

# Against the Stream of Desire

—A Psychoanalytical Interpretation on  
Woman Characters in  
Gao Xingjian's Novels

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June 2009

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## ABSTRACT

This paper contains an introduction, four main chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction introduces into preparatory discussions on background, questions, proposal, aim, method, theories, and division of content. Chapter one interprets Gao's earlier novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (Buying my Grandpa a Fishing Rod) (1989) as woman's repressed desire under the ruling of the patriarchy. Chapter two reveals the protagonist's self-awakening under the influence of a culture with natural intelligence in *Lingshan* (Soul Mountain) (2001). Chapter three discusses Gao's *Yige ren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible) (1999) to reconstruct the personality at post-modern stage. Chapter four constructs the aesthetics of desire for life by discussing Gao's style of language and interpreting his later novel *Shunjian* (A Moment) (1999). The conclusion summarizes what have been discussed and promotes life to a higher level by Wang Guowei's "Jingjie," which enables the "poetics of life."

The 1-19 parts form an integral whole, showing their interactivity using the structure of summation-division-summation. In theme, this study opens up a literary topic that everybody can reach—life. In the depth of the theme, it explores the development of human personality by analyzing the transmutation of the protagonist's inner world. In the width of knowledge involved, it contains literature, philosophy, psychology, religion, science, art, poetics, and aesthetics. The psychoanalysis as methodology traces and realizes a psychological progression of philosophical meditations on life. The use of symbolism, analogy, sense perception, artistic analysis jointly gives this thesis a poetical disposition with natural sensuousness and aesthetic connotation. In the choice of materials, it encompasses those that can both suit the topic and reflect the voices of different levels.

To sum up, life's positive potential may bring fragile mind out of nihilistic state and give it a positive meaning. Thus the development of a positive personality must be the right path to the wholeness of human personality.

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study seeks a tentative exploration for the interactivity between the self and the other. Modern world is open and interactive. So it is inevitable to face various conflicts caused by different cultures and values. Is there a universal topic that can discover a harmonious sound among diverse voices to encompass and fuse the differences? This is what the paper intends to attain: building up a wide literary platform to realize a constructive communication between differences. Therefore, this study proposes that Gao Xingjian's theme on life be a common topic for us to know the self and cherish the other.

In a broad sense, life can be analyzed on natural and social levels. To the self, life means a free dream; to the society, it represents a given identity. This is why our life is often full of contradictions and conflicts. This actually raises a problem about how to find the harmony between individuality and sociality. In brief, they form an interactive relationship: everyone is born to be unique; but he or she is not isolated, needing others' participation to discover the self.

The protagonist in Gao Xingjian's novels can be read as a man who is often puzzled by the conflict between free will and social reality. Can he finally find a feasible way to balance the contradiction and realize the development of his personality? In order to find this answer, he needs the other's participation. This "other" is embodied by woman, symbolized by desire, and interpreted by Gao's novels at different stages.

During my writing, I am greatly grateful to my supervisor Zhao Yiheng and Michel Hockx for their invaluable guidance. I also express my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Liu Guangyao in Henan University, whose careful correction in language has made this thesis a satisfactory one. Thanks are also due to all my teachers and classmates for their help, and to my colleagues and friends for their suggestions and assistance. Lastly, my deep indebtedness is given to my parents, brothers, sister-in-laws, nieces, and relatives in China for their selfless love and support for many years.

# Introduction

## 1. Gao Xingjian: An Explorer of Life

The 2000 Nobel Prize for Literature provoked a storm of high praise and violent criticism within the different contexts of the West and the East. Gao Xingjian, the overseas Chinese writer with French citizenship, was recognized and rewarded by the Swedish Academy, winning the Nobel laureate of this millennium. As a result, “Nobel Prize” and “Gao Xingjian,” became two of the most popularly discussed topics, and attracted worldwide attention, simultaneously triggering a heated debate over Gao’s eligibility and literary validity.

In the Academy’s complimentary address, Gao Xingjian was cited for his “opening new paths for Chinese novel and drama” by his works’ “universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity.”<sup>1</sup> In a general sense, this citation may be seen as a high appraisal for Gao’s literary achievements in thought and art. In this research’s interpretation, the “opening new paths” indicates Gao is a creative writer in Chinese novel and drama. His creativity is embodied in the universality of his theme on life (生命 shengming/人生 rensheng), in his deep comprehension on life, and in his innovative ability to command language.

In his Nobel lecture—The Case for Literature,<sup>2</sup> Gao Xingjian basically identifies this affirmation for his works. Firstly, to him, literature is a “universal concern about the dilemma of human existence and nothing is taboo,”<sup>3</sup> which agrees with the reference to the “universal validity” in the citation. Secondly, Gao believes, “portraying the true circumstances of human existence” underlies the vitality of ever-lasting works, or is

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<sup>1</sup> “Prize Citation for 2000 Nobel Prize in Literature,” appendix to Gao Xingjian’s *Lingshan/灵山* (Soul Mountain) (2001), Taipei: Lianjing, 529. Please also refer to “The Nobel Prize in Literature 2000” at [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/2000/press.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2000/press.html) (The Nobel Foundation 2000)

<sup>2</sup> Gao Xingjian, “Wenxue de liyou (The Case for Literature).” Please refer to the appendix to Chinese version *Lingshan* (2001), Taipei: Lianjing, 533-547. Please also refer to *The Case for Literature* (2006) translated by Mabel Lee. Yale University Press: New Heaven and London, (32-48).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 537 (Chinese); 36 (English).



“the power that literature is inherent.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, those works deeply penetrating the true nature of reality deserve the literary recognition as “bitter insights.” Moreover, Gao Xingjian thinks that language is not simply a “carrier of notions and concepts” but also activates human “feelings and senses,” so it has “the power to stir body and mind,”<sup>5</sup> which directly match the high compliment for the “linguistic ingenuity” made by the Academy.

Here, the Academy’s citation and Gao’s lecture form a joint interpretation for literary values on three levels. First of all, the universality of literature lies in its concern for human’s existential dilemma. Secondly, the eternity of a literary work lies in its sight into the truth of reality. Thirdly, the charm of literary language lies in its perception and description, with the latter stressing a static imitation of external worlds and the former condensing the soul of thoughts and emotions. Gao should deserve this award if his works truly conform to the three principles. However, this literary resonance between the author and the Academy hasn’t constructed a universal literary criterion. Rather, it touched off a heated controversy over Gao’s eligibility as a winner and literary values.

It is true that Gao is an influential writer especially after his being awarded. However, this doesn’t necessarily mean he is or will be a great writer. As we all know, a truly great work must be able to go across and beyond the wind and dust of history and then gain its eternal fame in human beings’ cultural heritage. This is to say, a truly valuable literary work must be able to withstand multi-dimensional observation and controversial appraisal, and must be able to weather the storms in the changes of history, and must be able to illuminate a wide road to humans’ spiritual world. Can Gao Xingjian’s works shoulder these missions? Different commentators hold different views and opinions.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 542-543 (Chinese); 43 (English).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 543 (Chinese); 44 (English).

For some, this prize can be seen as the recognition for the achievement of Chinese literature. It, at least, conveys a message that Chinese literary works, in some aspects, have aroused worldwide attentions. Others, however, do not accept this honor at all. They think Gao's works can neither reveal the truth of traditional Chinese literature nor reflect the spirit of contemporary Chinese literature. This is because the "without-ism"<sup>6</sup> and "cold literature"<sup>7</sup> that Gao claims is opposite to Chinese people's traditional values and the spirit of personality.

As a cultural tradition, Chinese people are good at interpreting life on the cosmological, philosophical, and aesthetical levels. Thus, it stresses a harmonious interaction between all the beings, concerns the cultivation and development of a positive personality, and sees human's virtue and dignity as goodness with aesthetical connotation. This is why Confucius is seen as 圣人/Shengren(Sage) and Zhuang Zi as 真人/Zhenren (True man). They believe that life can attain a transcendental level (境界/Jingjie) by tempering a noble personality.

In modern world, the aesthetics of human personality is more often seen as a condensed inner spirit or the strength of subject's personality. Its vitality is showed as a purely spiritual power in personality, an instinctual ethical rationality condensed with thoughts and emotions.<sup>8</sup> This kind of value has essentially influenced the formation of Chinese intellectuals' personality and becomes a criterion to assess intellectuals. This is a fundamental reason that Gao's "without-ism" and "cold literature" triggered off such a big controversy. Gao's works may be said to be all-embracing in content yet lack a condensed disposition in overall style. Gao highlights the perceptual function of literary language so his language mirrors the

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<sup>6</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Meiyou zhuyi (without-ism)* (2000), Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 8-9. Gao thinks he is not subordinate to any ism both in politics and literature. In this era that ideology has disintegrated, if one wants to maintain an independent spirit, a desirable attitude is to question. In literature, purely deducing isms or indiscriminately copying isms probably lead to a situation of "only see banners but not see works."

<sup>7</sup> Gao Xingjian, "I maintain a cold literature," in *Meiyou zhuyi (without-ism)* (2000), Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 19. According to Gao Xingjian, the literature that has returned to its nature might as well be called "cold literature", which is different from that which is to convey Dao (the Way), to attack politics, to intervene society, as well as express ideals. Its value is shown as human's pure spiritual activity other than the demand of materialistic desires.

<sup>8</sup> Zhang Lugao, *The Suffering of Pioneers: On Luxun's Spirit*. Anhui: Jiaoyu, 134.

thoughts and soul of his characters. However, his characters are overly introverted in personality so tend to escape from the reality, lacking a positive spirit of personality. This is why some critics hold an extremely radical view for his works.

The critic Cao Changqing views Gao's works as a "false literature," "false modernism," and "false individualism." Compared with great literary giants, Cao thinks that Gao only creates the "ruins" of "vulgar language" and "clumsy imitation," which only reflects the protagonist's "ugliness of morality" and the author's "ugliness of art".<sup>9</sup> For Cao, apart from the "extreme individualism", one can hardly find any evidence to show his "concern for humanism" and "ethical responsibility," not to mention literary aesthetics. This critique was resulted from the elitism awareness of elite intellectuals. For them, literature should reflect a warm humanism spirit and a noble ethical principle. This may be seen as a negative criticism against Gao's "cold literature" and "without-ism". Cao tends to see life as an existence with social responsibility and ethical connotation; but Gao pursues a personified life with an independent spirit and aesthetical tendency.

Here, Cao criticized Gao's works from ethical, humane, and artistic angles. However, the critic Liu Zaifu holds a quite different view. He views the personalized state of being as a transcendental observation and exploration for human's sufferings on a higher spiritual dimension. For him, this is a bigger and deeper philosophical concern rather than an indifferent ignorance for ethical values. This philosophy is to calmly admit that man is fragile in the reality. Only in this way, one may avoid being self-important and conceited.<sup>10</sup> This in fact points out a low-key but positive spirit of personality. Gao Xingjian's life is a reflection of such a state. Liu Zaifu interprets this state from the Chan's (禪) perspective.

The writers with the nature of the Chan must be low-key. They are passionate but this

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<sup>9</sup> Cao Changqing, "Comments on Gao Xingjian's Works." <http://caochangqing.com/big5/index.php?Content=21>(7 June 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Liu Zaifu, "On Gao Xingjian State," collected in *On Gao Xingjian* (2004). Taipei: Lianjing, 63.

passion is inner, sober-minded rather than high-toned and arrogant. The nature of the Chan is a strength that restrains aggression and fanaticism. Gao's "cold literature" and his restrained art in novel have benefited from the Chan sect. <sup>11</sup>

For Liu, "cold literature" should be a low-key literary state but doesn't lack a positive solicitous spirit for human's existential dilemma. In other words, this "coldness" is not really cold; rather, it only tends to be introverted in expressing feelings and emotions. Liu thinks this restrained passion is originated from the spirit of the Chan, representing a low-key artistic style, reflecting an introverted sentiment in personality.

Comparatively, Cao Changqing emphasizes that intellectuals should pay more attention to the hardships of the people, treat and cure the society, and enhance the spirit of benevolence. Gao Xingjian, however, advocates a detached philosophical stance to show his solicitude for the people in suffering. The former lays stress on actions but the latter on theory. Their difference is caused by their different point of view for the same topic. However, both identify with one point: a true life starts with an inner cultivation of personality. Without an inner cultivation and sustainable insistence, all the ideals to transform the society will become empty talks. In brief, a complete personality must be based on the perfect union of interior and exterior life. In other words, a true man must mean a harmonious union of his personified and socialized being.

Through this dialectical discussion, it may be said that Gao's without-ism has gone beyond a personal orientation of value. Rather, seen from the perspective of this research, it has been given a positive meaning on a transcendental level, namely the author wants to break up a psychological limitations caused by different isms and then opens up a wide literary platform to accommodate the same but not exclude the different. However, Gao tends to be a purely writer rather than a literary politician, for

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<sup>11</sup> Liu Zaifu, "Gao Xingjian and the Chan Nature of Writers," collected in *On Gao Xingjian* (2004). Taipei: Lianjing, 162.

his works concern human's inner world more than external society. A true writer must be able to transcend a moment or an ism in the human history to realize a deep insight into human and human nature. A true writer should be a broad-minded person, so he is willing to broaden rather than narrow the dimension of his thinking. A true writer should be a man who dare insist on his own values, so he never mixes his political stance with literary tendency, because literature pursues eternity but politics only means a certain ism. However, a true classic must be able to go beyond isms. This is why classics can prevail throughout the world and enlighten humans' mind and wisdom throughout the ages. In brief, a true literary work should be universal in theme, transcendental in disposition, and has an all-embracing literary breadth of mind. With such a literary mind, human beings can approach the infinity of human mind, break up various psychological restrictions, and then commonly create a positive spiritual space in the boundless world of literature.

However, the post-modern world has not provided us with a complete spiritual space. Instead, when the whole world is progressing into the globalisation in many fields, and when internet technology is developing at extremely fast speed, this world inevitably goes towards an either real or virtual interaction. It is impossible for people to live in isolation, because people need to complete many things through cooperation. At the same time, various collision caused by different nations, different races, different cultures, different fields, and different levels are inevitable, which have led and will constantly lead to the disintegration and fusion of various establishments.

In this sense, the controversy that Gao's works sparked off may be said to be of cross-nation, of cross-literature, and of cross-culture. So what it presents to us is a mixture of many voices at different levels: it is both Chinese and Western, both literary and cultural, and both social and spiritual. Thus the birth of the controversial Nobel winner is by no means an accidental event. Instead, it has a deep root in the conflicts of diversified values within the multi-cultural contexts in the contemporary world.

This essentially symbolizes a universal human spiritual dilemma in modern world: human's belief is constantly deconstructed and reconstructed in the clashes and fusion of diverse values. Thus, life is like playing chess or go, the more parameters one refers to, the more restrictions one has to consider, so, the more possibility one falls into deadlock. An individual involved in different references is no doubt stuck in various psychological conflicts. The self in crises may be compared to a multi-faceted mirror, with each facet reflecting one dimension of life. In the multi-dimensional personality, the self hesitates to affirm which is the right aspect with which one should identify. This is the common predicament that modern people have to face: they fail to find a truly universal thing in the integrated world to unify the increasingly decayed life and renew its personality.

Then, would it be possible to interpret Gao's works by unifying them into the common contexts of the East and the West? Alternatively, there must be something that can link people together and integrate the gradually decayed world, which is divided in the name of territory, system, race, religion, gender, and class, into a universal topic. This union is intended to discover a harmonious sound among different voices.

This is what this research seeks: building up a wide literary platform to realize a constructive communication between the East and the West. This platform should be able to bridge the two different patterns of culture to enhance a mutual understanding. Or this topic should be able to accommodate cross-cultural elements, which can serve as a mirror to reflect the interactive relationship between the self and the other.

Accordingly, this study proposes this theme on life in Gao's works as a common topic for the East and the West to know and understand each other. Its feasibility first lies in a fact that life to everybody means a grace from the boundless time and space so all the beings commonly have and cherish the landscape of life between Heaven and

Earth, regardless of nation, system, culture, race, religion, gender and class. Moreover, this topic constructs a theoretical framework to interpret life: life means a process, a secret, and a truth, so that to live means to experience this process, find out this secret, and explore this truth. However, our life is not isolated, needing others' participation in order to discover the self. Thus, this study attempts to explore a spiritual path from life to life, and open up a limitlessly wide space of life.

However, in the highly materialized and socialized modern world, the so-called life is exterior rather than interior, materialistic rather than spiritual, for people have been used to remembering their physical existence and social identity but increasingly forgetting the spirituality of the self. As a result, they all look like a copy of the same mould plate, with an "assumed identity" that the society has meticulously designed. This might be a beautiful mould but lacks soul, for it has lost a natural intelligence of life, with no more sensitive system of nerve to sense the thoughts and emotions of the world.

However, in Gao's novels, the moments of life can be felt so strongly that one can capture its every bit of pain and pleasure, for he has fused his real feelings and thoughts into his writings. His novels tend to reveal the inner world of the characters: this is a lonely feeling of a lonely man, a disquieting and disturbing soul constantly summoned by his dreams, and eventually emancipating himself from the reality.

Thinking in conflict is a strong message running through Gao's works. Thus one can often sense a soul struggling in ambivalent feelings. In this heart, there are two totally different psychological forces, the yearning for living and the gloom of death, mutually fighting to dominate the other. Each collision makes life experience a huge pain, and finally pushes it to a new rebirth. There is a tension in this fighting of life and death, driven by the desire of life, presenting an intense connotation of life. Here, life is no longer a fragile flesh but exhibits an expansive space of life, where as if we are able to approach the infinitude of life.

