with an example from a study of feminist organising in Canada in which the researcher asked of something an interviewee had just said: ‘Do you agree?’ Confused, the interviewee replied: ‘I’m saying that by rote; it’s been drummed into me at every meeting.’ The point is that it is possible to speak a certain discourse and yet know something entirely different. Even when interviewees speak using dominant discourses, it cannot be assumed that they are locked into them. On the contrary, it is possible that interviewees say what they think is wanted of them. If something similar was happening in our interviews, that is, if the people we were speaking with were saying that they were emulating a Western NGO model, while they were in fact doing something else, then it meant that we were not fully grasping the cultural encounter that was taking place between the Chinese organisations and the Western donors. We were not grasping the coevalness and open-endedness that is central to Massey’s definition of space. We were not fully grasping the becoming of Chinese forms of organising that was taking place, that is, the process of creating organisations specifically in the PRC, the newness, the open-endedness, the unknown outcomes of the involved relations. We were perhaps being told what interviewees had been trained to know about what a certain ideal Western-type NGO ought to be. This relates to an issue pointed to by Gimpel in the document that framed the first workshop that led to this volume. She noted that local brokers of change may attempt to adopt outside influence and ‘become like them’, while foreign agents of change may aim to ‘make them like us’, and ‘very often the situation and its results require a far more sophisticated analysis.’ The main focus in this chapter is on how geographer Doreen Massey’s conceptualisation of space can provide a framework for what we hope may prove to be, if not a more sophisticated analysis, then at least a different analysis.

This chapter is divided into the following sections. First, we introduce the two gender and development organisations that constitute the immediate and core object of analysis. Second, drawing upon Massey, we problematise and redefine this object of analysis. We posit that rather than these organisations being viewed as something Chinese and separate from foreign

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8 Gimpel 2009, 4. See also the introduction to the present volume.
donors, it is the relations between these new organisations and the Western NGOs that are involved in their establishment that should constitute the object of analysis. Third, we argue that the implication of the process of what Massey calls the meeting up or ‘throwntogetherness’ of people and institutions from China and the West is that Western NGOs are present within the non-government initiated organisations. They are not external to these organisations. On the contrary, they are in the situation in so far as they are one element of the constitution and existence of these organisations.

**Two Gender and Development Organisations: The Immediate Object of Analysis**

What should we call the phenomenon we are studying? Social entrepreneurs from the two organisations speak of their organisations as non-governmental organisations, often either using the English acronym NGO or the English-Chinese combination ‘NGO-zuzhi 组织’ (NGO-organisation). We prefer to define our object of study as non-government initiated gender and development (GAD) activity. The notion of non-government initiated is helpful in so far as it makes it possible to avoid the issue of whether the units of study merit the use of the term NGO or not. We avoid the issue of whether the use of the NGO concept and the connotations it carries with it serve to advance or obstruct an understanding of the phenomena under study. Moreover, the conceptual framing of the research object is important because it defines the kinds of questions that can be asked. Our overall interest in this chapter is primarily on the process of organising rather than on organisations as such. By naming the organisations in terms of how they were initiated, our intention is also to emphasise our interest in the process, the change, the movement of the activity under study rather than the issue of whether or not they function according to a certain standard or norm of non-governmental activity.

The two gender and development organisations which form the empirical starting point of the analysis in this chapter were chosen on the basis of three criteria. First, that they were initiated from below rather than being top-down government initiated. Second, they were engaged in addressing gender and development issues. Third, they were supported by Western development

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9 See Hsiung, Jaschok and Milwertz 2001 for an elaboration of the focus on the process of organising.
aid NGOs. We compare two organisations that are in many ways different, but also in many ways similar. The YRHRA is a member organisation and research association located in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province. The QWLAC is a non-member organisation located in Qianxi county in Hebei province. The QWLAC was defined by the people involved in its activities as a women’s organisation, whereas the people we interviewed at the YRHRA emphasised that it was not a women’s organisation. The target group of YRHRA activity was indeed initially primarily women. However, gradually the association became engaged in many activities not directly related to addressing women’s practical and strategic gender needs. The organisation does, however, aim to promote gender equality throughout its activities. Both organisations work for the elimination of subordination, discrimination and marginalisation of women and to promote gender equality. Through their interaction with foreign development aid agencies the organisations have adopted a so-called gender and development (GAD) approach in their activities. This implies that activities pertaining to women’s subordinate or marginalised positions in society are based on the premise that women cannot be viewed in isolation. On the contrary, the gender and development approach emphasises a focus on gender relations when designing measures to ‘help’ women in the development process.¹⁰

In terms of further similarities, at the time of the start of our study in 2004 both organisations had a history of about ten years. Both organisations have important relations with party-state institutions at various administrative levels. Importantly, both have relations and interaction with the Women’s Federation system with which they are also registered according to legal requirements. The QWLAC has evolved from within the Women’s Federation and carries out projects in close collaboration with the Federation. The organisation is registered with the county level Women’s Federation. The YRHRA was established without direct links to the Women’s Federation. It is registered as a second level association with the Women’s Theory Study Association (Funü lilun xuehui 妇女理论学会), which is registered with the Yunnan province Women’s Federation. Each organisation is also registered with professional management units (yewu zhuguan danwei 业务主管单位) – the Qianxi Administration of Justice (Qianxixian sifaju 迁西县司法局) and the Yunnan Social Science Association (Yunnansheng shehui kexue lianhehui 云南省社会科学联合会).

¹⁰ Moser 1993, 3.
Both organisations interact closely with two other entities – non-Chinese (primarily European and North American) governmental and non-governmental institutions and domestic party-state institutions. Thus, three main entities are involved in the process of creating non-government initiated GAD activity: the non-government initiated GAD organisations themselves, the Western institutions that offer their support (financially, as well as in many other ways) and, finally, a range of party-state institutions, including the Women’s Federation, with whom the non-government initiated organizations are registered and with whom they collaborate. In this chapter we focus solely on relations between the non-government initiated organisations and one Western development aid NGO leaving aside the roles of both Western and Chinese governmental institutions. We have published an analysis of relations between the YRHRA and party-state institutions, as well as a further analysis of relations with foreign donors, elsewhere.11

Problematising and Redefining the Object of Analysis

Multilateral economic and technical assistance to China started in 1979 when the Chinese government signed its first co-operation agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and in 1985 an NGO liaison department was set up under the China International Centre for Economic & Technical Exchanges to promote co-operation between foreign NGOs and China.12 The Western NGOs that entered China in the 1980s and 1990s for the first time since 1949 were engaged in both relief and development work. While some organisations were already operating in China in the 1980s, floods in the summer of 1991 drew overseas funding into China on a larger scale and provided a major entry point for foreign NGOs as this was the first time the Chinese Communist Party requested international relief aid.13 By the mid-1990s there were around 15 foreign NGOs operating in China including among others Hong Kong Oxfam, British Save the Children Fund, German Friedrich Neumann Stiftung and the US-based Ford Foundation.14 The Ford Foundation played a key role in constructing the two organisations that we are concerned with here. About ten years later

12 Huang, Li and Bai 2004.
13 Howell 1997.
14 Ibid., 204.
an estimate quoted in Hsia and Whyte\textsuperscript{15} was that about 50 foreign NGOs were registered in the PRC, and that there were in addition about 150 that funded work in China through local partners.

Generally, Western development aid organisations work in other countries in two main ways, either engaging directly in development activities or working via local organisations.\textsuperscript{16} In the People's Republic of China the first method of direct development activities was initially not an option and foreign NGOs had to seek local partners. Typically, when Western NGOs seek partners in other parts of the world they seek likeminded organisations to work with based on the concept of a 'natural partner'. This implies that they tend to seek partners who have origins, interests, values, intended beneficiaries, constituencies and objectives similar to their own.\textsuperscript{17} Western NGOs entering the PRC in the early and mid-1990s encountered the fact that there was a scarcity, if not a total lack, of such natural NGO partners. Writing about the mid-1990s situation in the PRC, political scientist Jude Howell noted that at that time China had few NGOs in the development field that had been set up from below and were able to control their organisational structures. Moreover, there were no pressure groups seeking to represent the interests of vulnerable or poor groups and very few advocacy groups that were able to openly pursue policy issues such as environmental damage.\textsuperscript{18} Howell concluded that the consequence was that, while the situation might change during the first decade of the 21st century, until then Western NGOs would have to work mainly with government departments and semi-official organisations. In addition, Howell noted both that there were benefits to working with semi-official social organisations and that these organisations also had 'the potential to become more autonomous structures, depending in part upon their success in raising their own funds.'\textsuperscript{19} Now that bottom-up organisations have been functioning in the PRC for about 20 years it is possible to see that the underlying assumption in many studies of NGOs which view this type of organising as ideally autonomous may have had unintended implications for the analysis of the functioning of such organisations in China. Such a perspective seems to have foreclosed the possibility

\textsuperscript{15} Hsia and Whyte 2002, 334–335.  
\textsuperscript{16} Fowler 1991, 1.  
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 11.  
\textsuperscript{18} Howell 1997, 207.  
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 213.
of imagining that an organisational phenomenon that was not autonomous in a sense similar to the situation of NGOs in Western democracies, but might nonetheless be quite able to attain its goals, might emerge in China in the meeting up of Western development aid NGOs with the newly developing forms of organising in China. As noted by Lu Yiyi, there is a need for the study of NGOs in China to move beyond a crude state–society framework and ‘instead recognize the heterogeneous nature of both state and society and their multifarious interactions’. In an overview of Chinese and English language studies of NGOs in the PRC, Lu Yiyi has pointed to some of the limitations of current English and Chinese language studies of NGOs. She notes that apart from a few exceptions, English language studies consist mainly of political science approaches which predominantly employ a state–society dichotomy in the form of theories of civil society, corporatism, a continuum from civil society to corporatism or mixes of the two as their analytical framework. Basing her analysis on these political science studies she notes that while most studies recognise that state–society boundaries are blurred and that many Chinese NGOs are mixtures of state and society, they at the same time have a tendency to focus on the importance of the degree of autonomy of organisations from the state. Lu concludes that, to gain more knowledge of NGOs in China, researchers will need to pay closer attention to the diverse actors within state and society and their different interests and positions. Lu points to two major theoretical contributions made by Chinese language studies in the form of the concepts of the ‘post-totalist society’ and the ‘dual nature of Chinese NGOs’. She criticises the majority of Chinese language studies for lacking sufficient depth and focus on the politics behind management issues, while also acknowledging that the concepts developed in Chinese language studies have more practical value than those contributed by the English language studies.

Lu’s important contribution to the analysis of Chinese NGOs is the concept of ‘dependent autonomy’ which is developed by disaggregating the interactions of various interests, agendas and perspectives within both state and society. With our use of Doreen Massey’s concept of space we aim to take Lu’s understanding of what she defines as the ‘interpenetration’ of state and society one step further. We build on the important early work

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22 Ibid., 19.
by Howell, and also on the work of scholars such as Lu, Edwards and Li.\textsuperscript{23} Their work has, first, dissolved what we would define as a rather rigid and restrictive party-state/saviour donor binary. Second, they have recognised that the role of donors must be made more visible, as also emphasised by Hsia and White, and, third, they have noted the fluidity of boundaries between NGOs and party-state.\textsuperscript{24}

In order to show more specifically how the previously predominant perspective which these studies have moved beyond tends to obstruct the possibility of grasping the open-endedness of the relations involved in organising, we turn to an example of an analysis that advances an amazingly clear-cut anti-party-state and pro-foreign donor narrative. Interestingly, the authors of the analysis, Zhang and Baum conclude their article by problematising their own analysis and recognising that their initial perspective does not fully enable an understanding of the current phenomenon of bottom-up organising in China. In their article ‘Civil Society and the Anatomy of a Rural NGO’ the two authors present a ‘case study of one people’s NGO’ – the Sanchuan Development Association (SDA) of Guanting Township in Qinghai Province.\textsuperscript{25} In terms of its relationship to the state, the SDA is defined as lying at the highly autonomous end of a state–society associational continuum. Generally, the language used by Zhang and Baum to describe the controlling intentions of the party-state carries connotations of violation and damage. Relationships with foreign donors can be used as ‘a shield against potential state penetration and predation’\textsuperscript{26} and the party-state is seen as a potential threat to the NGO in terms of ‘intrusive interference’,\textsuperscript{27} ‘co-optation’,\textsuperscript{28} manipulation,\textsuperscript{29} ‘scrutiny and regulation’.\textsuperscript{30} Whilst independence and autonomy in relation to the party-state are lauded by the authors, the fact that ‘[t]he initiation, funding and management of SDA projects are all strongly influenced by the associations’ funding agencies is seen as an advantage in so far as this is the key reason that the SDA

\textsuperscript{24} Hsia and White 2002.
\textsuperscript{25} Zhang and Baum 2004, 99.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 106.
has been able to maintain its autonomy and avoid intrusive government interference.\(^{31}\)

The binary of a controlling party-state/saviour donor becomes very clear in the understanding of organisational accountability to party-state and donors. At a time when foreign donors were making an enormous effort through capacity-building training to teach NGOs in China basic institutional accountability practices that are the norm in highly economically developed Euro-America, it is interesting to note that lack of obligation to fulfil party-state reporting requirements is viewed as an advantage by Zhang and Baum. The reporting requirements in question, which we would view as quite legitimate, consist of an annual report to the sponsoring unit, the Minhe County Education Bureau and reporting to the Minhe County Civil Affairs Bureau, which is the ‘registration management agency’\(^{32}\). At the same time, and in contrast to the benefits of avoiding reporting to party-state institutions, Zhang and Baum emphasise that reporting to donors has been taken quite seriously by the SDA and that the organisation has ‘worked hard to improve the quality of their reports, making extensive audio and video records of each project available to patrons and including a complete accounting of every yuan spent’.\(^{33}\) The authors do not elaborate on why accountability to the party-state is apparently viewed as negative and controlling, while accountability to foreign donors is viewed in a positive light.

The Association is defined by Zhang and Baum as an NGO that is ‘a true “people’s” (minjian 民间) NGO’\(^{34}\) and ‘a genuine minjian organization’.\(^{35}\) When something is genuine it is truly what it is said to be, it is authentic, it presents itself in its clean, pure and uncontaminated form. Apparently, the reader is to understand that the SDA is uncontaminated by involvement on the part of the Chinese party-state. In view of the fact that 44 per cent of the SDA’s funds are derived from foreign embassies, in other words, governments of other countries, it is apparently not so much lack of government involvement as lack of Chinese government involvement that merits the definition of the SDA as a truly and genuinely non-governmental organisation. The analysis of the SDA is a relatively clear-cut example of the tendency to essentialise

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 102.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 103–104.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 99.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 101.
others by applying a ‘predefined assumption of a particular power structure’ that Gimpel mentions as a problematic element of understanding cultural encounters. It is precisely what we attempt to move beyond in this volume.\(^{36}\)

In contrast to the rather sharp opposition that is drawn between the SDA and the party-state on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the supportive role of foreign donors, Zhang and Baum conclude their article by modifying the binary which structures their analysis. By problematising the initial narrative of the restrictive party-state and saviour donor the authors join other scholars in pointing to the need for more nuanced perspectives to understanding bottom-up forms of organising in China. These insights are similar to our view of both party-state and Western development aid NGOs as entities that can potentially work with and to the benefit of, but can also work against and detrimentally to, non-government initiated gender and development organising. Both party-state and Western NGOs subject such organisations to their particular interests and both attempt to shape organising according to their particular interests. Moving on from dissolving the rigid and restrictive party-state/saviour donor binary and recognising the fluidity of boundaries between non-government initiated GAD organisations and the party-state, we propose a theoretical framework that, instead of studying the interaction between three separate entities of gender and development organisations, Western NGOs and domestic party-state, emphasises the meeting between them, or to use another of Massey’s expressions, their ‘throwntogetherness’. In this chapter we focus only on two of these three actors – the foreign donors and the gender and development organisations.

Massey argues for a relational understanding of the spatial. She defines her alternative approach as a challenge to hegemonic imaginations of space in which space is often viewed as static or as a blank surface. Massey is concerned with what she defines as ‘ordinary space; the space and places through which, in negotiation of relations within multiplicities, the social is constructed.’\(^{37}\) In other words, she is not concerned with space as a metaphor. On the contrary her concept is about space as practice or space unfolding as interaction. Massey’s definition of space is characterised by three main elements. First, interrelations – meaning that space is constituted through interactions. Second, space is ‘the sphere of the possibility of the existence of

\(^{36}\) Gimpel 2009, 4.

multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality.\textsuperscript{38} And, third, space is always under construction in the sense that space can be imagined as ‘a simultaneity of stories-so-far’.\textsuperscript{39} Massey problematises the understanding of space as it is used in ‘voyages of discovery’ in terms of crossing and conquering space. Space in this way of telling things is an expanse people can travel across. Space is land and sea. It is a surface that is continuous and given. According to Massey this way of understanding space has effects. One effect is that space is converted into time and geography is turned into history. This is the case when different societies are viewed as situated at different points in one universal form of development.

The understanding of space as open surface which Massey critiques seems to be the predominant understanding applied in studies that use a concept of space to analyse popular organising in the PRC. The space occupied by popular organisations is often portrayed as an open surface which they have moved onto following either the withdrawal of the party-state or the offering of space to NGOs by the party-state. The metaphor of an open space that can be stepped onto or into is emphasised by the further metaphor of the party-state being able to obstruct use of that space by ‘closing the door’ on it if so inclined.\textsuperscript{40} In this understanding space seems to be viewed as an open surface, something that can be provided or withdrawn by the party-state or conquered from the party-state in an ongoing struggle. Space viewed as an open or blank surface can also refer to the way the movement of something from the West is often imagined as ‘a continuous surface that the colonizer, as the active agent, crosses to find the to-be-colonized simply “there”.’\textsuperscript{41} In this view China and Europe would be part of one universal developmental model, but placed at different stages of this development. As such, spatial difference is convened into time\textsuperscript{42} in what Massey calls an ‘imagination of globalization as a historical “queue”’.\textsuperscript{43}

Massey rejects this imagination of space as blank surface and instead proposes a conceptualisation of space as interrelations and a sphere of coexistence of multiple trajectories. Instead of viewing space as surface and

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Howell 2004, 161.
\textsuperscript{41} Massey 2005, 63.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 11.
converting space into time Massey proposes an understanding of space as a meeting up of histories. Based on her understanding, China and Europe are different types of society facing each other at the same time. In terms of bottom-up organising one implication of their difference is that such organising can also move in completely different directions in the two different geopolitical situations. Another implication is that the encounter between the two involves the possibility of the emergence of something new and different, something that is neither the one nor the other.

Following these reflections we now turn to an analysis of the establishment of two gender and development organisations. We focus on relations between a Western development aid NGO and Chinese social entrepreneurs viewed through the framework of Massey’s three characteristics of space as, first, a meeting up of histories or thrown-togetherness, second, coevalness, and third, open-endedness.