The 80<sup>th</sup> chapter in *Lingshan* describes this contradictory life as follows: “Life is vulnerable but its tenacious struggle is only rooted in an instinctive obstinacy.” In face of death, life’s physical existence is fragile. However, its strong spiritual existence is able to maintain its tenaciousness. It is the perseverance of life that enables people in difficulty to survive. Here, the author explores the protagonist’s inner psychology. As mentioned above, in his life surges two streams of forces: one is a negative force from various cultural fragmentations produced by postmodern spiritual dilemmas; the other is a positive force from a renewed life after struggling out of these fragmentations. Thus this life in crises can be seen as a spiritual epitome of modern people. It offers the self an opportunity to make a spiritual examination: how do people emancipate the imprisoned self and find the right way to life?

This question touches upon the universality of life: to emancipate the self from the pain of life means to confront, to endure, to think, to comprehend, and to transcend this pain. This embodies a positive potential of life. For this resilience or the strength of will, just as what Goethe said, “To see life as a restless process of disintegration and recovery.” At least two layers of meaning are implied in this maxim: life means a permanently restless process; life means to experience this constantly disintegrated and finally condensed process. In this sense, life has been given a deep connotation: despite many trial and tribulation, a developed personality will come to rise again.

However, to realize such a new personality must be based on various interactions with many others, to seek a mutual communication between the East and the West. In this sense, this research explores a subject as to how the self positions, observes, and understands the other. Then, how do we construct a harmonious interactive relationship between the self and the other? A golden rule in *Sunzi bingfa* (The Art of War) may provide us with a train of thought: to know oneself and know others, so one can always win. This is an open art of war, emphasizing the significance of the other to the self. Such an art of war can be adopted to construct a dialectical relationship



between the self and the other: only knowing how to properly position the self's relation with others can one make a proper judgment for others. In this relation, knowing the self may be said to be a precondition to know others. However, the road to the self is both the nearest and the farthest. Or, to approach the self is easier than to understand the self. Therefore it is by no means an easy thing to truly know the self, particularly to those who have a strong sense of superiority. They have been accustomed to overlooking, to taking it for granted that they are the center of focus, a symbol of authority. As a consequence, they use the same ruler to measure all. Here, there is a feasible method that has been ignored: people are expected to observe and judge others from displaced positions. Otherwise, what one sees will quite likely be something with bias. This is why our life is filled with various conflicts and contradiction.

In this sense, it is of necessity to find a right way to deal with the relationship between the self and the other. As a paired opposite, the self and the other are both two independent conceptions and an inseparable entity. In the western traditional philosophical dichotomy, the self and the other refer to as two concepts needing to be clearly defined in a certain framework in order to cognize them. In the traditional Chinese philosophical discourse, the self and the other, or the subject and the object, are generally seen as the two interrelated aspects of one unified entity. In this sense, it may be said that cultural difference is generally resulted from the territorization of concepts on different levels, such as various conflicts and contradictions caused by different ways of thinking, different modes of culture, and different perspectives of observation.

In the increasingly integrated world, however, the territorization of any conception in any field will possibly cause a biased view. This is originated from the self's mono-dimensional way of thinking, which will build up a centre for the self and exclude others outside the centre to consolidate the authority of the centre. In literary field, purely producing conceptions results in the territorizaion of conceptions, namely

its validity is generally restricted in a certain framework so this is a fragmented cognition rather than an integral entity.

However, the interaction of the world requires people able to walk out of the shadow of self-centredness and seek a contact and communication with others. It may be said that this is an extremely necessary ability for modern people to adapt themselves to this integrating world. Then, to what extent can we reduce the distance caused by territorized conceptions and reach this mutual contact and communication until the realization of harmony?

Let's take Gao's controversial prize as an example to further discuss this question. At the level of psychological cognition, this controversy reveals the conflict between two totally different ways of cognition. In other words, this controversy should be analyzed at the level of different cultural psychology. It has gone beyond the fact or event itself towards a psychological topic: it should be interpreted by referring to such psychological notions as "desire," "complex," "fantasy," and "intention". These conceptions reflect a psychological reflection or interaction between the self and the other. For example, Gao's eligibility as Nobel winner were heavily questioned by most intellectuals from China. Seen from Julia Lovell's point of view, the controversy is resulted from Chinese intellectuals' "desire" or "yearning" to represent the nation within world literature.<sup>12</sup> Instead, seen from China's intellectuals' perspectives, this controversy reflects their total "disillusionment" with western point of views for China, which is caused by a "superiority complex" that is called the "China fantasy."<sup>13</sup>

The two totally different views reflect two different perspectives of observation and different ways of understanding, caused by their different cultural backgrounds and different ways of thinking. This will become a general phenomenon in the process of

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<sup>12</sup> Julia Lovell, "Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize, and Chinese Intellectuals: Notes on the Aftermath of the Nobel Prize 2000" in *MCLC* 14, 2 (Fall 2002), 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 30-31.

contemporary cultural interaction and integration. However, there is no such an absolute criterion to judge one is superior to the other. Instead, it will be a desirable attitude for the self to know and understand the other by standing the other's position. This is a deeper psychological interactive cognition rather than a superficial unilateral take-it-for-granted. Its realization will conduce to the harmonious interaction and communication between the self and the other. For example, if western intellectuals truly grasp the cultural psychology of Chinese intellectuals<sup>14</sup>, it is not difficult at all for them to understand that their "desire" or "yearning" for Nobel Prize is mainly rooted in a natural national "pride" instead of "inferiority," and an instinctual intellectual "responsibility" instead of "complex." Similarly, if Chinese intellectuals thoroughly know the cultural psychology of western intellectuals, it is not hard at all for them to understand why the West's values highlights personified rather than socialized life, and why they stress human's awareness of independence rather than a thought of unification.

In this sense, it may be said that there is no absolute boundary between socialized and personalized life. A complete life must mean the constant development and renewal of a personified self in the socialized big background. This is because this universe can be compared to a big life, accommodating all the beings between Heaven and Earth. Though all the beings are myriad yet they share one heart, commonly feeling and enjoying the boundless landscape of time and space. In this sense, people should walk out of the shadow of self-importance and learn to accept those different things and people. This open and tolerant attitude towards life should develop into a new connotation of life in this new century. In this sense, cooperation will be the only right path for humans to co-exist in the world, and the cooperation is the common path for the myriad worlds to realize a relative harmony.

Is there a cultural pattern that can lead human beings to such a right road? This will be

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<sup>14</sup> In Chinese traditional culture, an intellectual usually spontaneously follows a noble value: to cultivate one's moral character, manage the family, administer a country, and achieve times of peace and prosperity.

an integrated cultural mode, which is able to accommodate all the positive cultural factors from different cultural ecology and is able to remove spontaneously all the negative elements. In brief, this should be a natural fusion of eastern and western excellent cultural elements. Life, as a universal topic, will bridge the two. In the following interpretation, Gao's works will provide such a platform to analyze and realize this attempt.

In this psychological analysis for life, desire will be seen as a symbol of life or an object to be observed and examined, and showed as a cooperation of a Chinese text and a psychoanalytical methodology, which will be elaborated in the following parts. In this mutual interpretative framework, the protagonist experiences the self, looks at the self, examines the self, and then gains an introspective self. However, life, as a convergence of two totally opposite streams of life, in this research, will be interpreted as a mutual restrain and mutual promotion between the two opposite mental forces. In this dynamical interaction, life will be given a positive meaning of mutual generation and mutual nourishment.

Such a balance in changes can be seen as a perfect union of the Eastern and Western culture. As we know, the West stresses the balance but the East highlights the changes. Can we unify the different elements into the same platform and realize a balance or harmony? Both the Eastern and Western theory can provide sufficient proofs for its feasibility. The core thought of *The Book of Changes* in Chinese culture is developed around the dynamical balance between 阴 /*Yin* (femininity) and 阳 /*Yang* (masculinity), the two vital forces in life. Such a balance is resulted from the mutual restriction and mutual achievement between *Yin* and *Yang*.

The Western culture has a corresponding theory to create this balance. Psychoanalyst Jung's archetype on Anima and Animus provide a theoretical prerequisite for such a harmonious personality. The French philosopher Bachelard further expounds this theory, in his *The Poetics of Reverie*, as the perfect union of the two opposite

personality after their fully idealizing the values of the world. These theories will be discussed in details in the following parts.

To sum up, it may be said that both the Western literary theory and Eastern philosophical view aim to explore a supreme values, to create a perfect personality, and to achieve a beautiful life. Especially for the decaying big life in modern world, it is more significant to explore and realize such an ideal. By analysing Gao's novels, this research will trace the psychological progression of a man's life to quest for a feasible path to a harmonious personality.

## 2. Gao's Works: A Journey to the Self

Gao Xingjian was born on 4 January 1940 in Ganzhou (Jiangxi Province) of China, with his family origin in Taizhou (Jiangsu Province). He was brought up to love writing and painting. In 1957 he entered the French Department of Beijing Foreign Studies University and worked as a translator after graduation in Foreign Language Publishing Bureau in 1962. He was sent to a cadre school in 1971 and then settled in a village as a teacher. He returned back to Foreign Language Publishing Bureau in 1975 and was appointed as an interpreter in China Writer Association in 1978. In 1979 he acted as the translator of Chinese writer delegation to France. In 1980 he was transferred to Beijing People's Art Theatre as a playwright. His *Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan* (Preliminary Exploration on the Skills of Modern Novel) (1981) initiated a debate on modernism in literary circles. His theatrical debut *Juedui xinbao* (Signal Alarm) (1982) successfully opened up an experimental play in China. But his *Chezhan* (Bus Stop) (1983) was banned during a campaign against "spiritual pollution." *Yeren* (Wild Man) (1985) led to a controversy and at the same time attracted international attention. In 1986 *Bian* (The Other Shore) was also prohibited. In 1987 he left China and settled down in Paris one year later. Through seven-year

efforts, his novel *Lingshan* was completed in 1989 in Paris and published in 1990 in Taiwan. *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (Buying my Grandpa a Fishing Rod) (1989) contains 17 short stories completed during 1980 to 1986. The autobiographical *Yige ren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible) was published in 1999. Moreover, Gao Xingjian as a traditional Chinese ink painter held about thirty international exhibitions throughout the world.<sup>15</sup>

This long list for Gao's experience of life conveys a feeling to us: he grows up in the changes of human affairs. Then, can he withstand the test of trials and tribulations in life? This interpretation for Gao Xingjian's works can serve as an answer to this question: life is a long journey or a process of constantly exploring the self. In this sense, life means a spiritual development more than a simple physical process of birth and death. Alternatively, life can be seen as a progression of repeatedly tempering and fully experiencing, full of conflicts and struggles. Though the vicissitudes of life make us painful, it offers us an opportunity to know and develop the self. It is the changes of life that make Gao's works somewhat nostalgic, somewhat bitter, somewhat cynical, somewhat narcissistic, and somewhat detached. Thus his works can be seen as a true record of his personal thoughts and emotions more than meticulously crafted literary works.

Accordingly, it may be said that Gao's works increasingly tend to explore the inner world of the self, of which perhaps he has not clearly become aware but has been practicing consciously and unconsciously. Life to us is more easily taken for granted to be a natural flow of time, needless to be given special attention. Like the author, he might not have probed into himself so deeply if he had never written such autobiographical books as *Lingshan* and *Yige ren de shengjing*. In this sense, writing is more a need to express than a profession to make a living, for he has regarded writing as a spiritual journey to the self, a monologue addressed to the self.

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<sup>15</sup> "Gao Xingjian's Life and Works," appendix to *Lingshan* (2001), Taipei: Lianjing, 551-552.

Gao Xingjian's writings are mainly involved in drama and novel. His experimental plays have won him a remarkable achievement in China and Europe. Some have been translated into different languages, well performed and widely commented western countries. In China, his subject matters mainly focus on social issues and traditional culture. The impressive "epic drama" *Yeren* led to a "dazzling" success. After *Yeren* was *Bian*—"a philosophical play as to how an individual survives in the society and obtains the salvation of soul."<sup>16</sup> Gao's exploration for inner life makes his theme, consciously and unconsciously, drift off from the "cognition for rationality" towards a "perceptual abstraction." From social rationality to personal perception, what Gao meditates has gradually deviated from social problems towards the psychological world of characters. His "Myth Ceremony Drama"<sup>17</sup>—*Shanghai jing zhuan* (Legend of Mountains and Seas) (1989) marks his successful exploration for the spirit of traditional Chinese folk culture.

Western theatrical theories have had a significant influence upon him. His theme tends to explore the subtleties of human mind and the ultimate meaning and value of life.<sup>18</sup> By virtue of the mode of theatrical expression, Gao Xingjian gradually turned to contemplate human's relation to the society and the world. What is the meaning of life in relation to the vastness of the world? What is the value of the lonely self in contrast to the boundless universe? Obviously, his meditations on life become wider and deeper, and tend to the exploration for the self. Similarly, his novels can evidence such a change.

Gao Xingjian's achievement in novels was not as notable as his plays before the prize. However, the meritorious award to a greater extent owes to his novels, in particular to

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<sup>16</sup> Zhao Yiheng, *Jianli yizhong xiandai chanju* (Towards a Modern Zen Theatre) (1999), Taipei: Erya, 141. Here, the author thinks that the philosophy and admonishment on collectivism have entirely disappeared in *Bian* compared with the philosophical play *Chezhan*, and its language has tended towards a way of expression for "Zen Buddhism."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 121. The author sees the play *Shanghai jing zhuan* as "Gao's ambitious attempt to reconstruct the epic of national myth."

<sup>18</sup> Hu Yaoheng, "My Appreciation and Analysis on Gao Xingjian's Play," *A Harvest of Hundred-Year Cultivation* (1995), Taipei: Dijiao, 3.

*Lingshan*. His middle and late novels tend to explore the protagonist's inner world. However, his early novels show his pursuit for "awareness of elitism" and bear a "complex of hero." He admitted frankly that he at that time favored a "strong literature" and was willing to write for "elites of nation" and eulogize their "tenacity" and "strenuousness" in face of the pains of life. *Hanye de xingchen* (Stars in Cold Night) (1978) and *Yizhi gezi jiao hongchuner* (A Pigeon Named Red Lip) (1980) were his two attempts on such a theme. The revolutionist in the former and the scientist in the latter rebuilt their life after surviving the Cultural Revolution. Though both passed away in the end, for Gao Xingjian, they represent the strong rather than the weak in life. It was the resilience of life that enabled China to have survived a disaster and started a new era, paving the way to the awakening and flourishing of Chinese Literature.<sup>19</sup>

From above, it can be seen that Gao Xingjian at that time ardently expected a new era and a new literature, a type of literature that sang high praise of strong people in life. That was totally different from his advocacy for "cold literature" and "without-ism" in his later works. What, then, makes him abandon his initial literary ideal and turn for the inner world of characters?

This change marks Gao's new cognition for the function of literature. In his prize lecture, Gao expresses his understanding for the criterion of literary values.

However, literature is neither an embellishment for power nor pursuits for social fashions. It has its own criterion of value, e.g. its aesthetic quality and style. The aesthetic that is closely linked with human's feelings and emotions is the only indispensable criterion for literary works.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Postscript" to *Yizhi gezi jiao hongchuner* (A Pigeon Named Red Lip) (1984), Beijing: Shiyue wenyi, 335-336.

<sup>20</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Wenxue de liyou (The Case for Literature)." Please refer to the appendix to *Lingshan* (2001), Taipei: Lianjing, 537; please also refer to *The Case for Literature* (2006) translated by Mabel Lee. Yale University Press.



This can be seen as Gao's affirmation for the value of literature. He opposes the politicization and popularization of literature and holds a positive attitude towards the aesthetic criterion of literary works. For him, the beauty of literature is embodied in its inner thoughts and emotions more than its exterior formalities. Such an aesthetic view suggests his concern and exploration for human's inner feelings and thoughts.

This can be seen as Gao's liberation from narrow literary functions. He sees writing as a mode of artistic expression and deeply enjoys this expression. By virtue of artistic expression, he seeks an insight into the inner mind of the human. In terms of subject matter, his drama and novel underwent a change from social problems through the spirit of folk culture finally toward the exploration of characters' psychology. This makes Gao's literary view take on an utterly different understanding for life and the society and the world. This reveals his philosophical shift from particularity to generality and his psychological transmutation from self-pursuit to self-examination. Moreover, this can be seen as Gao's pondering over the self's relation to others on a psychological time and space.

After having read through Gao Xingjian's novels and his personal experiences, it is not difficult to come to such a point: there is only one protagonist running through his different novels. It can be sensed that a male character with similar disposition dominates his different stories. This protagonist may be seen as "you," "I," "he" or "she" around us. In this sense, what Gao intends to present is not a specific man but an identity that can be shared by humans. This pronominal narrative pattern weakens the significance of name itself to humans but rather enhances the feasibility of humans' mutual observations at a psychological level.

Mabel Lee thus reads it as "pronouns as protagonist"<sup>21</sup> in one of her articles. In this way, the protagonist reflects the intrinsic nature of our life. What the author shows to

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<sup>21</sup> Mabel Lee, "Pronouns as Protagonists: On Gao Xingjian's Theories of Narration," *Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian* (2001), edited by Kwok-kan Tam, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 235.

us is a path to the self by constantly displacing the positions of the self. Every shift of pronoun narration opens up a new perspective to observe one dimension of life. Through constantly changing angles of narration, by referring to his own experiences of life, the author makes an overall observation and scrutiny for the development of the self. In Gao Xingjian's works, life manifests itself as a significant metaphor rather than a simple signifier of name, pointing to its multi-dimension and sharing the generality of human mind.