**Creating Non-Government Initiated Gender and Development Organisations**

We examine interaction between one US based development aid donor, the Ford Foundation, and social entrepreneurs related to the establishment processes of two organisations, the Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association and the Qianxi Women’s Legal Aid Centre, which were both set up in the mid-1990s. We argue that the Western donor became an integral part of these organisations at a very early stage.

**The Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association**

Many people were involved in the establishment in 1994 of the Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association (YRHRA). Here we concentrate mainly on two people who played pivotal roles in representing the Chinese and the Western side of the meeting-up process that led to the formal establishment of the organisation: the main initiator and driving force of the organisation, medical doctor Zhang Kaining, and Dr. Mary Ann Burris, who was the programme officer for reproductive health at the Ford Foundation Beijing office from 1991 to 1996.

Writing about the history and development of the YRHRA in a volume edited by social entrepreneur and gender studies scholar Li Xiaojiang, Zhang Kaining chooses to describe the establishment of the association without any direct reference to the involvement of the Western NGO. He
does, however, mention the assistance of new friends and here he might very well be referring to the Ford Foundation. He writes:

We found a solution to some problems faced by our research group and some thoughts developed. Why not join forces to establish an interdisciplinary popular group? This idea was enthusiastically received by new and old friends. On 7 March 1994 the Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association was established in a simple classroom at Kunming Medical College.44

Our interviews with Zhang Kaining and Ford Foundation programme officer Mary Ann Burris provide insights into their meeting up as it took place prior to the 7th March 1994 formal establishment of the association, as well as to how their meeting-up led to the Western organisation becoming integral to the creation of the YRHRA. Based on their memories of the events as they related them to us, and supported by stories told to us by other social entrepreneurs, we have reconstructed the story as follows:

Zhang Kaining and Mary Ann Burris first met in England in connection with a meeting at the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex. According to Mary Ann Burris, Zhang Kaining was eager to talk to her and the first contact with the Western NGO was made by him. At that time Zhang Kaining, who was employed as vice director of a research institute at the Kunming Medical College, was on leave to study for a PhD degree at Cambridge University. While in the UK he met people from Harvard University and Shanghai University who were preparing to engage in a public health project and were looking for a local collaborator. Zhang Kaining decided to drop his PhD programme in order to return to China to engage his institute in this project. At some point between their initial meeting and the establishment of the association, Mary Ann Burris proposed the possibility that Zhang Kaining might receive funding that would be allocated to a new entity rather than to the research institute. In other words, the initiative to set up a new institutional entity originated with the donor. The Ford Foundation was then establishing its reproductive health programme in the PRC; Mary Ann Burris was the first programme officer responsible for the field of reproductive health and she had been charged with the task of setting up a programme in Yunnan province. She set up what she calls a 'leadership group' with participants from many different authorities involved in women's

44 Zhang 2000, 274.
reproductive health activity that could make recommendations regarding how to use Ford Foundation funds in collaboration with her. In addition, a bottom-up approach in which village women defined their needs was initiated. These activities were the first in defining the content of reproductive health projects that the Ford Foundation would support in Yunnan Province. From the perspective of the donor, once the issues that would be addressed had been defined, there was, quite in accordance with the system of Western overseas development aid engagement as described by Fowler, and mentioned earlier on in this chapter, a need for a so-called natural local partner. In the words of Mary Ann Burris:

the hope was to help nurture a multi-disciplinary and activist academic circle that could grow the notions of and implementation of a more feminist and rights-oriented reproductive health agenda – in Yunnan, and nationally. YRHRA was initially thought by both Zhang and me to be a sounding board, a conscience, and a stimulus to efforts to establish an attitude and scholarship supporting it, that accepted ‘reproductive health’ as about rights, culture, choice, work, gender, as well as microbes or fetuses.

In establishing a natural partner the donor seeks a core contact person who is open-minded and who also has the contacts and connections to party-state institutions that can form the basis for facilitating the work of the organisation that is being supported and spreading its effects. Both Zhang Kaining and Mary Ann Burris emphasise the importance of the way their work together was what Burris calls ‘dialogical’ in the sense that they engaged in broad-based conversations on the ways in which health was understood, data was collected, and women’s voices, as well as local voices in general, were or were not included. Both speak of their conversations as mutually enriching explorations of interests, issues and practices. Establishment of the YRHRA grew out of these conversations as well as the engagement of Zhang Kaining’s institute and a larger group of Kunming-based academics in the implementation of the public health project. According to Zhang Kaining:

In the beginning we used funds from the public health project for our work. Later she [Mary Ann Burris] asked us, and we responded that this was not going to be a short-term affair. We were all going to work together

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46 Mary Ann Burris e-mail to authors 29 June 2010.
on a long-term basis. She then said that if we had these ideas then they would be very happy to support us.\textsuperscript{47}

Subsequent action to formally establish the association developed on the basis of their visions of what they wanted to do matching each other. In terms of the importance of institutional contacts, Zhang Kaining was employed by Kunming Medical College and as such based within a government institution that provided him with both a teaching and a research mandate. Although the contact with party-state institutions was important, it was equally important, from the perspective of Burris, to set up a new institutional base where social entrepreneurs were able to operate more freely than the norms of the existing institutions would allow. Zhang Kaining emphasises the importance of bringing together a group of people who were all enthusiastic about working together and engaging in cross-disciplinary conversation and action. The YRHRA brought together a broad group of people from medical sciences and social sciences and enabled them to engage in dialogue and open discussion in a setting that was less bound by existing hierarchies. From the perspective of the donor the association constituted an arena in which it was possible to voice the opinion that the population control policy was hurting women and to do research on politically sensitive and problematic elements of policy implementation. Zhang Kaining emphasises that people from other institutions were being drawn into the donor-funded project that was led by his institute. They were working for his institute and by setting up a new entity he saw the possibility of creating a context in which they would come together on a more equal basis.

The Qianxi Women’s Legal Aid Centre
The Qianxi Women’s Legal Aid Centre (QWLAC) was established in 1995 as a result of the interaction between three actors: the Qianxi Women’s Federation, Beijing-based legal scholars and the Ford Foundation.\textsuperscript{48} At that time the Ford Foundation had been involved for several years in the process that led to the formal establishment of the centre. In 1993 a group of Beijing scholars led by professor of law Chen Mingxia from the Law Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, lawyer Guo Jianmei, who was then

\textsuperscript{47} Zhang Kaining 2005.

\textsuperscript{48} Wang 2005.
employed by The All China Women's Federation and legal scholar Ma Yinan from Peking University became involved in a Ford Foundation supported research project on problems related to implementation of the 1992 Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women.

As far as Chen Mingxia recalls, the following was what took place: Guo Jianmei and Ford Foundation programme officer He Jiesen had planned the project which involved both an urban and a rural subproject. Subsequently, He Jiesen contacted Chen Mingxia and asked if she would be responsible for the rural part of the project. After the project group in Beijing had been established, Qianxi county in Hebei province was chosen as the rural project site based on three selection criteria. First, the project group wanted a rural location that was not too far away from Beijing. Second, the local Women's Federation had to be willing to become involved in the project and have the ability to carry out the project. Third, the project site had to be neither too economically advanced nor very poor as it had to be representative in terms of implementation experiences that could be widely applicable to other places in the country. When the research group visited Qianxi it was intrigued by the way Wang Shuzhen, the Women's Federation head, was able and willing to talk about problems in law implementation. Her open-mindedness was central to the choice of Qianxi. When the research project ended Wang Shuzhen was intent on continuing some kind of law implementation activity and she asked Chen Mingxia to help her to secure funds to do so. The starting point for setting up the centre was that both the Qianxi Women's Federation and the Ford Foundation were interested in finding a way to continue their initial and successful collaboration.

Chen Mingxia's account of the role the Ford Foundation played in the change from project to centre clearly indicates that the Western NGO played a major role in setting up the centre. According to Chen Mingxia, the Ford Foundation was eager to develop legal aid in China, particularly in relation to women. Moreover, at the time when the project ended and the centre was established there had been a change of Ford Foundation programme officer. Chen Mingxia emphasises that the setting up of the centre was closely related to the interests of the new programme officer, lawyer Phyllis Chang, who was interested in supporting the development of legal aid activity. The result was that following termination of the initial law implementation project, two legal aid centres were established – the Centre for Law Studies and Legal Services in Beijing and the rural centre in Qianxi.
Concluding Remarks on Space, Critical Mobilisation and Emancipatory Epistemic Community

Our main focus is on activity created by the relations between the Western organisation and the organisations that were established in China. Our main interest is in the process, the innovation, and the change that arises from, and is constituted by, the encounters between representatives of the Western organisation and the people in China involved in establishing gender and development organisations. Our focus is somewhat similar to what Denise Gimpel proposed in the document that initiated the workshops that led to this book. She noted that ‘Instead of one cultural phenomenon replacing another, such cultural encounters produce new cultural phenomena, modify “traditions” and provide the actors on both sides of the exchange with new and hybrid life trajectories and visions.’ However, where Gimpel saw the encounter as giving ‘rise to the transformative space where notions and things and people are reformulated, modulated and recreated’, Massey’s concept of space, which we draw on, defines the encounter, the very relations themselves, as space. Massey’s space is thus not a space in which something happens. On the contrary, the involved relations constitute space.

By departing from what we see as a predominant discourse on bottom-up organising in China that somehow tends to hold organisations static in line with a certain Western norm, we aim to make other ways possible of understanding the becoming of such organising in China. Studies of popular organising in China have focused on what Howell defines as ‘the impact of international development agencies, social movements, and global civil society on Chinese civil society’ (emphasis added). In other words, the focus has been on the influence of outside actors on something that is taking place in China. In our approach we prefer to speak of ‘involvement in’ rather than ‘impact on’. We believe this choice of wording makes a huge difference in analytical perspective. We are thus interested in the involvement of international development agencies, social movements, and global civil society in Chinese civil society. Our position is that donors do not merely influence the organisations in China from the outside. They do not constitute a context within which organising in China takes place and

49 Gimpel 2009, 5.
50 Ibid.
51 Howell 2004, 165.
is supported or constrained. On the contrary, donors are situated within the situation. They are part of the phenomenon of bottom-up organising that has developed in China. This understanding of what is often understood as context is expressed by grounded theorist Adele Clarke as follows:

_The conditions of the situation are in the situation._ There is no such thing as context. The conditional elements of the situation need to be specified in the analysis of the situation itself as _they are constitutive of it_, not merely surrounding it or framing it or contributing to it. They _are_ it. Regardless of whether some might construe them as local or global, internal or external, close-in or far away or whatever, the fundamental question is ‘How do these conditions appear – make themselves felt as consequential – inside the empirical situations under examination?’52 (emphasis – italics and bold – in original text).

We contend that in the case of the establishment of both the Yunnan Reproductive Health Research Association and the Qianxi Women’s Legal Aid Centre, the Western donor is inside the empirical situation under examination. In other words, a core characteristic of this particular form of non-government initiated organising is the close links and collaboration between China-based social entrepreneurs and the foreign donor. The implication is that the degree to which these organisations are ‘pure’ or ‘real’ NGOs according to a Western format is of little importance. On the contrary, if we are to understand how these organisations function we must instead look specifically at the core relations that constitute not only the creation of the organisations, but also their early and ongoing functioning. In terms of their establishment they are not autonomous in the sense of being separate and independent of the foreign donor. Nor is the foreign donor separate. On the contrary, it has become inserted into non-government initiated organising in the PRC. The form and degree to which the establishment-donor, as well as other foreign donors, are involved in the ongoing functioning of the organisation is a separate issue that we will analyse in future publications.

We conclude with some reflections on possible implications of the initial encounter between the Western donor and social entrepreneurs engaged in establishing non-government initiated organising. We see the analysis strategy we propose based on Doreen Massey’s conceptualisation of space

52 Clarke 2005, 71.
as conducive to understanding the meeting-up or cultural encounter of various knowledges and practices that have the potential to lead to the type of epistemic change that Gayatri Spivak refers to in an interview with Tani Barlow as ‘critical mobilization.’ Critical mobilisation is what Spivak engages in as an educator in India with the aim of achieving what she intriguingly calls ‘uncoercive rearrangement of desires.’ Critical mobilisation implies that people ‘will not just be led, or they will not think they are making choices, when the terms of the choice have been taught them by those who mobilize.’ On the contrary, they will be supported in learning to make critical choices that are appropriate to supporting their own interests. 

We view the dialogical relations between pivotal actors involved in establishing the YRHRA and the QWLAC as central to potentially enabling this form of critical mobilisation. As Chen Mingxia points out regarding the establishment of the QWLAC, and as can be seen from the interaction between Zhang Kaining and Ford Foundation programme officer Mary Ann Burris as recollected by them, the interaction between the programme officer and her/his specific interests and approaches with those of the core social entrepreneurs are important to constructing the form and content of the new organisations; such interaction also results in a format in which new knowledge and practices are introduced as something to be used if and when deemed appropriate by the knowers of local conditions.

Although not referring specifically to China, China-anthropologist Ellen Judd has noted that when local societies open the door to governmental and non-governmental agencies that bring in funding, which potentially can be used for local purposes, there is a difficult problem in disentangling competing sources of control and competing purposes for this funding. While money can be the lever that opens societies around the world to the global processes of market-oriented development, it can also ‘sometimes [be] one of the means through which solidarity can express itself.’ In the case of both the YRHRA and the QWLAC the basis for establishing the organisations seems to have been the existence of such dialogic solidarity that emerged in the meeting-up of the involved parties.

Mary Ann Burris expresses this in relation to the role of matchmaker played by the foreign donor. During the initial phase of establishing non-governmental

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53 Spivak and Barlow 2004, 146.
54 Ibid., 151–152.
55 Judd 1999, 224.
initiated organising, social entrepreneurs did not have access to information on, or contacts to, people involved in bottom-up organising in other parts of the world. Nor did they know how similar organisations in other parts of the world were addressing gender and development issues. One donor role was to act as matchmaker by introducing ideas, interpretations, theoretical concepts, people and institutions to local actors. About this initial phase in the mid-1990s Burris says:

I was the match-maker. I mean, in the beginning I think they just waited for me. I think it happened a lot because this is in an authoritarian place and I think that people took a while to realize that I really did mean that I wasn’t the expert. I was willing to share what I knew, but hey, I didn’t know anywhere near what they know about Chinese health or Yunnan. [...] I would bring lots of materials and lots of contacts their way. But I really did step back and they developed in their own ways.56

Our impression based on an initial, but as yet not finalised, analysis of the capacity-building processes that have been taking place during the first decade of this century as viewed from the perspective of social entrepreneurs is that Western donor NGOs seem to aim at teaching (we are not sure ‘teaching’ is even the appropriate term, perhaps ‘transmitting’ is more appropriate) specific, pre-defined packages of knowledge and practices, thereby obstructing the possibility of the continued formation of non-government initiated organising as an open-ended process. In contrast, the initial establishment of the YRHRA and the QWLAC seems to have been a very open-ended process. Both social entrepreneurs and the donor had their clear agendas. However, they seem not to have been in conflict with each other and at that initial stage the organisations seem to have developed in a dialogical and open-ended process. Mary Ann Burris even speaks of ‘an alliance’ having been created between her and Zhang Kaining.

In the case of the establishment of the YRHRA and the QWLAC, the Western development aid NGO went East and met up with other trajectories in an attempt to create natural partners and become involved in developing non-government initiated organising. What happened was that it became part of these ‘Chinese’ organisations. The donor was not an outside actor that the organisations could be more or less dependent on. On the contrary, the foreign donor was ‘in the situation’ as an integral part of the

56 Burris interview April 2006.
phenomenon of non-government initiated organising in the PRC. In other words, to return to Elaine Jeffreys’ call to reveal the difference of China, the ‘China-specific’ character of these two non-government initiated organisations involves and includes the Western donor. What took place in China was different from the type of so-called pure or genuine NGO that may exist in some places. While we have looked for the ‘China-specific’ – that is the specificity of the formation of NGOs in China – what we have found is that the non-government initiated organising of the YRHRA and the QWLAC includes the foreign donor; the organisations are thus not separately Chinese as is usually understood.

This brings us back to Spivak’s notion of critical mobilisation and the way we see it as relating to the notion of emancipatory epistemic community as defined by philosopher Alison Assiter. Assiter argues\(^\text{57}\) that knowledge-building processes are co-operative, constructive endeavours that enable experiences and values to be illuminated in a way that isolation does not. Assiter defines an epistemic community as ‘a group of individuals who share certain fundamental interests, values and beliefs in common, for example, that sexism is wrong, that racism is wrong, and who work on consequences of these presuppositions.’ Building on Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined’ communities,\(^\text{58}\) Assiter’s notion of community includes people who may share no physical, social or cultural ties. More importantly, the nature of an epistemic community is such that it undermines claims made by other communities by generating new, counter-hegemonic knowledge regardless of whether people are physically, socially or culturally tied together or not.

In the mid-1990s one of the ways links to emancipatory epistemic communities on women’s legal rights and on reproductive rights developed by the international feminist movement and integrated into the United Nations system and the World Women’s Conferences were brought into the PRC was by matchmaking facilitated by development aid programme officers. This type of matchmaking no longer plays such a central role. The links have been made and knowledge and contacts have been developed. As one element among the many relations involved in the ongoing processes of non-government initiated organising, the meeting-up of foreign donors and social entrepreneurs has played a role in creating critical mobilisation and joining such organising to global emancipatory epistemic communities.

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\(^{57}\) Assiter 1996.

\(^{58}\) Anderson 1982.
The YRHRA and the QWLAC can be viewed as Chinese in terms of their formal affiliations and registrations according to PRC laws and regulations. Much knowledge and many practices that characterise the organisations are tied to the history, culture and political circumstances of China. At the same time both the Ford Foundation, which was strongly involved in establishing the two organisations, as well as other donor organisations that have interacted with the YRHRA and the QWLAC over the years, are ‘in the situation.’ They are integral and pivotal elements of these organisations in the sense that their knowledge and practices have been woven into the organisations. In a manner which is perhaps comparable to Li Shizeng’s activities based on his commitment to internationalism, world harmony and engagement in cross-cultural interaction the organisations encompass a diversity of the China-specific and the foreign that cannot be separated. The relations between the two form the substance of the knowledge that lies at the heart of the way these organisations function and of the global emancipatory epistemic communities they have joined. Again, much as in the case of Li Shizeng a century earlier, the non-government initiated organisations are not ‘passively imbibing “superior” knowledge from the West.’ On the contrary, they are active and equal members of a global community of social entrepreneurs. In sum, the type of non-government initiated organising represented by the YRHRA and the QWLAC has come into being through, and is constituted by, the meeting-up of domestic and foreign trajectories in an intriguing and continuously unfolding experiment. This relational space of non-government initiated organising is not constituted solely by either the ‘Chinese’ or the foreign. On the contrary, it is characterised by the inseparability of the coeval, open-ended meeting-up process in which the future is held open.