Such a mode of narration fits the subtle theme on the exploration of human mind, because it is able to reach the breadth of society and world and touch upon the depths of human mind. Its multidimensional changes form a mixed echo of many orchestral instruments, playing a complicated movement for the mind.

First of all, with the shifting of pronouns "you," "I," "he" or "she," what the characters present to readers is the mentality of the constantly changing mind. This may be analogized as a process of life's being integrated and recovered. During this process, each pronoun represents one dimension of the mind, either maintaining its own independency or performing multi-vocal resonance. Secondly, the displacement of pronouns generates a sense of distance between characters, which enables the self's "meditative visualization (neiguan)"<sup>22</sup> by observing the others. Such a psychological interaction not only enables an internally reflective observation for the self, but also realizes readers' displaced understanding for characters. The constantly shifting way of thinking requires readers to have both a good facility of sight and a good ability of comprehension; otherwise, they would probably fail to follow the leaping mode of thinking.

What's more, the pronoun's substitute for name reveals the instability and illusion of name. Indeed, a name to a person is no more than a symbol or signifier, thus it can be

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<sup>22</sup> It is usually used as a term of Taoism, and also as "inner sight" to refer to an inward-turned vision of the eyes to conduct a respiration of inner breath and realize the tranquility after meditation.

in constant shifting, but what is never changed is the nature of the consciousness of life, which is driven by desire and secretly working as an unconscious world of the mind. This may justify one perspective to look at life: what it gives us goes beyond what it appears to us, because the nature is hidden behind appearance. This is one reason that psychoanalysts devote themselves to exploring the truth of the mind, and that the artists seek to uncover the essence of artistic expression. This is “The Case for Literature,” as what Gao has titled in his speech, implying that the concern for human mind is an eternal literary topic that artists and writers explore restlessly. In other words, this suggests a huge change that the protagonist explores and examines the self, namely a psychological progression from rationality to perception, a cognitive shift from social awareness to individual mind, and an introverted meditation from reality to spirituality. Thus it can be said that this is a man’s spiritual journey, an awakening journey from a socialized, assigned, and imprisoned self to an emancipated, natural, and true self.

Based on what have been discussed above, it may be said that, by shifting narrative perspective, either in his drama or novel, Gao Xingjian enables his characters to actualize a psychological inquiry into each other, and acquire a perceptual cognition for life through inner observation for the self. Such a mental interaction between the self and the other makes it possible to attain a spiritual comprehension and transcendence for life. This is just what the author wishes to achieve by writing—let “feelings and senses” penetrate “the subtle and dark depths of human mind.” However, this kind of inner observation and contemplation for the self can only be realized by the contacts with various “others.” These others, in the following analysis for Gao’s novels, would be interpreted as a group of women with different characters and a culture with natural intelligence. Woman here, as an embodiment of human’s psychological origin, would be read as the psychological sediment of Gao’s experience of life, and as an indispensable reference that the protagonist ponders over life, the society and the world.

### 3. Theories Involved

This study attempts to interpret life at a symbolic level by analyzing Gao's novels. Life, here, is symbolized by human desire and represented by woman characters in Gao's novels. Thus this study can be seen as a psychoanalytical interpretation for life. Through probing into the world of woman's desire, this research aims at exploring a constructive relationship between the self and the other.

Here, woman is embodied as an indispensable human's natural aptitude instead of man's physical "fantasy." In Gao's novels, one can, directly or indirectly, sense his "woman complex" that can hardly be dismissed from his mind. Some may claim that it is developed from Gao's "sexual fantasy", others may argue that it is rooted in his "mother complex", even it may be assumed that it is resulted from his "love trauma". These points all try to find a key that can unlock all the mental secrets of the author by tracing back to some of his personal experiences.

Indeed, one can sense a feminine aura pervading through Gao's novels. This reflects a natural temperament of human mind, an instinctual tendency towards the spirituality of life. Gao's attachment to such naturalness of the self is shown as his protagonist's obsession with woman and his great interest in a culture with natural femininity. Through looking into the self in woman's desire, he discovers a permanent fate of human beings: it is the irrational female existence that embodies a powerful natural faculty of humans, a profound belief being latent in the depths of human mind, which nourishes, influences, constructs, and renews human personality.

Then, how is such a relationship between the protagonist and "she" constructed? By splitting the self into "I," "you," "he," and "she" respectively, the protagonist seeks to search and confirm an identity for the self in society. As for the writer "I," Gao has his

own understanding:

(It) may be the author himself, or equivalent to the narrator, or the characters in the works, either “he” or “you,” the subject as narrator can be divided into three (identities). The writer realizes his perception in the process of his search for a unique mode of narration.<sup>23</sup>

Here, Gao Xingjian affirms his mode of narration: the oneness of three identities, the author, the narrator, and the characters. When the author unifies the three into his works, it is hard to distinguish anyone from the other two, for they jointly form an integrated whole and cannot be separated from each other. In other terms, in the process of writing, the author has condensed them into one subject with multi-dimensional personality.

Taking *Lingshan* as an example, the critic Gang Gary Xu<sup>24</sup> holds a sensible view that pronouns “I,” “you,” “he” in Gao’s novels provide three perspectives to read, to understand, and to interpret Gao Xingjian as the autobiographer, the wanderer, and the author. What is “her” relation to the trinity writer then? Chapter 52 in *Lingshan* points out the mutually established relationship:

In the lengthy monologue, you are the object I talk to, the self who listens attentively to me.

You are only the shadow of me.

When I listen to myself—you, I let you create a she, because you are like me and also cannot bear the loneliness so you have to find a partner to talk.

So you talk to her, just like I talk to you.

She is derived from you, yet is an affirmation of myself.

You, the partner of my talking, transform my experiences and imaginations into your

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<sup>23</sup> Gao Xingjian, “Wenxue de liyou (The Case for Literature).” Please refer to the appendix to *Lingshan* (2001), Taipei: Lianjing, 544; please also refer to *The Case for Literature* (2006) translated by Mabel Lee. Yale University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Gang Gary Xu, “My Writing, Your Pain, and Her Trauma: Pronouns and (Gendered) Subjectivity in Gao Xingjian’s *Soul Mountain* and *One Man’s Bible*,” collected in *MCLC* 14, 2 (Fall 2002), 112.

relationship with her, and it is impossible to distinguish imagination from experience.<sup>25</sup>

Here, the author has created a reciprocally dependent relationship between characters in *Lingshan*. The relation implies a possibility, no matter which pronoun it is, “you” or “I” or “he”, each reflects one aspect of the protagonist or the author. Thus “he” and “she” respectively show the duality of the protagonist’s life: the former represents his rational self, searching for his social identity in the reality; the latter signifies his exploration for the spiritual self through the mirror of woman’s desire.

Such a mutual construction between the self and the other has been widely discussed in different fields. French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan points out that “man’s desire is the desire of the other”.<sup>26</sup> It is meant that subject must have “the other” as a reference to understand and affirm the subjectivity. To a greater degree, “the other” is referred to as the unconscious of subject, so the wishes of “the other” are in nature the reflections of subject’s unconscious. Accordingly, “the other”, as the bearer of the unconscious of subject, acts as a psychological image closely related to subject, not only filling the emptiness of subject but also mirroring the mentality of subject. Compared with Freud’s three-layered structure of personality, Lacan’s dialectical relationship between subject and object constitutes the mutuality between the self and the other. This is just like, as what Lacan has said, the two sides of one coin—one conditions the other.

In fact, Lacan’s theory implies a philosophical proposition, namely, the self as subject is not an independent existence; rather, his selfhood is always developed from his various relationships with other subjects; so they construct each other and depend on

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<sup>25</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan* (2001), 319. Please also refer to *Soul Mountain* (2000) translated by Mabel Lee. New York: Harper Collins. There are at least four reasons to explain why I adopted my own translation rather than the officially published English version. First of all, for a novel written in Chinese, the Chinese version represents the style of its original language. Secondly, all the translations mean a direct or indirect interpretation of texts on the basis of original language. Thirdly, my research focuses on exploring and analyzing the inner world of the protagonist, so I must follow a basic principle, e.g. to grasp and be true to the original state of his mind as much as possible and avoid distorting his true mental activities. Fourthly, Chinese is my native language so I am confident I can have a more exact and deeper understanding for its original connotation.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Lacan, “What is a picture?” *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (2004), London; New York, Karnac, 115.

each other. According to Lacan, the structure of language generates a tie, linking and establishing an interrelated relationship between different “others.” Therefore, it may be said that subject’s contact with “others” is always in changes, in a constant state of building and being built, positioning and being positioned. By means of such an interactive process, the selfhood of subject is confirmed. In the mutually constructed relationship, desire is seen as a core thing that links the transmutations from one to another. This is just like what Lacan says: “Desire is a ‘message’ both to and from the other.”<sup>27</sup>

As to this viewpoint, Paul Ricoeur, the most influential French philosopher in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thinks that one is always already an “other” to oneself, or “one becomes who one is through relations with the others.” For Ricoeur, the self is a dialectical notion with “double nature,” which is just like, as he says, the “two sides of the same sheet of paper,” each has the “embodied subjectivity” of the other.<sup>28</sup> His point is intended to prove the feasibility of “love and understanding” for both the self and others. In other words, to love others is in nature to love oneself, to understand others means to explore the self.

According to Ricoeur, one’s retrospection must be accompanied by attentively listening to others.<sup>29</sup> In his understanding, the self is never autonomous. One must seek to transcend oneself in order to discover, understand, and develop the self by virtue of various “others.” In other terms, the other, as a media of the self, in the real society, is usually seen as a greater variety of fields outside the self, including human, world, history, politics, culture, language etc. These others are respectively codified by various symbols and signals, establishing a corresponding relationship with the external world, so as to exchange, to communicate, to understand, to transform, and finally return to the self. Here, Ricoeur’s interpretation points towards an active cycle

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<sup>27</sup> Ellie Ragland Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (1986), Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 82.

<sup>28</sup> “Ethics” on Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: [www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu)

<sup>29</sup> Gao Xuanyang, “Dialogue • Cycle • Retrospection • Creation: To Mourn for Ricoeur,” <http://www.enphenomenology.com/0505302.htm>.

of self-development. This may also be understood as the self's multi-angled reference and retrospection through the others' reflected subjectivity.

A comparison between Lacan and Ricoeur may be made to further understand the relation of the self to the other, though they belong to different disciplinary fields. As a psychoanalyst, Lacan attempts to reveal the influence and domination of the other to the self, which becomes the origin of the self's obsession with the other, so what it represents is usually a voice of authority. Instead, Ricoeur as a humane philosopher intends to enhance a connection, an extension, and an interaction between the self and the other to establish a harmonious development. Psychoanalysis explores, discloses and analyzes the ways that human desire suffers the repressions from the society, so it tends to be close, empirical and analytical; whereas the concepts that philosopher Ricoeur proposes are open, interactive and retrospective. Both share the significance of the other to the development of the selfhood, yet Ricoeur stresses an interactive spirit between diverse fields and Lacan emphasizes a cultural influence upon the self by analyzing the structure of language.

Based on the discussions above, a mutually constructed gender mode in Gao Xingjian's novels could be explained in the following ways. When life is seen as a complete fusion of man and woman, desire can be interpreted as an interactive message transmitted between the self and the other, as an embodied subjectivity reflected by the interaction between subject and object, and as a positive cycle of the development of personality. Such an interactive relation between man and woman, between reality and mind, enables readers to experience and explore the invisible mentality of a visible being in real world.

In addition to the points of Lacan and Ricoeur, Jung's archetype on Animus and Anima provides this study with a complementary relationship between man and woman, which would be seen as a psychological construction between the protagonist and his heroine, and seen as a further theoretical guidance to interpret Gao's novels in



the following chapters.

For Jung, the self means a complete personality with paired oppositions, such as conscious and unconscious, heart and brain, good and evil etc. This shows both the complexity and potentiality of human mind.<sup>30</sup> In other words, a complete personality should be the combination of the self and the other; at the same time, the image of the other can exert a huge influence on the development of the self's personality. For Jung, a man's inner personality bears a personified woman image named as Anima; similarly, a male disposition termed as Animus could exert an influence upon woman's personality.

Accordingly, while the conscious personality of a woman is, or should be, feminine in agreement with her sex, her unconscious counterpart will be masculine, symbolized in dreams by the figure of a man. This figure, which Jung calls the animus, will carry the other half of this pair of opposites, both of which are necessary to psychological completeness. With the man the situation is reversed. His conscious is masculine, but his unconscious counterpart is feminine. Jung calls it the anima.<sup>31</sup>

It follows that Anima provides femininity for man's inner world, and Animus replenishes masculinity for woman's psychology. Both jointly constitute the completeness of human personality by complementing each other.

The complementariness of Anima and Animus agrees essentially with the mutual construction of the self and the other. Carlos Rojas<sup>32</sup> thinks that the heroine in Gao Xingjian's novels can serve as "a foil" to construct the protagonist's identity, or as "a

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<sup>30</sup> Eleanor Bertine, "The Collected Papers of Eleanor Bertine," edited by Elizabeth C. Rohrbach, in *Jung's Contribution to our Time*, Published by G.P.Putnam's Sons for The C.G.Jung Foundation For Analytical Psychology, INC., (New York, 1967), 102.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 102

<sup>32</sup> Carlos Rojas, "Without [Femin]ism: Femininity as Axis of Alterity and Desire in Gao Xingjian's *One Man's Bible*," collected in *MCLC* 14,2 (Fall 2002), 186-189. Here, Carlos argues that the narrator throughout the novel uses a variety of feminine figures as a foil to develop his own identity, or as figurative screens onto which different aspects of his subjectivity may be projected.

figurative screen” onto which his different subjectivity could be projected. It could be said that Carlos pointed out the important role of Gao’s heroine in the construction of the protagonist’s identity. In this research’s view, however, this psychological interpretative structure is interactive rather than oneway, aims to realize a mutually explore and mutually cognize. In other words, only interactive cognition can develop and realize a complete personality.

Woman, in Gao’s works, can also be interpreted as a spirit of personality with natural intelligence, which nourishes and nurtures the development of the protagonist’s personality. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, in his work *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), holds the view that the existence of Anima leads Animus to a state of reverie, which is of help to re-construct Animus’ values in real society. The protagonist in Gao’s novels is a man with the temperament of a poet, frequently in the state of “reverie,” exploring a psychological “poetics” of his own. By virtue of memory, imagination, illusion, reverie, conjecture etc, he reviews his past to find a spiritual shelter for his mind in the real world.

“Reverie,” in the philosopher’s eyes, can be seen as an active strength, which can give the mind an ability to imagine freely. Bachelard believes that the pure memory in childhood comes back to nourish reverie as a grace from the non-life that helps us live an instant on the edge of life, which returns us the delicate sentiments, and enables us to gain consolation after experiencing those ancient griefs in reality.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, when these appealing moments that had ever deeply stirred our feelings revive at the bottom of memory, it will return again to us the vitality of life. This is the beauty of those cheerful moments in our inner life. How can we ignore such a psychological beauty when we feel a deep freedom and relief?

In this sense, reverie has a power of arousing the vitality of life and creates the magic of curing mental trauma. It brings us back to ardent old days, where those experienced

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<sup>33</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “Reveries toward Childhood,” *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 116.

and imagined events are able to revive, where the mind becomes no longer wandering, and where one can feel a sense of homecoming, of shelter, and of peace. Psychoanalysts may say that it is in reverie that people are able to feel the tranquility of the mind, because they have returned to their true state of being, without any spiritual burden from the reality. To a poet, however, such a state of mind is more creative than pathological. This seems to be able to explain the greatness of some great artists: reverie stimulates and nourishes their creativity, which has become an origin of a beautiful life.

Tracing the past through memory is a subject that both philosophers and writers cherish. Through his *In Search of Lost Time*, French writer Marcel Proust seeks to testify a truth: everything around us is in eternally elapsing so only memory is solidified as the quintessence of life, for the true paradise is the one that has been lost.

Such a spiritual traveling to the past reviews Proust's lost time, annotates Bachelard's "poetics of reverie," and reflects the spiritual pursuit of Gao's protagonist. Compared with our socialized personality, the protagonist's rumination on our subtle life reveals one truth of life: the society assigns life an "assumed identity" but memory returns to our life its original beautiful connotation.

In this sense, Bachelard has constructed for every dreamer a poetics to read the self and cherish the other. This is an interactive poetics, orienting towards a path to a harmonious beautiful life. What is the dream of which the dreamer is dreaming then? How does the dreamer dream? Why does the dreamer dream?

For Bachelard, Animus as an artist imagines and constructs a personality for the self by projecting his desires onto Anima:

In fact, it seems to us unquestionable that an utterance remains attached to the most distant, to the most obscure desires which stir the human psychism in its depths. The subconscious

is ceaselessly murmuring, and it is by listening to these murmurs that one hears its truth. Sometimes desires carry on a dialogue within us—desires? Memories perhaps or reminiscences made out of unfinished dreams?—a man and a woman are speaking in the solitude of our being.<sup>34</sup>

Reverie originates from human desires. It is a yearning from deep subconscious, or an obsession with the truth of inner life. However, life is so close to us that we easily ignore its existence; or, life is so distant from us that we have to approach its existence by “others.” This is why we have Anima and Animus: they construct each other and need each other. Here, Bachelard intends to point out that man tries to comprehend his own inner world by finding an “other” in his reverie. This is a man in reverie, who is “dreaming” and “listening to” his Anima; only in this way can he more deeply comprehend his own spiritual world, and only the coming of Anima enables him to enter a deep contemplation on his self and fully enjoy a peaceful bliss of mind:

In brief, it is the task of the animus’s memory to tell the facts well in the objectivity of a life’s history. But the animus is the outside man, the man who needs others in order to think. Who will help us to find the world of the intimate psychological values which is within us? The more I read poets, the more comfort and peace I find in the reveries of memory. Poets help us cherish our anima happiness.<sup>35</sup>

As an external man, Animus needs Anima’s participation to regain his “psychological values.” Dreaming of Anima is just like reading works of poets, bringing to Animus a deep peace and content. Bachelard believes that the existence of Anima has composed a “psychological poem” for our mind, and so the “poetics of reverie” is exactly the “poetics of Anima.” She evokes his reverie with the enthusiasm of poetry, which allows him to dream and imagine freely in the vastness of the world, fully enjoying the fragrance of her enchanting heart.