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59 Bailey, chapter 3 in this volume.

60 Ibid., 86.


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Cecilia Milwertz and Wang Fengxian


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Speaking Bitterness and Pleasure: The Vagina Monologues in the People’s Republic of China

Cecilia Milwertz and Bu Wei

In March 2002 the play *The Vagina Monologues* (*TVM*), written by the American journalist and writer Eve Ensler, was performed in Shanghai. This was, as far as we know, the first performance in mainland China. The play is linked to V-Day, which is a non-profit organisation started in 1998. This organisation distributes funds to grassroots, national and international organisations and programmes that work to stop violence against women and girls. In the performance one, or several, actresses narrate women’s experiences and feelings related to their bodies. The play challenges negative images and connotations related to women’s bodies and it confronts the phenomenon of violence against women. The underlying assumption is that if the word vagina is not pronounced and made open, audible and visible, the sexual violence enacted towards women’s bodies will also remain unseen, unheard, unrecognised and secret. The point of the performance is that, by saying the word ‘vagina’ out loud, women’s shame and fear and the violence against them can be challenged. The play is the centrepiece of annual V-Day events on college campuses and in theatres in cities around the world on or around Valentine’s Day. The ‘V’ in V-Day stands for Valentine, Victory over Violence and Vagina. During February–March of 2002 one of more than 800 performances worldwide took place in Shanghai. The profits from the performance were donated to the Network for Combatting

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1 We originally wrote this text in 2005 for the book *Theorizing The Vagina Monologues: Local and Global Activisms* edited by Adrienne McCormick. Regrettably the book has not yet been published. We thank Adrienne for suggestions that have led to improvements of the text. For this volume we have made minor updates and changes.

2 Here we are not including Hong Kong where the play had, at that time, been shown by a theatre group from the Philippines and a play inspired by *The Vagina Monologues* had been created and shown by Sealing Cheng. See Cheng 2004.

3 St Valentine, the patron of lovers, is traditionally commemorated on 14 February, particularly in the US, and increasingly in other countries as the commercialised version of the practice spreads across the world.
Domestic Violence, a Beijing-based NGO, and two representatives from the organisation were invited to attend the performance.

The three Shanghai performance actors, who were from Britain, China and the US, could not have known that by choosing to make a donation to the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence they not only financially supported the Network’s activities, but also set in motion a sequence of activities in which the Network has used TVM in its work to change attitudes and practices regarding violence against women. The two network representatives who attended the March 2002 Shanghai performance were Chen Mingxia, who was then co-ordinator of the network, and is also Professor at the Law Institute and Director of the Centre for Gender and Law Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, and Bu Wei, co-author of this chapter, who is Professor of media and communication studies at the Institute of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and was then responsible for the Network website. After she first encountered TVM in Shanghai, Bu Wei was involved in facilitating the use of the play as a tool to promote activism against violence against women in China. In this chapter we discuss the introduction of the play to the People’s Republic of China.

**Linking *The Vagina Monologues* to activism against domestic violence in the PRC**

Soon after the first performance in China, students at Fudan University in Shanghai performed an English version of the play in 2003 and a Chinese version was shown by students from Zhongshan University in Guangzhou in December 2003 during the ‘16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women’.5

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5 The ‘16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women’ is an annual global campaign started in 1991 by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University in the United States. The campaign begins on 25 November, the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and lasts until 10 December, UN Human Rights Day.
In February 2004 the play was supposed to have been shown publicly outside of a university context in both Beijing and Shanghai. However, performances in both cities were banned by the authorities. Also in 2004 a documentary film *The Vagina Monologues: Stories from China* was produced by the Gender Studies Forum at Zhongshan University in order to further spread knowledge and use of the play in China. While knowledge of the play outside of university circles was thus restricted, within university circles the play has become increasingly popular among students. The following performances in different parts of China reflect the initial outreach of the play. In 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 students from Fudan University performed the play at their university. In 2005 and 2006 the Golden Phoenix Performance Troupe at Huaguang Women’s School, which is a school for poor girls in Guangxi province, performed a play inspired by *TVM* twenty times at colleges and universities in Guangxi. In addition students at Huadong Normal University in Shanghai, at Peking University and at the Capital Normal University in Beijing have performed the play. In all the plays students performed some of the monologues from Eve Ensler’s play and they added their own stories as well.

When the play was first shown in Shanghai in March 2002 the performance had not been publicly announced, the monologues were in English and the tickets were primarily sold to expatriates. Profits were, as mentioned, donated to the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence. Before the Network was established in 2000, several other non-governmental women’s organisations in Beijing had begun to address the issue of domestic violence during the 1990s. The Jinglun Family Centre set up a domestic violence telephone hotline and attempted to set up a shelter for battered women. The Women’s Hotline provided psychological counselling to victims of violence, while two centres set up by lawyers – the Centre for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Services and the Women’s Legal Service Centre – provided legal telephone hotline counselling and also helped women to take their cases to court. The party-state All China Women’s Federation was also involved in work against domestic violence. In 2000 several Beijing NGOs consolidated activism against domestic violence in a new organisation called the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence. This network is Beijing-based with members in nearly all provinces. Its main objectives are to change attitudes

and practices related to violence against women and girls and to work towards the passing of a Domestic Violence Law. According to a study carried out in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China by a group of researchers from Hong Kong at the time when non-governmental organising against domestic violence was emerging in the PRC, violence within the family is perceived as acceptable in Chinese cultures if such violence is seen as necessary in order to uphold family harmony.\(^8\) The Network for Combatting Domestic Violence aims to shift domestic violence from being hidden and acceptable within the private family to becoming an aberration that is openly and publicly discussed and acted against. NGO activities against domestic violence are part of an ongoing redefinition and shifting of the issue of domestic violence in China from private and unspoken to the public sphere of debate and legislation. Activists are one element in a range of factors causing this change and they themselves are also part of processes of changing understandings, interpretations, thinking about and action against domestic violence.\(^9\)

This process of change has been strongly influenced by the engagement of both government and NGOs with activities that have taken place internationally. These started with second-wave women's movements identification of domestic violence as a public issue, developed into a focus at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights on violence against women as a human rights issue,\(^10\) and resulted in the inclusion of domestic violence in the 1995 United Nations Women's Conference Platform for Action document as one of 12 areas requiring action by governments, the international community and civil society actors.\(^11\) In terms of legislation in the PRC, the increased focus on domestic violence as a public issue is reflected in the inclusion of a concept of domestic violence for the first time in national level Chinese legislation in the revised 2001 Marriage Law. As of early 2012, activists are confident that their work over the past more than ten years is leading to the passing of a Law on Prevention and Punishment of Domestic Violence in the very near future.

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\(^8\) Tang et al 2003.
\(^9\) Milwertz and Bu 2007.
\(^10\) Pietilä 2002.
Conversation – The Vagina Monologues enters the People’s Republic of China

We have created the following text as a conversation in which Cecilia Milwertz asks Bu Wei questions about how the play was introduced to mainland China and how it was initially used by the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence as well as by other actors.

Had you heard about TVM at all before you were invited to the Shanghai performance in 2002?

I knew absolutely nothing about the play. Chen Mingxia asked me to go to Shanghai for a performance on women’s private parts. I had no idea what it was about and when I saw the play I was truly shocked. First of all, I was shocked because, although I consider myself to be a feminist, I had never made any link between my body, my sexuality and my whole being in the way the play does. I had never thought of a vagina as something positive and radiant. I had just not thought about my vagina at all. Or rather, if I had given it any thought, then it was as something shameful, certainly not as a source of joy. I was also shocked because I had not thought of the harm and difficulties women encounter because of their vaginas or of the atrocities women experience on their bodies. These experiences are bodily experiences, but they are also culturally-based forms of violence. You can treat the physical forms of harm – repairing a broken arm and so on. The cultural assumptions underlying violence aimed at women because of their gender is something that is much more difficult to change and it is something women in China live with all their lives. Thirdly, I was shocked at the message that only by voicing these violations can they be challenged. I had not imagined the strength of voicing violence and violations. Since then I have become used to saying the word yindao 阴道 that means vagina in Chinese. I could easily say the word in English, but in the beginning it was difficult to say it in Chinese.

The performance obviously had a strong impact on you. What exactly did you do after you had seen the Shanghai performance?

I interviewed Mattie, one of the actresses, and I kept on asking her why it was necessary to say the word vagina to address the issue of violence against women. She said that most violence against women is related

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12 US expatriate lawyer Mattie Johnstone organised the showing of the play at the Shanghai American Club with assistance from the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre. Conceison 2003.
to sexual activity and that by saying this out loud you break the silence. The vagina should not make women feel shame or that they are doing something criminal. We need to change the culture so that the violators and not the violated women feel shame. The crime is theirs not ours.

When I returned to Beijing I checked the internet for information on TVM. I found out that professor Ai Xiaoming at the Gender Studies Forum at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou had seen the play in the US and that she had used the text in her gender studies classes. She had also used the text as an example of her teaching at a conference held for gender studies scholars from all over the country, so in this sense there were already quite a few people who knew about the play.\(^{13}\) I also wrote a piece about the play for the Network website called ‘Listening to the “V” Monologues’.\(^{14}\) I did not use the word vagina in the title, but I did use it in the text. It would have been too daring to use in the title. Several newspapers printed parts of my article and in this way we linked the play to the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence activities and used it to get publicity for activities against violence against women.

The next thing that happened was that a medical company read one of the newspaper articles and contacted me. The company manufactured a product for cleansing the vagina and they wanted to fund a Chinese performance of the play in collaboration with the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence. I started contacting possible directors for the play in Beijing and I called Ai Xiaoming to ask if she would let her students perform the play. I also asked someone I know to translate the play into Chinese. I was spending my own money as we did not yet have a contract with the medical company. On the day we were supposed to sign a contract and everyone was there in the meeting room at the Network offices, I suddenly felt that the company wanted too much. They had too many requirements concerning advertising and wanted me to guarantee that media coverage would include mention of the company. Also, they wanted the names of the students who were going to perform and I felt they would exploit them. I simply had this gut feeling that something was terribly wrong. So I got Chen Mingxia into another room and told her that I did not want to sign. She was really supportive and she said that if this was what I felt then we should not sign. We returned to the meeting room and told the company people that we were not going to sign. Instead I contacted Oxfam Hong

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13 Ai Xiaoming has written in Chinese about her experience of using the play as a gender studies text, see Ai 2004.
14 Bu 2002.
Kong and they agreed to fund the translation and setting-up of the play by Ai Xiaoming and her colleagues and students at Zhongshan University.

When you first decided to collaborate with the medical company did you then have any thoughts about douching being linked to women’s shame about their bodies and that using such products is actually bad for general vaginal health?

This is a very interesting perspective that I had not considered at all. To my knowledge there is no discussion along these lines in Chinese feminist activist and gender studies circles and we at the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence had no discussion whatsoever about the product. I suppose I just thought that the availability of such a product would benefit women in the sense that they would have easy access to medication in a context where they might be ashamed to consult a doctor about vaginal problems.

The imposition of Western feminism on Chinese women’s studies and activism has been strongly criticised. What considerations did you have about using a play based on the experiences of women in the US in China, where the lives of women are quite different?  

Some years ago when I wrote articles for a youth magazine I used to receive letters from young girls who had been raped, but who had never dared say a word to anyone. In China they would be blamed and their families would think it was an awfully shameful thing that had happened to the whole family. One of my friends has criticised me for using a performance that is, for all we know, based on the experiences of white, middle-class women in the US. However, I think there are many common experiences between women from all over the world despite obvious differences. I think the piece in the play about women being raped during war in Yugoslavia is relevant to women anywhere in the world. It could happen to women anywhere regardless of whether they were rich or poor, urban or rural, young or old. Basically, raping a woman during war in Yugoslavia is the same as raping a woman anywhere else, regardless of class, ethnicity, age and whatever other differences, in the sense that gendered power relations are involved. Of course, the more we know about a specific historical and cultural context the more aware we become of the differences involved; however, the violation of women in Yugoslavia speaks to us and to our experiences across differences.

15 See also Spakowski 2005 on ‘global sisterhood’ and the internationalisation of the Chinese women’s movement.
In 2004 students at Fudan University invited me to their performance of *TVM* and I read an article written by Gao Xiaoxian together with them. Gao Xiaoxian is a well-known women’s movement activist and researcher in China who has done a lot of work with rural women.¹⁶ She has done a historical study of the lives of rural women and she has written about the harsh and physically demanding lives many rural women in China lead. One of the things she writes about is how many rural women have fallen uteruses, some to the extent that they protrude from the vagina. The urban students had never heard of such problems. They were mostly concerned about things like the different sizes of sanitary napkins. The piece in the play on the way women experience medical examinations has no relevance whatsoever to many rural women in China. They have never had the opportunity to have a medical examination. They have no access to a doctor. Once the students became aware of the type of problems experienced by rural women they included a piece about these problems in their play. To me this is what the play is all about: about making us aware of problems that are not necessarily directly linked to our own situation and bodies, about voicing women’s experiences and developing new ideas and ways to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and suggesting new practices for gender justice. This is what the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence is about and we can use the play to promote our cause. It does not matter that you yourself are not a white, middle-class woman in the US, or a war-raped young girl in Yugoslavia. I think that across these differences there are common experiences that we can use in our struggles against violence against women.

We are also using The White Ribbon Campaign in China. The campaign was introduced to China in 2002 when Michael Kaufmann, who was involved in starting a men’s campaign against violence against women in Canada, was invited to give talks in China. The campaign has spread to many countries in the world. The campaign symbol is a white ribbon and this gives the movement a special meaning in China where white is the colour of death. This is very simple, but it is also something that makes men think about the movement. It does not matter that the campaign comes from Canada, we can easily use it in China. We look for things that we can use. It does not matter whether they are Chinese or not. We use things from outside China and from China. In rural areas we use traditional theatre. As long as we can communicate our message, then we will use whatever medium we can to get the message across.

¹⁶ See Gao 2001.
When I first saw the play there were already quite a few activities opposing violence against women taking place in China. Activists from NGOs had already become acquainted with the international annual 16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women and there were various activities going on every year. I liked the V-Day movement idea of activities taking place from Valentine’s Day until International Women’s Day on the 8th of March. To me this was something that had grown from below rather than as a more formal United Nations government-type activity. Also I thought that a play would attract young people to pay attention to the work of the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence. Young people don’t want to go to formal meetings or to attend the type of street propaganda activities we use in China.

For the Guangzhou performance Ai Xiaoming and I discussed how we could add something that was particular to China. We did not really know what to do. We discussed the possibility of doing our own interviews, but we thought building up our own play would be much too time consuming. Then at some point I think some of the students read some articles about abandonment of girl babies. The majority of abandoned children in China are girls. Abandonment is related to cultural perceptions and practices according boys a more important place in the family than girls, and it is related to the population control policy requirement of only one or two children per family, as well as to the fact that parents are often dependent on the support of male offspring. Families typically abandon their girl child outside orphanages and pretend that the child has not been born at all in order to gain an opportunity to have a son. The students decided to include a piece on abandonment of female babies in their play. They did a dance piece with mothers and babies. There were no words, but the dance was quite dramatic showing mothers in despair having to let go of their baby daughters. So in this way we included a piece in the play on a form of violence against women that is specific to China.

In Hong Kong, Sealing Cheng chose to write a completely new play based on the stories of local women, whereas students at both Fudan University and Zhongshan University made changes to the play by adding their own texts referring specifically to gender issues in Chinese society. The V-Day organisation has quite strict rules on how the play should be performed and it seems that these rules were not being followed?

I am aware of these rules. I appreciate that Eve Ensler has generously made her play available to people all over the world with the aim of supporting
activism against violence against women, and we should respect the conditions that have been stipulated. However, even though the play does include the voices of different groups of women – young and old, homosexual and heterosexual – it cannot express the experiences of all women. Therefore, what is particularly important is that we can use the play to inspire our own activities. In fact, the play only becomes fully meaningful in a Chinese context when we add our own experiences. We are not professional actors performing a show. We are women’s movement activists, who are inspired by the play, and the nature of a movement is to use and transform whatever works to get across our message.

It was quite daring to stage the play in Chinese in 2003 and you were challenging quite a few taboos. How was the performance received?

The students invited their parents and boyfriends and other friends to see the show and, although some parents were somewhat embarrassed, nobody was directly against the play. There were some parts that we had excluded. For instance, the piece with all the many names for vagina, including derogatory terms. It would have been going beyond acceptable limits to include such words in a performance in China. Moreover, it would have been viewed as shameful for the young female students to say these words. I had planned our media strategy and I had invited the well-known author Bi Shumin from Beijing to attend the performance in Guangzhou. We had carefully selected and invited a group of journalists among people who either she or I knew. After the performance Bi Shumin gave a talk in praise of the play and the students’ performance and, as she is a highly respected author, the media reported positively on the play. We had no negative media coverage.

Later I heard some critique of one of the pieces – the one on orgasm cries. The piece was played by three students. Two represented urban women and one represented a rural woman. The rural woman was given a somewhat ridiculous role and the critique was that, even in a performance that is aimed at breaking gender stereotypes, stereotypes on rural-urban differences were not being challenged. But I think the critique was too simplistic. In fact, the students had decided on this particular way of presenting the piece and one reason was that one student related the piece to a story she had heard about a rural woman. On her wedding night villagers listened outside this woman’s house to her and her husband having sex and the next day they mimicked her orgasm cries. She felt so embarrassed that she committed suicide.
In 2004 the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence and other feminist organisations in China were engaged in the case of Huang Jing, a 21-year-old woman who died in 2003. The organisations argued that the young woman died following date-rape and they used TVM in connection with activities to initiate a debate about date-rape. Can you comment on this?

Huang Jing had dated a young man and she died naked on a bed with his semen on her body. The official cause of death was defined as heart problems. However, her mother was not satisfied with this explanation as her daughter’s body was covered with bruises indicating physical violence. This disagreement led to a conflict concerning the question of whether or not Huang Jing was raped and the question of whether or not she died a natural death or her death was caused by violence.

The case became publicly known when Huang Jing’s mother wrote about it on the website created for Sun Zhigang, a worker who was beaten to death by the police in 2003. Professor Ai Xiaoming originally took the initiative to bring the Sun Zhigang case to public attention. When she heard about the Huang Jing case, professor Ai contacted the mother and she became involved in helping her to have the case of her daughter’s death re-investigated. Since the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence worked with Ai Xiaoming to perform TVM, the Network also became involved in the Huang Jing case. Regardless of how Huang Jing died, and regardless of what role violence may have played, the case is permeated with perceptions of the appropriate behaviour of men and women according to dominant gender patterns. Feminist organisations contested the tendency to protect the young man and place the blame on the young woman. The counter-argument was that Huang Jing’s mother had educated her daughter too traditionally. If the young woman had been more modern, she would not have struggled against sexual intercourse and she might have been alive. In addition, Huang Jing’s mother was asked to consider the boy’s parents. The logic was that, as they have only the one son, it would be terrible for them if he were to be criminalised. The argument is based on the logic that the young woman is in any case dead, so why ruin the young man’s life too. A similar logic was applied some years ago in the case of a school teacher who had raped several of his students. Why ruin his life, since the girls had not really been harmed. In other words, even when a man has violated a girl or woman, the most important consideration is towards his reputation and continued well-being. The Network for Combatting Domestic Violence is contesting such attitudes and the lack of security they entail for girls and women. We are demanding that male violence against women is recognised as violence...
that requires legal prosecution. Moreover, we want the blame to be shifted from the violated girl or woman to the violator.