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<sup>34</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “Reveries on Reverie (“Animus”-“Anima”),” *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 58-59.

<sup>35</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “Reveries toward Childhood,” *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 105.

The tranquil images, gifts from this great insouciance which is the essence of the feminine, sustain and balance themselves in the peace of the anima. These images melt together in intimate warmth, in the constant softness where the nucleus of the feminine bathes in every soul. <sup>36</sup>

It is a happy thing for Animus to dream of Anima because she is a gift from the tranquil mind, being symbolic of the quintessence of femininity. She dwells in Animus's memory and reverie, freeing him from loneliness and worries, balancing his ambition and rationality. She is seen as a sustainable existence of our inner world; his mind would become tough, restless and chaotic without her participation. Instead, surrounded by her aroma, Animus is just far away from various "schemes and anxieties" in the human world and attains the calmness and tranquility of the mind.

According to Bachelard, the artists as poets are the dreamers who enter into reverie most easily, for their works often describe the fragments of childhood events: "The reverie which the writer leads in real life has all the oscillations of childhood reveries between the real and the unreal, between real life and imaginary life."<sup>37</sup> The reverie of childhood between the real and the past diminishes the poet's melancholy for the real but deepens his hope for the future.

The protagonist in Gao's novels is a dreamer of childhood. By virtue of the memories of childhood, he condenses the past and the future into current moments of life. As if various worries and anxieties have been transcended, his spirit can sail freely in the boundless time and space. In such a natural state of mind, life revives its original vitality and creativity, extending itself as far as it can reach. It follows that Animus's reverie on Anima has constructed a metaphor, which symbolizes humans' spiritual needs, or reveals an eternal nostalgia that our mind has for warmth, tranquility and

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<sup>36</sup> Gaston Bachelard, "Reveries on Reverie ("Animus"- "Anima")," *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 64.

<sup>37</sup> Gaston Bachelard, "Reveries toward Childhood," *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 123.

peace.

These theories proposed by Lacan, Jung and Bachelard have jointly constructed an interactive interpretative framework for this research: the self's reverie in other's desire. It reflects and reveals the protagonist's spiritual journey to the self through other. Lacan's theory on subject and object forms a psychological foundation for the interaction between the self and the other. Ricoeur's discussion on the self and the other develops his positive humanistic spirit through this interaction. Bachelard's poetics of reverie lifts human mind to a level of transcendence. Such a mode of construction would be employed in the following chapters to read and analyze the protagonist's understanding for life. In other words, a transcendental cognition of life will be established by placing the self in different interpretative contexts.

To sum up, life, to the self, means a dream; to the society, it represents an identity. The former is symbolic of freedom but the latter of responsibility. Gao Xingjian's protagonist can be interpreted as a man who pursues his dream in the real society. Can he finally break through his psychological bondage to reach the other shore? This paper would be divided into an introduction, four main chapters, and a conclusion to discuss Gao's novels. Introductory remarks serve as a general introduction to this research in terms of background, question, proposal, aim, method, theories related, as well as division of content. Chapter one interprets Gao's earlier novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (Buying my Grandpa a Fishing Rod) as woman's repressed desire under the ruling of the patriarchy. Chapter two symbolically reveals the self-awakening of the protagonist under the influence of a culture with natural intelligence in *Lingshan* (Soul Mountain). Chapter three discusses Gao's *Yige ren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible) to demonstrate the re-construction of personality at post-modern stage. Chapter four tries to construct the aesthetics of desire for life by discussing Gao's style of language as well as his later novel *Shunjian* (A Moment) (1999). Conclusion summarizes what have been discussed and promotes life to a higher level by Wang Guowei's "Jingjie Shuo," which enables a "poetics of life."

## Chapter One

### *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*

#### (Buying my Grandpa a Fishing Rod)

#### ——The Distortion of Personality in Patriarchy

#### 4. The Protagonist: Dreamer of Childhood

The protagonist often dreams of the world like a child. Dreaming can lead him to the impressiveness of the world, nourishing the source of his reverie, stimulating the vitality of his life, returning to him the pureness and innocence of childhood. In *The Poetics of Reverie*, the philosopher Bachelard gives a poetic description of the innocent return: “The root of the grandeur of the world plunges into a childhood. For man, the world begins with a revolution of the soul which very often goes back to a childhood.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, he is deeply convinced that looking back to childhood is one of our most cherished dreams and hopes in this life, because it is just “like a forgotten fire, a childhood can always flare up again within us.”<sup>39</sup>

To Bachelard, recollecting childhood presents the soul with a totally new world, which is tantamount to a spiritual revolution. Therefore childhood can be seen as the root that people is used to looking back to old days. It is always there, taking on to us the grandeur of the world and the hope that the grand world brings to us, which re-kindles the dreamer’s ardour for life. It may thus be said that revisiting childhood re-creates for us a new world, a world associated with innocence and simplicity, from which one has grown into sophistication and to which one would ultimately return. Gao Xingjian has created such a dreamer of childhood in his early novel *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*.

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<sup>38</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “Reveries toward Childhood,” *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 103.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.104.

The protagonist “I” is a man who ardently loves life. He is fond of music, interested in literature, and cherishes the memories of old days. All this has become the sources of his reverie, so he can be seen as a typical dreamer defined by Bachelard. Gao Xingjian’s short story *Pengyou* (Friend), completed in 1980, describes the meeting of two men after many years’ separation from each other and their warm review for their past. It is a symphony that reminds them of an old time:

I hum a piece of theme song on strenuous exploration and ardent pursuit for life. You nod repeatedly. That is a rapidly rising rhythm, disconnects then, again rapidly rises. It is a call of passion for future, ideal, as well as brilliant life. Yes, yes, it kindles me, and you. This is a spirit closely tied between us; it remains the same after thirteen years, after both have gone through separations and unions.<sup>40</sup>

Here, their comprehension for life is led by music. By virtue of music, they returned back to their youth. This piece of music conveys a spirit, a spirit that it is impossible to be eradicated as time goes by. The gradually weakening rhythm that was interrupted by the strong roaring of main rhythm has eventually survived. This is just like their pursuits for life: passionately dreaming, repeatedly losing, tenaciously fighting, persistently exploring, in an effort to find a way of their own:

...The music has so many levels and so complex structure. In unharmonious roaring, one and half scale’s unperceivable rising fought very hard to form but lost again. But it immediately appeared again in the roaring, distinctly, marching stably, and again was broke up by rapid and unharmonious thundering. However, this rhythm rises again out of the complex, strenuous struggle to realize, to display, and to tread out a solid path.<sup>41</sup>

The weaker scale in music tries to fight and survive the overwhelming roaring of the

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<sup>40</sup> Gao Xingjian, “*Pengyou* (Friend),” collected in the novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (Buying my Grandpa a Fishing Rod) (1989), Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 6.



strong to give out its own sound, which is symbolic of a persistent effort of those unyielding seekers in face of difficult situation in life. In this sense, it may be said that their persevering pursuit for life can be compared to this rhythm in rises and falls, metaphorically demonstrating their dreams and efforts, pursuits and hardships, pains and gains.

“This is a poem!” You sigh.

“It can only be said to be a mood of a poem, but not be able to exactly compose.”

“This is a sad and ominous dream.” You ridicule.

“An obsolete dream too.” I say. “But it is always kept in the mind as a warm memory.”<sup>42</sup>

They recollect the past in music. That was a sentimental poem, or an old dream. However, what life contains is not purely the pleasure of enjoyable poems but also filled with struggle, suffering, and sadness. It may be said that what the memory presented to them are personal experiences, dreams of life, an unlucky history, and some fragments of life, as well as a warm nostalgia. For “I,” these old events have gradually been forgotten, only leaving somewhat indescribable sentiments and moods, lingering in the memory.

The liking for a powerful music indicates that the protagonist used to be an optimist in life. Similarly, Gao’s early novels tend to portray strong characters in difficulty. The author at that time was both idealistic and optimistic, which was, to a greater extent, influenced by his time. In the late 1970s, China ended a political catastrophe, stepping into a new era. Just like gaining a new birth, people were sincerely looking forward to a new future. A promising era naturally produced many idealistic followers, who aspired to a meaningful life and a free expression in literature.

Though there are multitudes of memories in life, people have a habit to start from their childhood. In Bachelard’s definition, “Childhood is a human water, a water

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 7.

which comes out of the shadows. This childhood in the mists and glimmers, this life in the slowness of limbo gives us a certain layer of births.”<sup>43</sup> Here, again, Bachelard gives children the quality of water—a beautiful original time of human nature, a time of life as clean and pure as water. For him, water is a symbol of the spirit of Anima, presenting a pleasant quietness and warmth in Animus’s reverie.

The misty perception of life might be from the vestiges of previous life or from the early dawn of this life. On the cosmological level, childhood can be seen as a transitional period in life, linking past life and present life and giving a hint for the future. On the dimension of time, it is getting farther and farther from the current dreamer. However, on the psychological level, it is signified as a permanently brilliant quality of human, quietly flowing out of the shadows of human nature. Here, the image of water symbolizes human’s untraceable innocent time, which always reminds us of various attributes of describing water: stillness, simplicity, purity, and serenity.

Gao’s protagonist can be seen as such a dreamer, an artist in reverie. He seeks the tranquility and transcendence of the mind by looking back to the old events of childhood. In Gao’s novel *Huadou* (Flowerbean) (1982), the protagonist “I” goes back to the past in an autumn rain:

Because it is autumn, because it is misty and rainy, because there has never been such a leisure time to think of childhood, so that all this awakens so many memories. Drizzle drops, misty and soundless. It evokes a melancholy mood and mixes with quietness...It has never been like this moment, deeply sinking into the recollection of past events.<sup>44</sup>

For a dreamer, a misty rainy day is the best time to think of the past. The mistiness awakes countless sentiments within him. However, the sentiment in memory is quiet but not sorrowful, only silently pervading in the heart, as if thin rain is dripping into

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<sup>43</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “Reveries toward Childhood,” *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 112.

<sup>44</sup> Gao Xingjian, “*Huadou* (Flowerbean),” finished on July 14<sup>th</sup> 1982 and collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (1989). Taipei: Lianhe Wenxue, 106.

the mud, secretly moistening his aging worldly heart. This is the very charm of the passage of time of childhood: the heart always preserves a place that never becomes withered even if the physical body would turn into withered leaves. To the sophisticated heart, is there anything else that may be as cordial and innocent as returning back to childhood?

For Jung, *archetype* is characterized by its ability of providing psychological vitality for any activated activity. Based on this point, Bachelard interprets childhood as an archetype. For him, childhood is “like a real archetype, the archetype of simple happiness,” and also, “it is a water, a fire which becomes a light, causes a great abundance of fundamental archetypes...providing a poetic harmony between man and the universe.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, he is deeply convinced that “the archetypes are reserves of enthusiasm which help us believe in the world, love the world, and create our world...so each archetype is an opening on the world, an invitation to the world. From each opening bursts forth a reverie of flight.”<sup>46</sup> In the eyes of poets, the childhood as an archetype is given the most tranquil and most brilliant metaphors of “water and fire,” for they are pregnant with simplicity and enthusiasm, naturalness and openness, and vitality and creativity. As what is stated, if childhood is the “principle of deep life” within us, then, to make a poetic archetypal analysis for it will be given a meaning beyond our measurement:

If the word “analysis” must have a meaning when one is touching a childhood, it is then necessary to say that one analyzes a childhood better with poems than with memories, better with reveries than with facts. It is meaningful, we believe, to speak of a poetic analysis of man. The psychologists do not know everything. Poets have other insights into man.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “Reveries toward Childhood,” *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 123-124.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 124.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 124-125.

Here, Bachelard thinks that it is meaningful to make a poetic analysis for childhood and people in childhood. This is because one has to deeply dream of childhood in order to more deeply comprehend the nature that childhood gives each person. In Gao Xingjian's novels, the protagonist is not only an obsessive dreamer of childhood but also a man with poetical temperament, which makes him become the most perfect dreamer that Bachelard desires. For Bachelard, poets are more suitable to make a poetic analysis of man, which is different from the analysis that psychoanalysts make for man's repressed desire. This is because poets are inborn to have a deeper insight into human nature: they have a sensitive aptitude to sense and comprehend the beauty and brilliance within us. Instead, the psychoanalysts are good at discovering the dark side within us because they cognize man's inner world by analyzing the socialized man.

The protagonist in Gao Xingjian's early novels has a habitual nostalgia for the old events in childhood, through which he can make a deep introspection and meditation on present life, through which he can return to the serenity of his heart. Similarly, this is what Bachelard intends to realize by *The Poetics of Reverie*: the poet or artist in reverie, the poems of the poet, or the works of the writer, as well as the analysis of poems by readers or interpreters, jointly construct a kind of poetics for life.

However, that does not simply mean a process of writing, reading and interpreting, but also reveals people's need for psychological gratification—a desire to feel and to be felt. In a sense, it shows a fact that man has an instinct to express what is thought and felt, and at the same time release what is repressed. Accordingly, Gao Xingjian's protagonist, or the author Gao Xingjian himself, in fact acts as a dreamer in reverie, a listener to himself, and an interpreter to his inner world. By looking back to the past, he tries to re-construct the values for his life—his own “poetics of reverie.”

## 5. Mother: Origin of Life

Mother is an origin of mystery and warmth in life. She is seen as a symbol of solicitude and return. All the original dreams in life are rooted in her and the ultimate nostalgic is for her. Hence the attachment to mother, like an obsessive destiny, is hidden in each heart in the worldly world. Especially for a wanderer, mother is given a symbolic meaning, as solid as the Great Land and valued as the most respected virtue. This is because the wanderers live away from home and have no home in spirit. Therefore, mother or motherland to each wanderer is symbolic of home, hometown and homeland. Every child in wandering longs for a place to settle down this soul. The following dialogue in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* reflects the protagonist's inner loneliness and long for a sprirual home.

Whom are you talking to?

You are talking to yourself, to the "you" in your childhood.

That naked child?

That naked soul.

Do you have a soul?

I hope so. Otherwise this world would be too lonely.

Are you lonely?

Yes, in this world.

Which world?

An inner world that is not known by people.

Do you have an inner world?

I hope so. Only in this world can you become free.<sup>48</sup>

This is a conversation between the protagonist "you" and the "you" in his childhood. The former represents his present existence in reality, lonely and repressed; the latter is pictured as an innocent child, a symbol of his spiritual world. This is actually his

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<sup>48</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Geiwo laoye mai yugan," collected in the novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (1989), Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 256-257. Please also refer to Mabel Lee's English version for *Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* (2004). Flamingo: 110.

soliloquy. The socialized “you” stands opposite to the reflected spiritual “you,” observing and examining the reflected inner world of your own. The “you” in the reality longs for a spiritual world, a pure land in which a never-become-old child dwells, in which your body is no longer an empty shell in the human world, and in which “you” would be given the realness and freedom of life.

This conversation may be seen as an allusion to life. Life is destined to be a lonely journey in the human world, an exploratory journey from exterior self to interior self. Each of us undertakes the journey only to confirm an assumption of life: what is the self? The self is a multi-dimensional being, hidden in the depths of our life. The cognition to the self is a process of constantly understanding life. As a child, the self has found its obsession with mother because she is the origin of life. The glory of mother is first credited to her quietness and benevolence, so the attachment for mother reflects human instinctual escape from garrulousness and schemes and permanent craving for peace and wisdom.

Psychoanalyst Freud initially adopted the term “Oedipus Complex” to explain the son’s attachment to his mother. Threatened by the rigidity of the patriarchal ethics symbolic of social laws, the son has to repress the desire codified as a disgrace, which essentially accounts for the distorted personality. According to Lacan, in the “mirror stage” of an infant, the image of mother constitutes the infant’s initial reference for self-recognition. Here, the image of mother in the mirror is regarded as a “stable power”, which significantly influences the growth of the infant. Alternatively, it is the stage of self-confirmation in the mirror that gives rise to the first spiritual separation of the infant since his physical separation from his mother. In this sense, mother is symbolized as a spiritual strength, which exerts a significant influence upon a child’s life.

In contrast to Lacan’s theory on the “mirror stage,” Jung employs a notion “archetype” to explain the relationship between the son and the mother. On the one

hand, “mother complex” is built upon “mother archetype,” so the mother’s influence on the son can be traced back to early childhood;<sup>49</sup> on the other hand, Jung points out that mother is seen as one of various Anima’s variants. For the son, Anima is concealed in the dominating power of the mother. She leaves him with a sentimental attachment that lasts throughout his life and seriously impairs the fate of the adult, and even she is able to spur him on to the highest flights.<sup>50</sup> From which it could be seen that the decisively influential power from mother to the son indicates a complicated psychological interaction between the self and the other: it serves as both the son’s inseparable attachment to the mother and the mother’s flexible bondage to the son.