In February 2004, in connection with the one-year anniversary of Huang Jing’s death, the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence and the Women’s Studies Forum at Zhongshan University held a memorial with a view to creating public awareness of the case. At the memorial students performed the piece ‘My Short Skirt’ from TVM. The piece is about young women demanding their right to wear short skirts for their own pleasure and without risking harassment and rape. We use this piece in our activities to address the issues of date-rape and date-violence. These are issues that have never previously been addressed in the Chinese context where the dominant understanding is that a woman cannot be raped by a boyfriend or husband.

Following these activities in Guangzhou the next planned activity was to show the play outside of a university context in Beijing, but instead the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence ended up staging a ‘V-Day without TVM’ event. What happened?

Before we move to Beijing there is a story to tell about TVM in Shanghai. The play was supposed to have been shown there in February 2004 by three professional performers. However, authorities cancelled the performance with the argument that it was not in accordance with Chinese culture. This makes me really angry. What do they mean? Is it dangerous to say the word vagina? How about rape? Is rape a part of Chinese culture that cannot be addressed? I think we have to think critically about what we want to support as our culture and what we don’t want to support. We should support those elements that are in accordance with human rights. Rape is a violation of human rights and should be addressed as such. The practice of bound feet is a Chinese cultural tradition that has been discarded. This means that if a custom violates gender equality and human rights then it should be addressed and eliminated.

There were also plans to show TVM in Beijing in February 2004. Following the ban in Shanghai we thought the same might happen in Beijing. Here the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence was putting on the play together with Yingzi – the Chinese actress who also performed in the 2002 Shanghai performance. The performance was supposed to have been shown at Today Art Gallery and tickets had been sold to both Chinese and expatriates. However, the Gallery director was told by the authorities that the play would have to be cancelled as the Gallery did not have authorisation to sell tickets for performances. Instead the Network for Combatting
Domestic Violence held an event that we called ‘V-Day without TVM’. The event was held in the Gallery and included an exhibition of paintings and drawings by female artists related to the theme of violence against women, a talk about the White Ribbon Campaign, and fund-raising for the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence. Moreover, participants signed their names on a large banner with slogans against violence against women.

Then, following this activity in Beijing, the next performance I attended was in Shanghai. This time I was invited by students at Fudan University, who were setting up the play, to come and watch their performance and to give a talk on the V-Day Movement. I was really impressed by what these young students were able to do. They had secured funds from a local condom company and they were just incredibly relaxed about the whole thing. On the day of the performance they did not know whether or not the university would allocate a meeting room for the performance, but they just said that if no room was available they would perform outdoors. Originally, I wanted to perform TVM in China in order to mobilise young people to take part in activism against violence against women. After seeing how the Shanghai students had staged the play I realised that young people are way ahead and don’t need to be mobilised by anyone else. The Guangzhou performance took place in a theatre with the performers on a stage and placed relatively far from the audience. The Shanghai students walked among the audience and asked about their experiences as part of the performance. Moreover, they included the derogatory terms for vagina in their performance. They did this while at the same time emphasising the absurdity of such language.

*Have you used TVM in other ways in connection with activism against violence against women?*

The Shanghai students also performed at an international conference held at Fudan University in June 2004 on *Chinese Women’s Organisations and Activism in the 20th Century*. At the conference I held a Vagina Monologues workshop where I talked about the play and the V-Day Movement and a teacher from Zhongshan University talked about the Guangzhou performance of the play in 2003. Finally, the Shanghai students performed some pieces from the play.

Another thing that happened in 2004 was that the Guangzhou performance was videotaped by documentary film-maker Hu Jie.\(^{17}\) He was also commissioned by the Gender Studies Forum at Zhongshan University in

\(^{17}\) Hu Jie 2004a.
Guangzhou to make a documentary of the whole process of getting to know and performing *TVM* in China. This was Ai Xiaoming’s idea and again we were able to secure funding from Oxfam Hong Kong. Ai Xiaoming wanted something that could preserve the experience of the play and something that could be used as a ‘text’ in gender studies. The documentary shows parts of the Guangzhou performance, there are interviews with students and teachers from the Gender Studies Forum who performed the play, and with Ai Xiaoming and myself. There is also a long sequence with the dance piece the students created about the abandonment of girl babies and there is a sequence with students visiting an orphanage where practically all the children are abandoned girls.

The documentary also includes extracts from a lecture given by Professor Josephine Ho (He Chunrui) from Taiwan, and there is an interview with Professor Li Yinhe from the Institute of Sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing where she comments on the strange fact that the Beijing performance was prohibited in a country where the achievement of gender equality has been defined as one of the basic policies of the nation. Both Josephine Ho and Li Yinhe are leading scholars of sexuality and gender. There is also a part of the documentary that is taken from a television documentary showing interviews with women who have spent years and years in prison after having killed their violent husbands. Again this relates to the work of the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence where we have been engaged in research into the life stories of women victims of violence who kill their husbands.

The plan is that the documentary will be used as a teaching tool and as a starting point for discussions at universities about gender and violence as well as at meetings in many other contexts. In fact, the documentary shows how an early version of the film is used at a meeting with migrant workers and at a meeting at a museum in Guangzhou. At both places the documentary provides the starting point for participants to tell stories of their own experiences and to discuss and challenge dominant unjust gender practices in Chinese society. This is also one of the important features of *TVM*. In China we have used the play to spark discussions based on women’s own experiences in ways that we are not used to doing.

The Network for Combatting Domestic Violence has members all over the country. Most of these members are provincial-level Women’s Federations and lower administrative levels of the Federation. One such member is Hebei Province where the Women’s Federation has done a
huge job in getting the Women’s Federation at all administrative levels to join the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence. Hebei Women’s Federation and I discussed plans for activities to communicate knowledge to challenge violence against women to women and men in rural areas of the province. We discussed whether or not we could perform TVM. We also discussed copying the Clothesline Project that I saw at a conference in the US where rows of T-shirts, each representing a victim of violence, were hung on a clothesline with a text on each T-shirt written by the victim. However, this would be much too expensive to do in China.

*TVM stories of individual women’s personal experiences follow a second-wave women’s movement tradition of women meeting in consciousness-raising groups to discuss their personal experiences and interpret these as ‘the personal is political’. It is strange to think that consciousness-raising was adopted from the Chinese revolutionary practice of ‘speaking bitterness’ and ‘speaking pain to recall pain’. The Chinese tradition required accepting one’s fate by ‘eating bitterness’. In opposition to this tradition, publicly speaking bitterness was used as a means to expose the hardship suffered by the rural population under the rule of a wealthy landowning class and to oppose and eliminate the power of the landlords. Second-wave women’s movement activists had read about speaking bitterness in William Hinton’s book ‘Fanshen’ about the Chinese revolution.*

Do you see TVM as one of the ways in which this practice has been brought back to China, where women are now speaking their experiences of bitterness specifically related to the issue of the violence they experience because of their gender?

There are many important perspectives and values in TVM that we can use – the respect for victims, for example. In China we sympathise with victims and we pity them, but we do not respect them. Another value is that victims can participate in the movement. In China these things come from above, for example from urban intellectuals. The only activity I have seen in China where domestic violence victims themselves have participated is the plays being performed by villagers in Luohe in Henan province as part of local activities of the Network For Combatting Violence Against Women. In China the idea that victims themselves can play a role and

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voice their concerns is something new, and I had not thought of this as related to speaking bitterness. I am sure Ai Xiaoming has not thought of this either. I don’t like the practice of speaking bitterness because to me it is related to the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, when I was a child, I took part in many meetings and listened to adults speaking bitterness. This was a form of expressing hatred that led to new forms of violence. I think there is an important difference in what we are doing. We use TVM as a way to allow the voicing of individual experiences in order to challenge cultures of violence against women and to create a society without such violence. I see the V-Day Movement as a global movement. I want to link the global movement to the Chinese women’s movement because we can exchange experiences. The movement can only become global if women everywhere base their activities on local experiences. During the Cultural Revolution people were told what experiences they should express, so this was not genuinely speaking bitterness.

You emphasise the need for exchange in order to have a truly global movement. Would you say that the Chinese performances have become part of a global movement?

Actually, the performances at universities in China are probably not known outside of China, and there is no exchange between the performers in China and other places. One important reason is that we have not followed the rules of TVM. Students here have performed their own stories whenever it suited them. The first performance at Zhongshan University was primarily based on TVM script. Since then performances have increasingly included stories told by the students themselves. Also there has probably not been an interest in disseminating Chinese experiences beyond China. The aim has been to address students’ own problems. In Chinese culture sexual violence cannot be talked about. It is silenced. What has been most useful to women in China has been to discover that it is possible to break the silence and to openly address the issue of men’s violence against women.