It is psychological fact that as soon as we touch on these identifications we enter the realm of the syzygies the paired opposites, where the One is never separated from the Other, its antithesis. It is a field of personal experience which leads directly to the experience of individuation, the attainment of the self.<sup>51</sup>

Compared with Lacan’s mother’s stable influence on the infant’s self-recognition, Jung’s “paired opposites” influences the son’s self-attainment and underlies his ambivalent feeling for the mother. From the very beginning, the mother has had a “decisively symbolical significance” for a man. Therefore, he has a strong tendency to idealize his mother as a perfect image; at the same time there are “secret fears” in his unconscious, morally or personally, forcing him to flee from it. This view accounts for the subtle and capricious relationship between Gao’s protagonist and women he encountered.

Gao’s protagonist is obsessed with his childhood time spent with his mother, and with describing his encounters with various women in his adulthood. His attachment to woman may be interpreted from two aspects. For one instance, mother-image, as a

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<sup>49</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, “Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype,” *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung* (1968), Volume 9, Part I, London: Routledge, Par. 161, P.85.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Par. 61, P.29

<sup>51</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious,” *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung* (1968), Volume 9, Part I, London: Routledge, Par. 194, P.106.

conscious or unconscious reference in his life, has been inscribed in his memory; for the other, the permanent loss of mother has collapsed his reliable spiritual pillar. Therefore, his incurably searching for an idealized perfect woman is, on the one hand, intended to re-discover the solidified principle of values in his heart, which had been deeply influenced by his mother; on the other hand, this complicated feeling actually reflects his strong desire for love as well as his ineffectualness after the loss of love.

The short novel *Muqin* (Mother)<sup>52</sup> looks back on some old events in his life, an old time that the protagonist “you” has spent with his mother. In his memory, his mother is an idealistic woman. She is a model worker, a loving mother, a virtuous wife, and a good daughter. She is an active and responsible worker and a daughter with filial devotion. She sends living expenses back home to her grandmother every month however hard her life becomes. During the Three Years of Natural Disasters, she would rather suffer starving but kept the limited eggs and meat tickets until her son’s return for a family union.

In the eyes of the son, his mother was a strong woman. During his father’s unemployment and when her son was nearly dying young, she tided over the family by selling off her jewellery or by borrowing from others. She kept watching by the son’s bedside. She went around for making a living. For the son, it was her tenacity and resilience that enabled the declining family to go through various difficulties.

For the protagonist, his mother is an idealistic woman with noble characters and significantly influences his whole life. He has been accumulating his attachment for his mother since his childhood. In his eyes she is the beauty of beauties. This could be proved by his first peeping at her nice body while she was having a shower, and by her patiently teaching him to learn, to paint, to keep a diary, to sing songs, and to perform plays. All of these have jointly led to his present achievements. He thinks of

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<sup>52</sup> Gao Xingjian, “*Muqin* (Mother),” completed in 1983, collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (1989). Taipei: Lianhe wenxue.



an old picture in which she wears a “seersucker gown spotted with yellow flowers.” Her beauty and goodness have been inscribed in the daily events and some moments of life. For the son, she has been solidified as some references that have impossibly been transcended.

For the mother, the son is always the beloved, so what she gives to him is the deepest and the most selfless. As a son, “you” freely enjoys her benevolent love but neglects what she needs. She passed away because of overworking. But she only wanted to have more off-duty time to stay with her son by doing more extra work.

Nonetheless, “you” even rarely thinks of the mother in the nether world. In contrast to mother’s magnanimity, “you” deeply feels regretful for your selfishness and indifference. “You” blames yourself for your mercilessness and hates that “you” is an unworthy son. The novel *Muqin* in fact serves as a memorial speech to repent a son’s negligence for his filial duty:

You bore an unworthy son. Those years he has been working for himself, with nobody in his heart except his career. He is a callous and selfish man...a man who has forgotten his mother...hoping he is able to have a little of your forgiveness...I think I should kneel down for long in front of parents’ grave, paying my respects to the parents who gave birth to us and brought us up. That is a need of the soul. Ancients also could express themselves by composing and reciting, as it was also necessary to weep and wail by elegy. However I did not kneel down nor did I wail, which again shows my insignificance...<sup>53</sup>

Deep grief often comes after one has lost the beloved. Love can never be regained though long kneeling down and mournfully weeping might be able to reduce the bitterness of his mother in the nether world. Nonetheless, “you” neither knelt down nor wailed. So the protagonist confesses that he is an “insignificant,” “callous,” “selfish” and “unreasonable” man. He uses these harsh words to blame himself. Only

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<sup>53</sup> Gao Xingjian, “*Muqin*,” collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (1989), Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 156-164.

## Abstract

This paper is a tentative exploration on the spirituality of life. In this topic on life, desire is seen as a symbol of life, embodied by woman and interpreted by Gao Xingjian's novels.

Life, to the self, means a dream; to the society, it represents an identity. Dream is immanent but identity is assumed, and so the former is natural and the latter is given. This is why our life is often full of contradictions. How do we confront and balance these contradictions? The protagonist in Gao Xingjian's novels could be read as a man who pursues his dream in the real society. He is often disturbed by the dilemma between free will and social establishments. Can he finally find a feasible way to balance the contradiction? This paper would be divided into an introduction, four main chapters, and a conclusion to explore these questions. Introductory remarks include a general introduction to this research in terms of background, question, proposal, aim, method, theories, as well as division of content. Chapter one interprets Gao's earlier novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (Buying my Grandpa a Fishing Rod) as woman's repressed desire under the ruling of the patriarchy. Chapter two symbolically reveals the self-awakening of the protagonist under the influence of a culture attributed with femininity in *Lingshan* (Soul Mountain). Chapter three discusses Gao's *Yigeren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible) to demonstrate the re-construction of personality at post-modern stage. Chapter four tries to construct a breed of aesthetics of desire for life by discussing Gao's style of language and interpreting his later novel *Shunjian* (A Moment) (1999). Conclusion summarizes what has been discussed and promotes life to a higher level by Wang Guowei's "Jingjie Shuo (plane of life)," which enables a "poetics of life."

To sum up, the female existence attributed with natural intelligence is a potential that can balance the rationality of the society and an ultimate path towards a harmonious human nature.

in this way can he feel slightly peaceful in his heart.

By virtue of this memorial speech, the protagonist deeply mourns his mother's loss. Here, the author employs almost all the pronouns, such as "you," "he," "I," and "us" to express a son's deep pain. This makes us feel it indeed an elegy, expressing the grief of the mourner through different ways—lamenting, self-blaming, confessing, as well as sighing.

Though his mother passed away, she, as a consolation, always dwells in the depths of his heart. He perhaps forgets his mother when he fights for life, but the warmth from mother has been deeply inscribed in his heart since he was a child, and has already changed into his present attachment for her:

Don't go, stay with me, mother! I am the same as you, tired, extremely tired! Those years, I have been struggling in the swirls of life, ups and downs, at last climbing up on the shore again. Mother, I need your comfort, just like the way that I snuggled into your arms when I was young.<sup>54</sup>

The son tries to find a solace from his departed mother. On the one hand, he feels extremely regretful for his failing to fulfill his filial duty as a son for his mother; on the other hand, mother has been the only one on whom he can entirely trust and depend, in particular when he suffers setbacks in the reality. Mother, to every son, can be compared to a solid and encompassing land, from which the remorseful son can ask for forgiveness. Mother, to all the beings, is always eulogized as a great and ordinary figure with a quality of forbearance, in which the lonely son can seek solace.

It is true that a man might encounter many women in his whole life, but his mother would invariably be the only irreplaceable one in his heart. Nobody is able to give him love like what his mother gives him. It follows that mother's love for son is

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 161.

permanent and unconditional. She is always there, being ready to give her love and support, in however easy or difficult circumstance.

In this sense, it may be said that “mother complex” is rooted in a human instinctive need for the goodness of mother—her tenderness, selflessness, forbearance, resilience, and perseverance. In this increasingly materialized world, such qualities should be valued. In this sense, the mother here has transcended her social role, and has been given a spiritual strength that man eternally needs, which would contribute to the progress of moral awareness of human beings.

The short novel *Muqin* could be seen as a son’s elegy to commemorate mother. Here, the mother had a deep influence upon the son throughout his life. This topic is also repeatedly touched upon in Gao’s *Lingshan* and *Yige ren de shengjing*. The son’s attachment for his mother could be explained either by Jung’s “mother archetype”—Anima’s influence on Animus or by Lacan’s mother’s “stable power” upon the infant at the “mirror stage.”

Mother is symbolic of an ever-lasting feeling, because she is the origin of life. She always gives us a sense of root, as solid as the vast land beneath our feet. For all the beings in the human world, mother is attributed with a noble spiritual connotation. So she is often compared to homecoming, shelter, and harbor. Just as what Jung has described, “...from which everything begins and in which everything ends.”<sup>55</sup>

Accordingly, it may be said that the nostalgia for mother symbolizes a human quest for the root of the self. But in the traditional patriarchal society, such a quest was more often transformed into a repressed feeling. This may account for the emergence of many theories, such as “Complex,” “Name-of-father,” “Guidelines” and “Principles”.

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<sup>55</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, “Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype,” *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung* (1968), Volume 9, Part I, London: Routledge, Par. 172, P.92.

On the psychological level, the repressed desire is termed as “Oedipus Complex” by Freud and “Name-of-the-Father” by Lacan. On the level of social ethics, the former emphasizes the father’s authority in family over the son’s repressed feelings for the mother, the latter metaphorically reveals the true manipulator of the right of cultural discourse in the society—“Name-of-the-Father.” Similarly, in China’s ethical history, the “Three Cardinal Guidelines and Five Constant Virtues”<sup>56</sup> positively stabilized the ruling of empire at that time, and also seriously fettered the development of natural human nature.

In view of this point, Lacan’s theory on the mutual construction between the self and the other could be understood as two stages.<sup>57</sup> The first stage refers to the “mother image” in “mirror stage” (or others). As the initial “other” of the infant, she becomes an object that the infant recognizes his identity, thus the desire at this stage is of femininity. The second stage comes with the access of the “Name-of-the-Father,” which is seen as the “other” of the subject, composed of signs, symbols, rules and regulations, norms, taboos etc, so is symbolically demonstrated as the structure of social cultural discourse. The symbolized cultural order is of masculinity and indicative of Father’s dominance over the self of the subject.

The two stages on Lacanian theory, respectively symbolic of “Mother” and “Father” in the family of human beings, are aligned with each other to manage the society and mould human personality. So this paired opposites form an interactive relationship of mutual restrain and mutual promotion.

However, when such an interaction becomes unavailable, the imbalance will cause problems. For example, humans are inborn with some natural attributes, such as

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<sup>56</sup> In Chinese, it is “sangang wuchang,” with the three cardinal guides (i.e. ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife) and the five constant virtues (i.e. benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity) as specified in the feudal ethical code. Please refer to *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (revised edition) (2002), published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1050.

<sup>57</sup> Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, “Four fundamental Concepts,” *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (1986), Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 15-16.

innocence, simplicity, sincerity, giving, forbearance etc. At the same times humans are given various “ascribed identities” by the society, such as parents, son, daughter, colleagues etc. In the patriarchal society, humans created “Complexes,” “Guides,” and “Principles” to standardize human’s relationships but at the same time fetter human nature. Thus modern people should develop an equal and harmonious relationship between people. In this research’s view, the mutual respect and cooperation between the cultural personality of “Mother” and “Father” will create a harmonious human nature. Can we realize such an ideal? This research will explore the progression of the development of human mind by analyzing Gao’s novels to look for a right way to life.

Gao Xingjian’s earlier novels mainly depict a series of woman characters. They are both sincere dreamers of life and unfortunate victims under the domination of the patriarchal system.

## 6. Woman’s Desire under Patriarchal Domination

*Geiwo laoye mai yugan* is an earlier novel collection by Gao Xingjian, intermittently completed during the years from 1980 to 1986. It consists of 17 novels. These works tend to be realism in style compared with the tendency of modernity of *Lingshan* and *Yige ren de shengjing*. Quite some have a local color and deep human concern, presenting a warm nostalgia and simple sincerity. This can reflect Gao Xingjian’s state of mind at that time. In the earlier period of China’s 1980s, China entered a new era after the Cultural Revolution. So everything took on a new aspect.

Through the novel collection, Gao Xingjian practiced the skills of the narration of modern novels. The frequent change of different pronouns give this collection a completely new narrating style, allowing readers to understand the inner world of characters from different perspectives. According to Gao, “to depict character or

mould personality by means of novels has become outmoded now.”<sup>58</sup> Instead, he makes his new efforts in terms of the mode of narration by this novel collection:

First, these novels are not intended to tell stories, and also not to design plots. Second, what I often use in these novels are different pronouns instead of describing characters, which provides readers with a perceiving perspective. Sometimes the perspective may change, allowing readers to observe and experience from different angles and distance. Third, I exclude purely objective description of environment in these novels...so the three is unified into a circuit of language. I think that the art of novel is exactly the realization of such a circuit of language.<sup>59</sup>

Gao Xingjian thinks that the art of novel may be seen as “the realization of a circuit of language,” in which the author intends to provide a perceivable perspective in the form of shifting narrators. Thus, his novels tend to evoke the true feelings of readers more than “imitating the reality,” to realize subjective perception more than objective presentation, and to trace and read the mental activity of characters more than designing the structure of plots. In brief, through changing the perspective of narrators, the author tries to unify some perceivable elements into the “circuit of language.”

From above it may be seen that the author does not get obsessed with the established “standards” and “principles” of mainstream literature, because he does not take it for granted that the orthodox is just to “depict typical characters within a typical social context.” Instead, he prefers showing and revealing the inner world of characters through the realization of the “circuit of language,” rather than making a clear-cut distinction between the “orthodox” and “heterodox” of literature.

By virtue of realizing such a “circuit of language,” Gao has established an interactive psychology of characters—to explore and to be explored, to feel and to be felt. In this

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<sup>58</sup> Gao Xingjian, “Postscript” to *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (1989), completed in Beijing on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1987. Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 260.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 260-261.

process of mental workings, the consciousness of characters constantly forms, flows, and changes through mutually feeling and being felt, analyzing and being analyzed. Such an internal interaction of the mind would be conceived in the following chapters as a topic: the fate of woman in man's dream—how is innocence defeated?

The female characters in the novel collection function as a mirror, reflecting the disillusionment of an idealist's dream. Woman characters in this period try to enter the world by means of female idealistic principles of life, hence the unavoidable consequence of being defeated by the real society.

It is true that life starts with a certain beautiful dream. However, it can hardly survive the practical patriarchal society. This is particularly true for woman. In the male-dominated society, woman's personal dreams and free will are restricted by patriarchal norms. The whole life of woman struggles in a continuous conflict of personality and responsibility: what will happen when personal ideal runs counter to the ethics of the reality? What is the final choice when the self is placed in difficulty?

The above questions will be answered based on the following close reading for Gao Xingjian's earlier novels. Just as what is pointed out in the previous section, the memorial novel *Muqin* has established an idealized image for "mother" in the protagonist mind. This has been taken for granted by most of men as a standard in patriarchal ruling to evaluate and judge woman, which would be evidenced by analyzing female characters in this novel collection. Those oppressed by social conventions include heroines in *Huahuan* (The Garland), *Xiejiang he tade nüer* (The Cobbler and his Daughter) and *Wuru* (Humiliation); the heroines in *Huadou* (Flowerbean) and *Ni yiding yao huozhe* (You must Stay Alive) are both reduced to the victims of social political campaign; *Yu, xue ji qita* (Rain, Snow as well as Other) shows a female idealistic philosophy.

*Yu, xue ji qita* (Rain, Snow as well as Other) demonstrates a perfect philosophy of life in



woman's ideal. The narrator "you," while sheltering from the dusky rain, happens to hear two girls' conversation. They joyfully exchange their own philosophy of life. The bright and sweet voices remind the listener of thinking of the blooming flowers in summer, showing their brilliance. In the narrator's view, they are the spokesmen of young girls, heartily expressing their longing for natural beauty, sincere friendship as well as true love.

She said she likes the purity of rain and snow and the brightness and clearness of the moon, because they are the grace from Nature. She also likes the mood of rainy day and the meditation of snowy day, because they take on a dreamily poetic world, also because rain can wash away the dust of the world and snow can light up the darkness of the world. Like optimistic children in life, they are eagerly expressing their strong desire for the beauty of life:

Why say rain is not beautiful? Why? It washes away all the dirt of the soul! What a joy!  
Just become a true man, a noble man, how beautiful it is!<sup>60</sup>

I like misty rain, drizzly drifting. I will stand on the top of mountain, let the drizzle wet my clothes, stick on my body—...let rain drop on the hair, hanging tiny drops of rain, feeling so great...<sup>61</sup>

I like snowing too. If snowflakes drop on the ground, never melt, always so white, you couldn't bear to leave a footprint on it.<sup>62</sup>

But I like the moon, not as hot as the sun; I can't stand it, under the sun. But the moon is always beautiful, so pure.<sup>63</sup>

The rain, the snow and the moon here are all symbolic of the most beautiful, the truest and the purest natural existence in the world, so the two girls must have a pure and sincere heart. Woman loves Nature by nature. In face of Nature, she is pure and

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<sup>60</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Yu, xue, ji qita (Rain, Snow as well as Other)," collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (1989). Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 40.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 46.

transparent, and there is no need to conceal and pretend, for she is originally integral to Nature. For this reason, their thoughts and behaviors more often appear to be impetuous and irrational. However, woman, as the opposite of man, is also primarily seen as a natural and irrational existence in the rational world.

The two girls dream about the world in a pure and innocent way, and deeply enjoy their dreamings for the world. However, what dream brings to them are not only joys but also a strong sense of impermanence:

I particularly like open wilderness. It lets me call enough, cry enough, and lets me play enough. I feel it good too. Around are all weeds, so desolate...<sup>64</sup>

...Every time on the train, though the destination is definite, once the train starts, I have a sense of not knowing where to go. I am only intoxicated with scenery in the eyes. Seeing mountains, bamboo forests and tea trees, all flashing by, I don't know where on earth my future is?<sup>65</sup>

For young dreamers, the world as a whole is open and spacious. The open wilderness, the weeds in the openness, the flashing-by mountains, bamboo forests and tea trees beyond the window of the train, all of them present to us a sense of being free and natural, as if they are some illusions in the real world, flashing by in the journey of life.

The sense of impermanence also means a sense of boundlessness. It is originated from human's totally fusing with Nature. On the one hand, their all-encompassing young hearts are able to sense and feel the vastness of the world; on the other hand, the boundless world can also accommodate their various moods and emotions. The union of human with Nature is demonstrated here as a deep sense of loss of the self in the real world, with no more distinction of the self and Nature, of time and space.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 45-46.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 46.

Here, the two dreamy girls heartily enjoy the solitude of the open world, at the same time are sentimentally disturbed by a sense of impermanence of life. When Heaven and heart melt together, the dreamer of the world has become integral to the boundless time and space. However, only those being capable of deeply dreaming of life and the world can truly perceive the openness of the world and the transience of life. This is in actuality also a reflection of human mental contradiction between his social existence and spiritual being.

Although life is impermanent, nothing can deprive young hearts of dreaming of a happy life. The two girls continue discussing their philosophy on love and life. To them, love should be sincere and ardent; it means to mutually explore rather than to dominate each other.

Like me, I feel everything natural is beautiful; I most hate repressing natural things.

But I feel man should create life if they are clever. Only a fool is content with life without change.

How to create life?

Use our hands and spiritual force to create life.<sup>66</sup>

What they are after is a natural and beautiful and creative life. What they hate is to repress natural things and be content with life without any change. It is clear that they have a high hope for life and firmly believe that they are able to create a life that they want by using their hands and spiritual power. On the one hand, they have a strong desire and passion to dream and create life, as if life could be moulded according to their free will; on the other hand, they are also annoyed by what they hate in the reality:

But if the environment doesn't permit you, you also have to learn to be pretentious.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 48.

No way out. We have to live, to fit us to the environment.

But I feel man should remain the truest and the purest things in the heart, however much pretension they make. This is the pillar of life, and we can't live without it. I can't live without this pillar.<sup>67</sup>

One has to adapt oneself to the social environment if one wants to live. Such a truth of life makes them slightly helpless. However, their aspiration for a perfect life cannot be eclipsed by such a reality, because in their heart there is "a spiritual pillar" that cannot be collapsed, which is to pursue what is the truest and purest rather than what is false, and to actively dream of what they desire rather than to blindly follow what have been told. For them, being true to life is seen as a firm belief in their heart, which constantly provides them with the source of dreaming of life.

It may be said that they are faithful dreamers in life. Innocence, love and sincerity serve as the means that they take to confront the sophistication and falsity of the society. It is just these qualities that give to them a sustainable courage to explore the ultimate meaning of life, of the world, and of love:

Nothing can reach the highest point, and love is also the same... it will go down if indeed getting to the highest point.

Why is it impossible to go up forever, pursue forever, and explore forever?

This is why, I say, a love that can be explored forever is a true love.

Love should be endless.<sup>68</sup>

"True love" for most people in the world is the truest dream hidden in the depths of heart, being too extravagant to pursue. However, the two innocent girls are courageous enough to dream of it. In face of the perfect ideal, it may be said that only those who are as enthusiastic as them are brave to "pursue," brave to "explore," and

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 48-49.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 50-52.

brave to say “forever.” In their eyes, love is a treasure house that can afford being endlessly excavated both in material and in spirit.

They prattle on their perfect philosophy for love, which sounds like a silly conversation from innocent children in the human world. However, childhood represents an unavoidable stage in life, a stage to brew innocent dreams and be determined to pursue ideals, even have an ambition to conquer the physical world and explore human spirit.

The two girls cheerfully exchange their own “philosophy” on life, society and love. They love the beauty of Nature as much as their strong desire for life in the human world. However, this seems to be a paradox in life. We become hopeful when there is a dream in the heart; at the same time, we also have to try to find a balance between dream and reality. The unavoidable contradiction in real life is just like the “snow” and “avalanche,” which is symbolic of both the beauty and the devastation of Nature:

Avalanche—I don’t like it at all, because it destroys my impression on the beauty of nature.

But you have to know, life is just so, both beautiful and evil.<sup>69</sup>

But the more beautiful, sometimes, the more pretentious...didn’t you feel it false if a man treats you particularly well?<sup>70</sup>

But sometimes you have to hide your own nature to cater to others. Sometimes it is also necessary.<sup>71</sup>

I say, even if a happy family with love is also—a flexible bondage.<sup>72</sup>

The conversation reveals a fact that no one can escape: life is full of “flexible bondages,” so the human has to waver frequently between one end and the other. Here, the natural scenery or the philosophy of life and love are both dialectical existence, so

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 48.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 52.

are regarded as the union of paired opposites or the two aspects of the same being. To maintain its wholeness or keep its balance means to reconcile with each other and complement each other.

But for the two innocent girls, they prefer to immerse in inexhaustible discussions on life and love, without considering what would be waiting for them—happiness or suffering? This may account for the view that innocent children are always fond of eloquent debate but sophisticated adults are more often men of few words.

The narrator of this novel simultaneously serves as the indirect listener of the conversation. By showing a perfect philosophy of innocent girls, the narrator conveys his pondering over an idealistic life, which could be seen from the passage at the end of the novel:

...Not everything in life is lovable! There is also pain, pursuit, and happiness, when you beat the unfortunate. It is still raining, soundlessly cleansing the dust in the world...later on, they left...you have not seen their appearance, their figure, not to mention their countenance, yet it does not matter. What matters are the two voices, bright and sweet, interplaying...walking in the wet cold night, you do not feel the chill of wind, wouldn't it be that the two familiar voices are warming you?<sup>73</sup>

Despite the fact that life itself is not at all as perfect and lovable as what they dream of, to the listener, however, their conversation strengthens his sincere belief in life. In some ways, it may be said that their ideas represents a common wish of human beings, for sincerely dreaming of life is indeed capable of giving a sustained vitality to our life, and humans also need such a vitality to widen and deepen their understanding for life and discover the value of life. Just like this moment, despite the rain, the warmth from the two cheerful girls convinces the listener that innocence is able to activate the potentiality of humans sincerely dreaming of life. Although the narrator has not seen

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 54.

their real appearance at all, he firmly believes that only those who are pure and innocent by nature are capable of dreaming of life in a pure and innocent manner and that only those listeners who are pure and innocent by nature are able to understand the pureness and innocence. In this sense, couldn't it be said that the two girls actually reflect one aspect of the spiritual world of the narrator?

Another very short novel *Huahuan* (The Garland) presents to us a heroine named Chunlan, a girl in the protagonist's childhood. She may be compared to the spring rain at his hometown, quietly dropping on the benevolent land and nourishing those simple and honest native fellows in this land.

The protagonist "he" brings his loveable girlfriend Xiaohui back to his hometown, and happens to encounter with his childhood pal Chunlan, who reminds him of the garland that they used to weave together:

"Dongling and others don't play with me."

"Why don't?"

"They say I show off shamelessly."

It was a voice from my remote childhood.

"Why not?" Chunlan is good-looking, so other girls are very jealous of it. He musters up the courage to say: "I play with you!"

"What do we do?"

He sees her dewy-eyed smile.

"I make a garland for you."

It was the garland in the remote childhood.<sup>74</sup>

The pure and innocent conversation vividly shows a subtle and friendly feeling between young girls and boys. Chunlan at that time was very pretty, so envied and

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<sup>74</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Huahuan (The Garland)," collected in *Geiwo laoye man yugan* (1989). Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 83.

isolated by other girls. But “he” gives her his understanding, so she offered him her trust. For the present protagonist, the remote garland of childhood is a witness to the pure friendship between them. However, the Chunlan who he met again after many years has become entirely different from the one in his memory:

This is a strong woman, with face and arms sunned dark and sallow, a pair of fed breasts bulgingly sagging in her loose color-faded garment, swaying with her movements. The thick brows and big eyes are evocative of her looks as a young girl: a pair of shy but clever eyes on her ruddy face, her slim figure, always in deft movements...<sup>75</sup>

The Chunlan standing before him is no longer the shy and tearful young girl for whom he used to make garland. Now, she has become a mother with two children, not only working hard in the fields but also taking the responsibility of looking after her husband, the children as well as the family. This is a typical traditional Chinese woman. Double responsibilities and obligations have tempered that innocent and intelligent girl as the present capable village woman. The huge difference makes him slightly embarrassed:

“Where is your husband?” He doesn’t know whom he is, asked vaguely, trying to find a topic to free himself from the embarrassing situation.

“He went to the town to sell watermelon.”

“Is he all right?” he can only say that way.

“Yes, he is well, it is better if the policy from higher-ups doesn’t change. Now is more labor with more gains, so planting watermelon can make some cashes. What else to want? It is getting much better.” She smiles, very honestly.

He feels much easier. Apparently, she has entirely forgotten the remote garland in childhood.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 84.



This Chunlan now is loyal to her duties as a wife and a mother, leading a simple and honest life. That pure feeling for the garland of childhood has become vague in her memory. In contrast with his beautiful and romantic girlfriend Xiaohui, Chunlan has been used to the ordinary reality in life. Just like most of women living in this land, she is true to her current responsibility and obligation, with no more pureness and innocence of the past.

“Elder sister, how do you name the flower please?” Xiaohui finally finds her topic.

“Chinese thorowax,” Chunlan answers without thinking. “It is medicinal herb, supply and marketing point collects and buys it.”

“What about this? The pinkish purple one?”

“Ah, this is *polygala tenuifolia*, also medicinal herb. Earlier years, nothing was allowed to plant except grains, so making some money had to dig medicinal herbs. Earlier, nearly all on the hillside was dug; the two years grow out again. If you come in spring, in the mountains there are also lots of flowers.”<sup>77</sup>

Time has hugely changed Chunlan both in looks and mind. Although the flowers remain the same, they have already meant differently to her. In the eyes of young Chunlan, “Chinese thorowax” and “*polygala tenuifolia*” were only beautiful flowers that could be used to make garland. After becoming a wife and mother, these flowers mean the money to make a living, because she has clearly been aware of her responsibility and obligation to the family.

Gao Xingjian’s short story *Huahuan*, with a simple and exquisite tone, delineates two totally different portraits for Chunlan: one may be titled as “innocence,” and the other has been inscribed with “worldliness.” It may be said in this sense that the “ascribed identity” that the society assigns to woman has thoroughly transformed woman’s inborn natural attributes. This might be an unchangeable fact in the human world: growing up means to become sophisticated, more specifically, to be socialized.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 84-85.

Through this nostalgic story, the author reveals such an indifferent reality. However, to the protagonist in the story, time is both cruel and kind. Its cruelty lies in a fact that the passage of time breaks every innocent dream. Nevertheless, the kindness of memory allows us to trace and record those beautiful moments in life, so as to recollect them after many years. Just as this moment, “he” recalls and feels the two widely different Chunlan, with a slight sense of loss, also a little bit of warmth.

Traveling back to the time of childhood in memory has become an obsession for the protagonist. In Gao Xingjian’s novelette *Huadou* (Flowerbean), the protagonist “I” and Huadou are a pair of childhood pals. Huadou is extraordinary, standing out to be an independent strong woman under the paternal ruling of her time. Born in a family without father, she lives with her mother and grandma. Her stepfather opposes her entering the university. But she finally completed her higher education in her own efforts and becomes a respected engineer.

Huadou may be said to be a rebellious woman under the shadow of the patriarchy. She is determined to choose a life as she wishes rather than to be chosen by life. For most women of her time, in the period of 1940s and 1950s, that was no doubt seen as a challenging decision, an unbending stand against the patriarchal will. Being the survivor of the established conventions, is she also able to weather the storm of social movements?

The protagonist’s story begins with the young Huadou in his memory. In his eyes, Huadou is both a little girl and a small elder sister. She is a little older than him in age though she looks like a very small girl. But the young Huadou in his memory has always first been framed as a “gown.”

You see how small you were at that time. But you wore a side-opened gown, like a small adult indeed. Do you still remember? Your color-faded red purple gown, as if edged with a blue rim and spotted with small yellow flowers.

You were much easier than me, walking out of the back door to the yard, going to play by the pool. You pulled my hands, really like an elder sister. I felt particularly warm, do you still remember?<sup>78</sup>

She was simple and trustworthy, not only because of her “one-sided” and “color-faded” gown generally worn by adult, but also because of her easy manner that she pulled “my” hand to play, just as an elder sister often did to a younger brother. Here, it could be sensed that the protagonist has a deep attachment to the warm impression that young Huadou left her, though most are just about trivial events of childhood life.

Most women of her time didn't have a strong independent awareness like modern woman. Rather, they were accustomed to relying on man, always seeking help and solace from man if in trouble. However, Huadou is special. No matter how much hardship there is, she always confronts them bravely. For these reasons, “my” feeling for her is the most complex and the deepest. This is a faithful and independent feeling between he and Huadou. In comparison to the love full of various irrational problems, the stable friendship is trustable and perpetual. Especially in time of adversity of life, it gives to the sufferer an unconditional help, which is the biggest spiritual solace that cannot be substituted by any other thing. It is precisely for this reason that “I,” in my declining years, remains able to enjoy the nostalgia in the rain. That was a beautiful time that only belongs to “I” and “you.”

Occasionally I see you, you always stay with other girls, talking and smiling, as if you have not seen me at all, as if we have never known each other and never pulled hands by hands playing by the pool, as if you have never done homework at the central room of my home, and as if you have not borrowed my colored pencil to draw a picture either. I do not know if you are afraid that I am not careful to call out your nickname “Huadou” or you are unwilling to let your classmates know that we have ever had such a childhood friendship

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<sup>78</sup> Gao Xingjian, “*Huadou* (Flowerbean),” collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*, 104-105.

between us.<sup>79</sup>

This passage vividly describes a pure and subtle feeling between Huadou and “I,” which immediately reminds readers of a childhood girl in memory. Even though there was not such a girl at all in their childhood, they would fabricate one by imagination so as to feel the ineffable pureness and innocence. This has been effectively done by the structure of parallelism composed of “as if,” which shows to us that the protagonist has an unforgettable complex feeling for Huadou in his heart, lingering on and on.

In the memory of the protagonist there are many so pure and innocent events as such. The protagonist remembered his waiting for Huadou who was having a bath. Below is a beautiful description of how the flower of desire blooms in the hearts of young boy and girl.

...The sound of water and soap rubbing behind the wooden partition are all clearly heard. You trust me so much that I am very grateful, sitting motionlessly, not moving even one step. You walk out of the room, with a basin in hands and wet hair on the shoulder. After dumping the water, you sit opposite me, combing your hair and making your pigtails...I curl it (hair) around my finger, and then you slightly smile. That is a smile at the corner of your mouth, almost unable to capture. Your face is rosy with thin and tiny hair, your skin is very new and fresh, there are threads of lines on the red lip, and your pupils are brown, twinkling strangely and changefully...<sup>80</sup>

Here, there is no conversation, but a soundlessly mutually sensing and exploring could be felt intensely. The “sound” of bathing, the wet “hair” on the shoulder, the “pigtails” being made, her ruddy “face,” the refreshing “skin,” the “lines of her lip,” as well as the “smile at the corner of her mouth,” all of which stimulates his

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 109-110.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 113.

imaginations to her and enhances his desire for her. Through the meticulous description of a series of physical actions of the heroine, the author intends to reveal a psychological desire secretly working in the boy's heart. The beauty of natural desire is just like a heart-stirring nocturne, refreshingly flowering at the quietness of night.

Just as most perfect dreams in life must end in failure, such a pure feeling between them eventually became an unforgettable childhood memory. It might be reasonable to say that excessively perfect things are too far away from the ordinariness of real life to outlast. As what the protagonist views, because there is a sacred trust between them so that he fears any of his imprudence would be possible to frivolously spoil the pure and innocent feeling.

Time goes by and they have grown up. The innocence of childhood has been replaced by the ambition of young people. Where to go and what to do after graduation for them means a significant choice in their lives. By letter, they express their poetic dreams and deep love for hometown and homeland:

“The rain of hometown is always sweet, whenever it drops on the face or falls in the mouth.” I remember forever what you said. I replied you in a letter: “to a place that nation needs most, I feel always warm, either with the wind on highland or with the snow in north land.”<sup>81</sup>

From these enthusiastic ideals and poetic expressions, it could be seen that the protagonist's generation was brought up under the influence of idealism and collectivism. Therefore, they had a strong desire to serve the motherland, and were deeply convinced that it was the best choice to have a noble belief in life, because it meant a significant realization of personal value. In some ways, it may be said that individual ideal is in essence equivalent to a belief, a noble pursuit to which one is willing to devote oneself. This attitude towards life to a utilitarian man appears to be

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 111.

poetically innocent and excessively irrational. But to young dreamers, noble dreams are indeed capable of pouring into life an incredibly powerful vitality and passion.