An article by Christine Cooper has critiqued the play’s form of feminism and activism for eliminating differences between women and reducing the speakers of the monologues to ‘versions of the same’. Cooper argues that critique and difference is silenced and dialogue disabled by the monologic of the play. She also argues that the play promotes a totalising view of sexuality that basically sees all women defined by their vagina. I am wondering what

21 Cooper 2007.
discussions there have been in the PRC concerning the use of the play in relation to differences between women.

I fully agree with this critique. I have already mentioned the Fudan University students’ piece on women’s health and their total lack of experience of the lives of rural women. The play has been useful for urban, middle-class university students. When the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence works in rural areas we cannot use TVM. We did discuss the possibility of using the play in rural Hebei province. We had long discussions with the Hebei Women’s Federation. They said that these methods would not work in rural areas because the content does not relate to their experience and culture. Rural women would not feel comfortable talking about their vaginas in public and, most importantly, the issues that are addressed are not what is most important to them. For them the most important issues are economic and they face issues of gender inequality in their families every single day. For instance they do not own their own land, they may lack decision-making power in relation to family funds, and there is even an issue such as whether a wife can have her meals at the same table as her husband and in-laws. Often she has to wait for them to finish their meals and she can eat the leftovers. The content and form of TVM are not useful to the huge majority of women in China. The style of play in which one person tells a story is suitable to and has been adopted by urban middle-class students. Rural women in China also use plays to talk about domestic violence. But the style of their plays is completely different.

What exactly is the difference, can you be more specific about it?

In the plays in the villages people play their own parts. For instance, in a play about a woman whose husband is beating her, the actor is a woman whose husband is beating her. During the course of acting the play she will seek help from in-laws, her own parents, the village head, neighbours, police. The play is open-ended and during the play the responses from all the people from whom she is seeking help will be discussed by the audience. This is completely different from TVM where the audience is told what is correct, what the solution is and where the actor represents the stories of other people. There are three main characteristics in this kind of people's theatre. The first is that people tell their own stories. Nobody else represents them. The second is, the theatre is open in the sense that during the course of the performance they can discuss the problems they have encountered. Third, there is no separate audience. All the actors are also the audience. This is completely different from the format of TVM.
where everything is closed and defined and changes are not permitted. I truly believe that the community style of people’s theatre, in which the performers are also the audience, can be really empowering because the actors themselves think through the issues they are addressing and they reach their own conclusions through discussion. There is not one predefined conclusion or solution which has been defined as correct.

Would you then say that TVM, in a way, resembles the one standard correct version of the truth when people spoke bitterness during land reform and during the Cultural Revolution?

Yes. You have to consider different classes and the different problems encountered by different people in different situations. There can never be one single best solution for all people. TVM-style may very well work for university students and I support it as a way of engaging them in the feminist movement. The people’s-theatre approach discusses what the best solutions are for the people who are involved in the performance. There is no predefined solution. People are used to being told what is right and what is wrong, but in this approach they have an opportunity to discuss and make their own choices and definitions of right and wrong. In this sense it can truly be an empowering process.

How does the Network for Combatting Domestic Violence use people’s theatre to address the issue of violence against women?

Urban students use TVM-style in different ways. At Zhongshan University the students did not have any interaction with the audience. The performance was beautiful with a distance between performers and audience. In the Fudan University performances that I have seen the actors did not have a stage and the students engaged in interaction with the audience. They asked men: ‘Do you accompany your girlfriend to buy sanitary napkins?’ In this way not only the experiences of the performers but also those of the audience are drawn into the performance and opened up for everyone to consider. Following the performance the aim is to engage in action related to students’ lives.

Would you say that there has been a change for you personally and for others who have used the play either directly or as an inspiration for their own performances from an initial non-critical excitement to a currently more critical stance to the play and the way it can be used?

The biggest change for me took place when I discussed the possibility of using the play with Wu Meirong from the Hebei Women’s Federation. She
did not think using the play was a good idea in rural areas. Moreover, I have since then seen many plays in rural areas, and now I realise that there are other and better ways for rural women to use theatre to address problems in their lives. In my work with rural migrant workers I have also seen how they perform plays. There is a major difference between the actor who represents other people from a stage and people themselves representing their own lives.

When I saw the Fudan University performance in which the students interacted with the audience I was really happy to see the changes to the play which the students themselves had initiated.

You told me that you saw a performance at another university where some people in the audience were really angry about the way the students had interpreted the play.

A friend with whom I watched the performance was really angry because of a piece the students had added on their problems in finding husbands. The students invited me to comment on their performance. I said that, first of all, it was really good that they make public their experiences. Secondly, that all people are equal. All people’s experiences are equal and that there is no need to disrespect others when talking of one’s own problems. They had said that they could not marry a peasant or someone who slaughters pigs, but they had expressed their views in a way that degraded the people who are peasants or have the job of slaughtering pigs. Finally, I said that they should be aware that Chinese culture views sex as negative but that women can express positive experiences of sex.

‘Our Bodies, Ourselves’ is a book about women’s health and sexuality originally published in 1971 by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective. The book was translated into many languages and the format was also copied in many places in the world. A Chinese translation appeared in 1998. How would you compare the use of TVM in the PRC with the way the translation of the book ‘Our Bodies, Ourselves’ has been used?

I think the book was quite different because it emphasised each person’s individual experience. There was no spokesperson, nobody representing other people’s experiences. The book was published in order to make the point that women have their own experiences. The book was translated into Chinese and the idea was to also write a Chinese version based on Chinese women’s experiences. The really valuable impact of TVM in China is that secrets and invisible experiences are made open and public so that
they can be discussed. Sexual pleasure is something that only men have been allowed to talk about, something that did not concern women at all and this attitude is being challenged.

**Faithless Appropriations**

Practically all the performances mentioned in this chapter used a direct translation into Chinese of the title *The Vagina Monologues* (*Yindao dubai* 阴道独白). One exception was the performance at Peking University where the title *Her Monologue* (*Ta dubai* 她独白) was used. It is worth noting that the play, whose purpose is purportedly to restore pride in female genital reality, uses the wrong word for female genitalia. In one of the play’s monologues there is, for example, a story of shaving a vagina. This is not possible. The vagina, which is the word for the internal tube leading from the vulva to the cervix of the uterus, does not have hair. Vulva is the correct word for the external female genitalia that includes the mons, the labia, the clitoris, and the perineum. Thus, ironically, the difficulty of breaking the boundaries of the unspeakable, whether in the US or in the PRC, is made vividly clear. According to Lerner the vulva is so threatening because it is the primary source of female sexual pleasure. As Lerner succinctly notes, ‘Americans do not surgically remove the clitoris and labia, as is the case with millions of girls and women in other cultures. Instead we do the job linguistically – a psychological genital mutilation, if you will. Language can be as powerful and swift as the surgeon's knife. What is not named does not exist.’ Despite this major linguistic weakness, if not absurdity, the play has been important to NGO activists and to students in the PRC. Even with the use of the wrong word the play has opened up creative spaces for women to challenge predominant notions of their bodies and sexualities, and it has functioned as a lead to speak more broadly of gender justice.

In our joint research on feminist activism in China we have pointed to the role of international interaction in inspiring and influencing the creation of new gender knowledge and action in China. Transnational encounters with feminist interpretations of issues such as domestic violence, together

22 Lerner 2005.
24 Ibid., 166.
with increased awareness of the existence of such violence in Chinese society, have led students and NGO activists to question taken-for-granted assumptions and to develop new understandings of issues rooted in Chinese society and to challenge practices and knowledge that serve to maintain an unequal gender order. Students at Fudan University, Professor Ai Xiaoming and others teaching gender studies and the Network for Combating Domestic Violence have all been involved in performing TVM and using the play as an instrument to set off discussions about gender relations and gender equality. Sometimes students, scholars and activists from different parts of China have joined forces in activities that have included use of the play.

Importantly, whether women's movement activists are working together or separately, the play has been a source of inspiration for addressing gender inequality in China. Rural students in Guangxi province provide a vivid example. After having seen the documentary film about the play, a group of girls aged between 13 and 18 years staged a performance of it. Their families could not afford to send them to school, and they were attending school because they had been granted scholarships from the Spring Bud Project that raises funds for the education of girls throughout China. These students expanded on the play by adding a piece on their own story called ‘I want to go to school’. It was the story of being denied access to education due to poverty. It was the story of the violation of rights that was important to these particular young women – the right to education. The value of TVM lies precisely in the catalyst effect it can perform in bringing forth women's own stories. The girls performed the play on International Women's Day – a day that usually in China promotes the achievements of model female workers, mothers, scholars, entrepreneurs and so on. The voice of poor young women is not usually heard, and the experience of telling their own story and being listened to was empowering for these students.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues that alliances that do not squash diversity build on translations of texts that are necessarily faithless appropriations, and that global encounters involve continuous processes of translation. There are no originals. Via the women's movement the emphasis on the life experiences of women and the monologue format of TVM has no doubt been inspired by the Chinese practice of speaking bitterness. The practice has travelled from China to the US and back to China in a transformed

26 Hu Jie 2004b.
version. In an ongoing continual process of transformation and translation, Chinese women’s movement activists have used, and students are continuously using, the play as an inspiration to express their own experiences and support their activism.

The ‘speaking bitterness’ format of the play originates in China. One might therefore even ask whether copyright can be applied to a manner of expressing and transforming personal experience into oppositional action that came to the US from China. Yet it is precisely by disregarding the copyright issues and requirement of exact reproduction that the play has functioned as a source of inspiration for urban and rural women in different parts of the PRC to speak their own bitterness and, at least to some degree despite the misleading language of the play, to speak their own pleasure.

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