For the protagonist, with the passage of time, his inner passion has become less and less, but he keeps a habit of dreaming of life, as if he “has not earnestly lived yet.” The protagonist is much like Animus in reverie, and Huadou may be seen as Anima in his mind. She is strong-minded but with Anima’s unshakeable composure. His trust in her is exactly from her determination and resilience in face of adversity.

Huadou survived the paternal oppression but was reduced to the victim of a social movement. Her husband was labelled as “anti-revolutionist” and then committed suicide. She entered “labor rehabilitation.” Her son was sent to the countryside for re-education. Her grandma died of illness. Her young daughter became a child without people to look after.

As a self-made individual, Huadou is strong, for she has enough courage to face and contend with her self. As a being in the real society, however, she is one of the vulnerable people who were ruthlessly thrown into this movement. When they met again after 15 years, her weatherworn face was reflected by autumn sunlight as a helpless vulnerability, which “I” had never seen before:

You have had wrinkles at the corner of your mouth, two lines rather than one. You sit on the chair, with sunlight reflected upon your face. You are very thin, as if having just gone through a serious illness.<sup>82</sup>

In the sunlight you look wan and sallow—the sunlight of autumn. The two clear lines at the corner of your mouth are two marks of your suffer. You wept. You cover your face by hands, tears are flowing out of the chink of your hands...you bend on the knees, sobbing.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 126-127.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 128-129.

It has to be admitted that the free will of an individual cannot contend with the fate imposed by the society. This is Huadou's existential dilemma: under the oppression of the society, she has nearly collapsed. Huadou's tragedy reveals an unavoidable conflict between individual free will and the manipulative society. Or alternatively it is an eternal paradox to seek the realization of personal dream within the confines of the established values.

In fact, Huadou merely represents one of multitudinous unfortunate people in that era. Gao Xingjian's short story *Ni yiding yao huozhe* (You must Stay Alive) serves as another example that is similar to *Huadou*. In this novel, Shujuan, the girlfriend of the protagonist "he," has been assigned to work as a primary school teacher at a mountain village, for her father has been labeled as a "counter-revolutionist." However, she despairs of leaving the place that she does not like at all. In virtue of his memories, the hopelessness of Shujuan is revealed in an indirect way:

Shujuan is waiting for his rescue. But what he can do is to speak a few empty words in telephone. It is nothing more than waiting, insisting, and being patient. What else is he able to say? Can he say in telephone that he loves her, being unable to leave her? He took a risk of writing self-criticism to write to her passionate letters but failed to encourage her to stay alive. These meaningless empty words are just like chilly moonlight, being unable to warm human heart.<sup>84</sup>

In the suffocating social atmosphere, his empty words of love and pointless encouragement are by no means different from the "chilly moonlight," which fails to save her from despair and warm her frozen heart. What she needs is a sense of security of family rather than the passion of love. For a person who has lost the confidence to live, the reality is no longer a cradle of ideal and romantic words of love. Instead, it may be compared to a huge black hole, an abyss that can empty all the dreams of an idealist.

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<sup>84</sup> Gao Xingjian, "*Ni yiding yao huozhe* (You must Stay Alive)," collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*, 25.

*Ni yiding yao huozhe* reveals Shujuan's miserable situation. Here, a sharp contrast between true love and ruthless reality has been drawn to more forcefully expose the incompatibility between personal ideal and social reality. In comparison to Huadou's independence and perseverance, Shujuan is helpless and fragile. The similarity is that both have fallen victims to the social movement; the difference is that Huadou faces more bravely however wretched living situation compared with Shujuan's depression and despair.

Faced with the social movement, Huadou and Shujuan are both passive. However, Huadou is a rebel against feudal paternal system. She refuses to become a victim of paterfamilias ruling and endeavors to be the master of her own, which is a choice that not all women of her time were willing to make and able to make. What follows is Gao Xingjian's mini novel *Xiejiang he tade nüer* (The Cobbler and his Daughter), in which the cobbler's daughter Dajingzi chooses suicide when she cannot endure her father's ill-treatment any longer. Her death is no doubt seen as an ultimate resistance against the tyranny of her father.

Through neighbors' narration, *Xiejiang he tade nüer* shows how Dajingzi is oppressed and finally reduced to a victim of feudal paternalism by drowning her beautiful life in the cold river. This is a narrative with local flavor, as if sitting under an old tree at dusk and hearing grandpas and grandmas to spread domestic trivia. Therefore the whole story sounds somewhat like drinking a cup of bitter tea mixed with different tastes: regret, indignation, grief, and a deep sigh.

It has been acknowledged by neighbors that Dajingzi is a tender and honest good girl:

What a good girl she is. At the best age of pretty girls—just seventeen or eighteen year old, a well-behaved and honest girl, she is even shy to speak to strangers. She has never done those improper matters. She has never seen to behave badly. Washings and cookings at



home are all her duties, and she also looks after her younger brother Xiaobaozi.<sup>85</sup>

According to neighbors, Dajingzi was a good girl but lacking a good lot. Mum passed away and Dad values boys and belittles girls. Being in bad mood or over-drinking, he always takes them out on her, frequently either beating or cursing.

Burning a meal, having a drop-in at night, staying more seconds at the gate, whichever young man talks to her several words, all impossibly escape beating and cursing...after her mum was dead, she was forced to drop out as a junior middle school student...even reading is not allowed, finding a book to read is like behaving a thief, secretly tucking in the waist, bringing them back and sending them back secretly again.<sup>86</sup>

Her ideal is merely to read books together with her classmates, to see a film, and to have some friends to talk. These basic requests to a girl are nothing less than natural and normal, yet Dajingzi paid the price of dignity and even the price of life for that.

For Dajingzi, what she says and what she does are all severely prescribed by her father. Slightly overstepping, she would be rebuked and even humiliated. It may be said that she has been deprived of basic freedom and rudimentary dignity as a person. This sounds to be an indignant story, reflecting an unimaginably queer ethical logic. In comparison with Huadou and Shujuan, Dajingzi is an unfortunate character, deserving more of our sympathy. To Dajingzi, the feudal paternalism has deprived her of the primary right to live, let alone freedom, happiness, and dignity to enjoy.

Dajingzi's tragedy to an extent reflects a living situation of Chinese woman over China's long paternal history, in particular prior to 1949. They conscientiously obey the norms that a woman is required to follow, cautiously mould their personality in accordance with the standard that the society prescribes. This is just Dajingzi's

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<sup>85</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Xiejiang he tade nüer (The Cobbler and her Daughter)," collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*, 96.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 97-98.

difficult situation: she has no opportunity to receive education, no friends of her own, and even no minimum freedom to have a word with a man. What, then, is the meaning of her existence? Is it to swallow her tears amid shouts of cursing? Being driven beyond the limits of her tolerance, would it be possible for her to gain a permanent liberation by drowning herself?

*Wuru* (Humiliation) is a mini-novel. It tells a story of how a kind and beautiful girl suffers the misunderstanding of passengers on the bus, for she fails to show her bus ticket for the time being. For her, this is a miserable mental torture, because it has dampened her enthusiasm and sincerity for life, deeply hurt her and twisted her natural human nature.

Her longing for life is shown by her sun-like heart to enter the world: "She feels she is particularly honest and generous. She feels there is a sun in her heart, and it is extremely warm, bright but not dazzling, like a round ball as red as fire, rolling on the horizon."<sup>87</sup> She also longs to be a person who satisfies herself: "she would rather be owed by others rather than to owe others, so she would be perfectly content with the view that she is so generous and so good."<sup>88</sup> Moreover, she does her best to be a well-bred good girl, for she believes that "to be a person should not lose one's dignity, and living in the world should have an awareness of dignity. To preserve one's purity is just the biggest dignity."<sup>89</sup>

It could be seen that this is a pure, selfless and generous girl, a girl with a strong sense of self-respect and self-discipline. She sincerely loves the world and people around her, and also longs for the same love and sincerity from the others. However, she was deeply hurt by the rumors from her colleagues:

...She can imagine what they said of her, saying she attracts others' attention, she should

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<sup>87</sup> Gao Xingjian, "*Wuru* (Humiliation)," collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*, 167.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 168.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 168.

not smile to everybody, she should not be so enthusiastic, even saying there should not appear ruddy on her face...it is not understandable! She feels very disappointed. Apparently all of her colleagues are friendly to her, but looking on her in this way behind her.<sup>90</sup>

Here is an epitome of how social conventions bias against a pure and innocent girl. The society tries to standardize all aspects of woman by “should” and “should-not.” It is the unimaginably queer prescription that heavily restrains the free development of human nature, and possibly results in the distortion of natural personality. Once she is convicted of her “impure intention” by conventions, all of her behaviors, to the defender of the conventions, appear to be “impure and improper,” so she is naturally to blame for her behaviors of “should-not.”

The bias from social conventions symbolizes an “unwritten law” of the society, so rumor becomes the most powerfully and effectively executive tool that the society holds to show its privilege to rule the ruled:

“Don’t behave like a person, actually worth less than ten pence!” the harsh words stab her like a pointed knife. She hears people on the bus are all laughing. Her face is also burning. She must find out the red ticket, letting everyone on the bus know that she should not suffer the humiliation without reason.<sup>91</sup>

A real wrongdoer deserves these sarcastic words, but it is so piercing for the wronged to hear. For the girl, the mercilessly mocking means an unbearable insult to her honesty and innocence.

Here, it may be said that her colleagues and the passengers on the bus in reality represent those who codify and decipher social laws and rules and regulations.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 173.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 170.

Therefore, they hold the right to willfully judge or conjecture the ruled. In this sense, it may be thought that the ruler symbolic of social laws and taboos is rational and indifferent, which completely runs counters to the basic sympathy and compassion that humans are inherently given.

When she eventually finds the five pence red ticket in her gloves, she does not feel it surprising at all; rather, that “bright and warm world” in her heart collapsed suddenly, no longer softly glowing like the sun. This is shown that her strong desire for a perfect self has been damaged under the suppression of social bias: “she just wants to go to a big prairie, alone, nobody knows, not let whoever know it, just being blown by chilly wind, being frozen to death there.”<sup>92</sup> Obviously, this is a heavily abused heart, an almost twisted soul, because an invisible power from social bias has mercilessly trampled her pride and dignity:

She knows that all are gazing at her, hoping her to slip down. But she cannot slip down. In the heart she always feels a heavy pressure, like a camera, no, not like a camera, it is a shadow, climbing on the ground, but shadow cannot climb, so it is spreading. The most fearful thing is the spreading, secretly, rapidly sucking all the light around. She tried to call but failed. It is extremely oppressive, extremely oppressive...<sup>93</sup>

Here, what is shown is her psychological reality. This is a chaotic blending of dream and imagination, which in actuality reveals her distorted mind, caused by an immense pain when human nature is being repressed. Though she clearly knows that she is innocent, the gazes with contempt and sneers are like vicious cancer cell, continually spreading in her body and mind, swallowing her vitality and health.

To sum up, Gao Xingjian presents to readers a series of girls’ stories and their tragic fate. All of them have been the dreamer, the explorer, and the pursuer of beauty and

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 175.

truth in the human world. As an incarnation of human natural desire, their innocence functions as the fire seeds of the sophisticated world, lightening and brightening the pure and innocent nature latent in the human heart. However, when the pure and innocent encounters the ruling of the patriarchal system, when the pure and innocent is placed in the shadow of “name-of-the-father,” being neglected, being transformed, being damaged, being humiliated, and even being ruined, thus, in Gao Xingjian’s earlier novels, have been demonstrated as a destiny with which they have to meet.

Seen from another perspective, their tragic fate may be understood as an ending of girls’ perfect dreams or as the initial defeat of the protagonist’s ideal in the real society. Thus, when finding himself in the contradiction between internal ideal and external reality, he starts questioning the self and the reality: what does personal ideal mean in real society? What will happen when human natural dreams encounter social laws and norms? Where is the homeward road towards innocence?

## 7. How Innocence is Defeated

The social mechanism forms an interrelated chain of management, including social laws, rules and regulations, conventions, taboos etc. It functions as an instrument of social ruling and so is good at rational administration and manipulation. On the contrary, woman, as a symbol of Nature and natural intelligence, always regards idealism as the first pursuit in life. But this is often taken for granted by the rational society to be naive and irrational. In the patriarchal society, this traditionally acknowledged fact also means a helpless reality to woman.

The psychoanalytical conceptions on “mother complex,” “Oedipus complex” and “Name-of-the-father” provide a theoretical cornerstone for this fact. First of all, the son’s “complex” or attachment for his mother serves as a stable mental power, which may influence his whole life. Secondly, as the ruler of the society, “father” locates

himself as the creator of social norms, laws, rules and regulations, taboos etc. Thirdly, “Oedipus complex,” like a mental shadow, reminds the son of remembering all the time the “laws and taboos of father.” As a result, the self may be compared to a child with both “father” and “mother,” and his or her subjectivity must be constructed and identified within the confines of various “norms” or “laws.” Therefore, it may be said the “Name-of-the-father” reveals that “father” is the real ruler of the family and the society. By virtue of constructing such concepts as “laws,” “virtue,” “complex,” “model” etc, “father” aims to rule over his “sons and daughters” in body and mind. At the same time, “mother complex” reveals the son’s spiritual attachment to his mother, which may be seen as humans’ permanent longing for warmth, trust, and solace.

The novel *Muqin* shows a son’s “mother complex,” which is symbolic of humans’ pursuit for the spirituality of the self. However, these woman characters’ unfortunate fate in the novels reveals that the laws of “father” is the root of the failure of personal ideal, because the patriarchy aims at moulding woman as an idealistic woman in man’s eyes to secure his manipulative power, to glorify “father’s name,” and to inhibit the natural development of human nature.

Nevertheless, woman is inherently an irrational being, aspiring after an idealistic life and love, hoping that their free will and natural dreams could be respected and actualised, which could be seen from the two girls in *Yu, xue ji qita*. However, these dreams are no doubt convicted by the patriarchy as naive “ambitions,” which have overstepped patriarchal permissible boundaries, so that they are destined to suffer the oppression from the family or the society, as have been shown by the village teacher Shujuan in *Ni yiding yao huozhe*, the dreamless Chunlan in *Huahuan*, as well as the independent Huadou in *Huadou*. Such a strong woman as Huadou finally failed to survive the social political persecution, despite her successful resistance against the paternal ruling. Dajingzi in *Xiejiang he tade nüer* and the wronged girl in *Wuru* also had to end their beautiful dreams at the price of distorting human nature or drowning her precious life. The two girls in *Yu, xue ji qita* are a pair of typical dreamers of

perfect life, the seekers of beauty and truth in this world, and the inexhaustible explorers of the boundless world. Nonetheless, both are also aware of the importance of social laws, for they fear a principle of life: "one has to first learn how to live if one wants to live a life."<sup>94</sup>

It may thus be seen that Gao Xingjian's earlier novels have explored the truth of social life. In contrast to the tyranny of the social reality, the personal ideal is only an illusory dream in the human world, a beautiful but transient dream. This is because it represents the irrationality of human beings, which is diametrically opposite to the rationality of the patriarchal system. As a consequence, they are destined to becoming the victims of various norms and laws, conventions and prejudices, as well as movements and taboos.

The patriarchal society powerfully manipulates woman's mind. Under its cultivation and intimidation, women are increasingly transformed to learn to forget their desires, repress their passions, and obliterate the natural disposition as a woman, until completely becoming accustomed to being standardized, dominated, and manipulated. The Chunlan in *Huahuan* may be seen as a typical idealist within patriarchal requirements, a woman who is utterly eligible for the glory of "virtue of mother" and "virtuous wife." She had ever been a dreamer of life, but with the passage of time, the duties of being mother and wife have made her quickly accustom herself to her fate, and finally have her dream thoroughly forgotten. This is the very power of order and time, which has not only tremendously changed her appearance but also gradually eroded away her natural intelligence.

Nonetheless, it may be said that woman's resistance against the patriarchal system is basically passive and futile. In China's long feudal history, most women had become accustomed to the authority of the established system, so are able to endure being dominated and oppressed at the maximum limit. Dajingzi's tragedy is a good example.

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<sup>94</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Yu, xue ji qita," collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*, 48.

Her ultimate rebellion against the tyranny of her father is only to end her suffering by destroying her young and precious life.

It is true that there have been a great number of women who courageously strive for an independent and dignified life. Through unremitting pursuits and efforts, Huadou finally broke through the oppression of paternal family and won her the respects from the society, but failed to weather the storm of the movement in 1960s in China. Her dual misfortune proves that individual efforts cannot help her survive the devastatingly political disaster, as is much similar to Shujuan's fate in *Ni yiding yao huo*. Both represent a common fate of people who are involved in the social movement: they only passively do what they are demanded and blindly follow what others are doing. Furthermore, the conventional prejudice can also be used as an invisible tool to ruin woman's dream. In *Wuru*, the pure and kind girl should have enjoyed the same love and respect from others as much as what she has given to others. However, the social bias against woman as one of variants of rational rulings has damaged her sincere attitude towards life and broken her steadfast belief in life.

From above, it may be seen that once the rational ruler has convicted woman's ideal as the irrational naivety, then the honor of making the law and standardizing the norms is taken for granted as the privilege of man. In accordance with such a man's logic, a conclusion would be drawn that woman's subordinate position is resulted from their irrational nature, so that they are the ruled rather than the ruler, and must follow the rules and regulations that the patriarchy has prescribed for them. As a result, an idealistic woman in man's standard is produced—a distorted being under the patriarchal oppression.

In China's feudal ethics, the Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> In Chinese, it is "sangang wuchang," with the three cardinal guides (i.e. ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife) and the five constant virtues (i.e. benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity) as specified in the feudal ethical code. Please refer to *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (revised edition) (2002), published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1050.



subjected woman to the dominance of father, husband and son. She was obliged to undertake the duty to be “virtuous wife, good mother and filial daughter and daughter-in-law,” and strictly follow an instruction that “woman should be virtuous without talent,” the standard made by man for woman. Similarly, the “assigned identity” for woman can also find its evidence in the background of Western religion. It is said that *Bible* records that Eve was made by one of Adam’s ribs, therefore it comes to a point that she is not a complete being, only derived from the small part of man’s body.

Accordingly, in man’s logic, how to be a woman is not a matter of a woman’s, but rather a man’s privilege to define it in accordance with his will. In man’s authoritative view, she does not necessarily have thoughts of her own, because the society has already constructed a series of moral codes and guidelines for her, so that it is natural to be obedient rather than to think.

If there is anyone who is brave enough to challenge it, which is meant to rebel against the authority and break through taboos, then what is waiting for her must be a severe punishment. This is much like Oedipus’s fear of the castration executed by his father, and is also like the awesome feeling that a Chinese woman has for Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues, because both are symbolic of the laws and norms of the patriarchal society and are carried out in virtue of the “name-of-the-father.” Under the instructions and influences and threats of these laws and taboos, woman is increasingly used to obeying, learns to yield, and eventually completely forgets that she had ever had dreams.

It has to be said that the patriarchal ruling is powerfully manipulative. Among these woman characters in Gao Xingjian’s earlier novels, Huadou can be seen as a universal representative of woman’s fate in patriarchal society. She embodies female forbearance, perseverance, and resilience when in face of difficulty of life, so that she could walk out the shadow of paternal ruling, but eventually failed to survive the

persecution of the social movement. The other women characters reflect woman's oppressed fate respectively. The transformed Chunlan, the mistreated Dajingzi, the exiled Shujuan, and the humiliated good girl all prove that woman's innocent dreams are fragile in the patriarchal ruling. Even the two carefree girls in *Yu, xue ji qita* also know a fact that life has its own rules that one must follow if one wants to enter life. All this discloses the truth that woman's existence in the patriarchal society is in fact a question about life or death, because, either compromise or resistance, both mean to be terminated in misfortune. In this sense, it may be said that the history of woman's existence is in reality a history that the weak fights to survive the strong.

If one reads through Gao's novels as a whole, it is not difficult to find that his works concentrate on the exploration for the relationship between the individual and the society and the world. His earlier novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* mainly reflects the unfortunate fate of woman in different existential dilemma. In the paternal or patriarchal ruling, women eventually fail to master their own fate, because they choose to enter the sophisticated world by innocence. On the metaphorical level, it may be said that this in fact represents the tragic fate of the particular generation in the history of China. In brief, either for an individual, or for an epoch, even for the whole mankind, innocence is both a beautiful endowment and a sumptuous dream.

Moreover, it has also conveyed the author's thoughts and feelings on life. In these novels, the innocence of young people is shown as a strong desire for the idealization of their perfect dreams. Would it be possible for them to approach the world by their pureness and innocence? The listener or the narrator or the protagonist, in *Yu, xue ji qita*, tries to give an answer by his meditations on life: "You love raining? Love snowing? Love the purity of moonlight? Loving it because it looks like a dream? But not all the dreams are pure. However the girl's dreams are always lovable, just like themselves? And not everything in life is so lovely! It is also full of suffering, pursuit,

and happiness, when one wins over misfortune.”<sup>96</sup>

In virtue of the listener's narrative, Gao Xingjian expresses his understanding for life. The innocent philosophy of life is a dream that everyone had ever had, and also the first step that everybody has to take in life. However, to stride across this step is by no means a lovely action as what is imagined. That means not purely the happiness of the realization of pursuit but also the pains and even misfortune in the process of pursuing dream. It would be happy if one could vanquish the misfortune, for that is the happiness after transcending the self. This, perhaps, may be understood as the author's reminder, an encouragement, a hope, or a blessing for those who are pure and innocent.

On the deeper level, it may be said that these women characters in Gao's early novels are in actuality constructed as an allusion to represent a pure and innocent time in life, a time of childhood in the process of development of life. Every pure and innocent dream reflects a psychological experience of the young protagonist in the real society—a spiritual journey of the undeveloped Animus. It is true that every young dream is flawless, but the disillusionment of the dream is also unavoidable in the real world. This could be seen as the first inevitable defeat in the progression of life, because of pursuing idealism, and because of lacking sophistication. Furthermore, the initial failure could be seen as the first disintegration of life. Only having undergone various mental pains of being disintegrated, can the innocent dreamer thoroughly perceive and comprehend the true meaning of the word “life,” and so obtain the most profound perception and cognition in life. Accordingly, it could be said that this is not only what the protagonist has understood and realized through the mirror of the other, but also reflects what the author ponders over life of his own.

## Chapter Two

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<sup>96</sup> Gao Xingjian, “Yu, xue ji qita,” collected in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*, 54.

## *Lingshan* (Soul Mountain)

### —Self-awakening at Grass-root Level

#### 8. *Lingshan*: a Female Mountain

*Lingshan*, as a representative of Gao's middle novels, laid a foundation for his unique style in terms of theme and language. The quest for the spirit of the self gives this novel a theme on life. The shifting of pronoun narration constructs a psychological interaction between characters, which forms a mutual exploration and cognition. The style on "stream of language" gives such a complicated narrative a free and flowing disposition. Therefore, *Lingshan* can be interpreted as a transcendental concern on life. Through reading, one can sense a pair of sightful eyes—a detached gaze beyond worldly affairs, overlooking the kaleidoscopic human world in his compassionate indifference.

The panoramic gaze at human life and the imaginative description for the trans-mundane world present the readers with a rich picture of universal life. In this all-embracing picture, there is no longer a distinction between time and space, Man and Nature, the real and the imaginary, and the mainstream and the marginal. Such an observation and comprehension for life is not a rational teaching but a spiritual roaming in the stories and legends in the human world. In this roaming, the traveler fully enjoys a harmonious resonance between the clamorous world and the tranquil Nature.

*Lingshan* involves plenty of local folklore prevailing along the Yangtze River Valley. According to Jung's "collective unconscious," the folk culture in *Lingshan* symbolizes a cultural psychology of human beings. This is because it fuses into the culture and spirit of human's ancestors and reveals the mentality and fate of human's

“collective unconscious.”

The scattered folk culture consists of the rituals that mountain folks worship Heaven and Earth and ancestors, the customs about their lifestyle and way of thinking, the anecdotes and even hearsay. This is a synthesis of folk culture based on folklore. In this colorful culture world, some are either originated from myth, legend, and history or inherited from the lifestyles of forefathers; others are either recorded in the local chronicles, or only grow out of hearsay. For examples, to pray Heaven and Earth and worship ancestors for blessing, to chant scriptures for the departed, to invoke the spirits for the dead, to preach the teachings of Buddhism, to interpret the tenets of Daoism, the shaman's communication with the spirits, the wronged woman's revenge, the departed beauty's request in dream, as well as the half-hearsay and half-legendary bandit wife and Zhuhuapo, all these exhibit the natural sensuousness and mystique of the Chu Culture. It has deeply influenced the life and belief of country folks for generations and finally forms a unique ecology of folk culture.

This is a simple but lively ecology of culture. It is the vigorous simplicity that accounts for its existence over thousands of years. In this sense, it may be said that its vitality is originated from a simple belief that mountain folks hold, which is shown as their respect and awe for Nature, Heaven and Earth, and deities and spirits. What's more, it reflects a cosmological view that practitioners of Buddhism and Daoism hold and the manner that they adopt to perceive and understand the self, life, the reality, the world, as well as the universe.

*Lingshan*, the all-embracing book, presents to readers a dazzling panorama of the human world, and a myriad of phenomena in the boundless worlds. Through which the author provides a new way to ponder over life: life is an existence that is beyond theoretical definition and eloquence. This is a kind of life that can be comprehended with spiritual perception rather than conceptual teachings and logical demonstrations. In this sense, *Lingshan* is more a book on the mind than a book on a travel.

The French *Le Figaro* has made comments on the uniqueness of *Lingshan*:

... (The journey) all the way was evocative of past events and childhood, constantly making surprising comparisons between the hardship of the long journey and the clamour of human affairs, between the minorities' folk songs and new customs, both intense and indifferent...it is also because the traveller always faces this world alone, seeking tranquillity. It is the same for us. To some extent, we have become one part of the book. The less known journey in China is so fascinating...<sup>97</sup>

This interpretation is quite sensible. The writer tries to understand this book on two layers of meaning: *Lingshan* not only picks up again ancient Chinese culture that has been lost among the people, but also explores how the lonely self attains tranquility through spiritual transcendence. On this level, it may be said that the primeval civilization of ecology possesses a power of spiritual inspiration, so it often enlightens the traveler as to the truth and wisdom of life in a simple way, bringing those who were lost in life back to the right way. Psychologically, it may be understood as the magical strength of Jung's archetype, a huge potentiality of "collective unconscious" as a representation of a certain culture.

In order to expound the dominating ability of the unconscious, Jung adopts the notion of "primordial image" to stand for some universal human modes of behaviour or perceptual patterns:

By "primordial images" Jung then meant all the mythologies, all the legendary or fairy-tale motifs, etc, which concentrates universally human modes of behavior into images, or perceptible patterns. In the course of history these recurrent motifs have taken on innumerable forms, from the most remote conceptions of the primitives, down through the

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<sup>97</sup> Diane de Margerie, "A Desolate Fragment of China." *Le Figaro* in France (November 1<sup>st</sup> 1996). Please see "Western Comments on Gao Xingjian's works," appendix to *2000 Library—Intensive Readings on Contemporary Chinese Books: Gao Xingjian* (1999). Hong Kong: Mingbao, 175.

religious ideas of all nations and cultures, to the dreams, visions, and fantasies of modern individuals.<sup>98</sup>

For Jung, “primordial images” may be seen as a condensation of images or perceptible patterns on universal human modes of behavior, such as various motifs of myths, legends, or fairy tales. In the course of human history, these motifs recurrently appear in innumerable forms, such as “the most remote conceptions of the primitives,” “the religious ideas of all nations and cultures,” as well as the “dreams, visions and fantasies of modern individuals.” It follows that mankind can share something common in the time and space of human spirit by tracing to its cultural, religious and mental origin.

The “primordial image” in *Lingshan* could be interpreted as the synthesis of folk culture along the Yangtze River Valley. To be specific, it reflects a cultural inheritance built on various forms of local subject matters, such as myths, legends, religions, and local traditional customs and rituals. In contrast to the orthodox position of mainstream classical culture, the folklore prevailing among the people is generally seen as a sub-culture. However, it is this culture with natural intelligence that distinguishes itself from the conceitedness and indifference of the rationality of the orthodox symbolized as male.

The journey to *Lingshan* starts with the traveler’s searching for a mountain named as “Lingshan.” This research views it as a “female mountain.” In the tradition of Chinese literature and culture, “mountain” is generally analogized as man, due to its impressiveness and majesty. On the contrary, “Lingshan” here is given certain feminine qualities, which represent an unsophisticated but profound strength of culture, showing a cultural spirit with natural intelligence and breadth of mind. Some points below would be addressed to justify this view.

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<sup>98</sup> Jolande Jacobi, *Complex, Archetype, Symbol in the Psychology of C.G.Jung* (1971), translated from the German by Ralph Manheim. N.J.: Princeton University Press, 33.

First of all, *Lingshan* can be read as a structure in parallel, which provides two perspectives for readers to enter the protagonist's world. On the one hand, this is a man's physical journey towards Nature and his exploration for the simple civilisation of ecology with female temperament. On the other hand, for the protagonist, this is a spiritual journey, aiming to probe into the truth of the self by taking woman as the mirror of his mind. Therefore, it may be said that the journey beginning with Nature would end with a spiritual awakening to the relationship between the self and Nature, and the society, and the world, and the universe.

The author's use of multi-pronominal narrative enables a dual structure. "I," the traveller, roams around Nature to trace and collect remaining folklore along the Yangtz River Valley; "you," the spiritual aspect of "I," travels with "she" to search for "the intelligence of mountain" of Lingshan. The physical journey of "I" witnesses the richness of folk culture such as folk customs, folk songs, folk rhyme, folktale etc, which displays the sensuous intelligence of mountains and rivers in Nature. The spiritual quest for "you," however, could be seen as your pilgrimage towards Lingshan, at the same time followed by different mysterious women, who actually reflect another aspect of your spiritual world. Thus the two aspects of the same journey constitute a parallel structure, showing a world of being either real or virtual, either worldly or spiritual. In fact this also reflects the author's exploration for the truth of the spirit and the flesh to an individual.

At the beginning of chapter 20 in *Lingshan*, led by a Yi nationality singer, "I" comes across the sea of grass to visit the stockade villages of Yi nationality. Along the path to the villages, there appears a chain of rolling hills. The further we walk into the mountain range, the rounder the outline of hills becomes, and the more luxuriant the forest grows. In "my" eyes, the rolling mountain chains are viewed as the beautiful curve of well-developed woman's body, proudly standing between Heaven and Earth, displaying the beauty of mature woman. Moreover, the lush forest and naturally



curved sketch of rolling hills are pictured in my mind as the body portrait of a beautiful woman, and her ineffable beauty is sprung from the vigor of her flourishing life. From the display of woman's natural glory, one can sense and feel a stream of desire lurking in the splendor that the primitive ecology is bursting forth.

In chapter 25 "you" and "she" inquire an old woman about the road to Lingshan. She impatiently answers that it is "a place that woman who failed to bear a boy burns incense and prays for a boy." This episode indicates that Lingshan is originally a mountain in charge of fertility, a special place that the deities bestow the fertile ability on infertile women as long as they wish piously. The fertility of Lingshan indicates its gender, and hints that this would be a travel closely linked to woman.

However, confused with why a man searches for a "female mountain," the old woman couldn't help mumbling a few curses at them. This immediately led "you" and "she" to a frightening guess:

She says she is scared, with a sense of bad omen. You ask if she is afraid to meet a witch.

You also say all the old women in the mountain villages are witches and all the young women are seductresses.<sup>99</sup>

"You" intends to frighten her by such a half-real and half-bantering remark. But it has paved the way for the wanderer's journey. Wherever he goes, there would be an attractive woman appearing in his journey. This is likely to be deliberately arranged by the author, or it has already been destined. Whichever case it is implied that this is a journey full of mysterious female aura.

The traveller and the ever-changing female character form an interactive structure, in which each is confirmed and projected by the other. As the bearer of his desire, "she" stands for one aspect of his personality. "She" is the Anima in his reverie. Only

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<sup>99</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 150.

through her existence can he realize the serenity and wholeness of his spiritual world. In the long and lonely journey, one is the partner of the other, so both are the narrator and listener of the stories. "You" and "she" continually repeat the theme on the tragic fate of woman under the domination of the patriarchy. In this sense, woman's unfortunate fate may be analogized as the forgotten ancient civilization in the Yangtze River Valley. Every story represents one form of folk culture, reflecting its free and natural spirit.

Such a design in structure and theme, on the one hand, shows a clever way that the author takes to construct *Lingshan*. In virtue of various tragic stories on woman, the author alludes to the depressed situation of China ancient culture. This is a trace and collection for a variety of folk culture, such as "travel notes, literary sketches, a short essay, reflections, fable, myth, folk rhyme, comment, and even hearsay." On the other hand, for the traveler, searching for Lingshan is not a meticulously planned journey but an aimlessly roaming, so that the quest, to a certain extent, has become a symbol or sign, pointing to a search and probe into the meaning of life, to justify that there may be something deeper that have been concealed beneath the superficial layer of life. In this light, in virtue of this spiritual roaming in real world and virtual stories, by reflecting the myriads of phenomena in the phenomenal world, the author sees life and society and world as a philosophical topic to perceive and comprehend.

In chapter 51 of *Lingshan*, the traveler "I" visits a local cultural bureau, where there remains a preserved earthenware spinning wheel over 4000 years before. It restlessly revolves and so forms the cycles of emptiness, fullness, growth and decline. This reminds "I" of the primary origin of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate of Daoism, which reflects the principle of the complementariness of *Yin* (Femininity) and *Yang* (Masculinity), and the rule of the interdependency of fortune and misfortune. Accordingly, "I" guesses that the woman using the spindles was the first one to

discover this truth, and that the man who gave this meaning was named as Fuxi.<sup>100</sup> However, giving the life and intelligence to Fuxi should also be a woman. Thus, the one who created the intelligence of man should be the woman who is generally called as Nüwa.<sup>101</sup> The union of the first named woman Nüwa and the first named man Fuxi in fact constitute the collective consciousness of man and woman.

By tracing the origin of the spindle, the traveler is intended to prove the significant role played by woman in the course of human history. By discussing the birth of “collective consciousness” of man and woman, he points out the root of the intelligence and wisdom of human beings. It may be said that this point of view has set a tone for this novel, allowing this journey to nature to be closely linked with woman and woman’s vital role in history. Moreover, the traveler tries to convey a point, namely, although people are forgetting the origin of their thousands-of-year culture, its spirit and soul with female natural intelligence have been quietly nurturing the minds of the dwellers and travelers. In this sense, it may be said that man and woman, through the reciprocal combination and complementation, constitute human conscious and embody the source of human wisdom, which is oriented to a permanent truth of the existence of human beings.

The mutual restraint and mutual promotion between opposing forces can find its evidence both in western psychoanalysis and in classical Chinese culture. Anima and Animus are adopted by Jung to analyze two layers of unconscious. They are originally pronounced in Latin as “Anima” and “Animus,” with the former referring to the soul in the gender of female, and the latter to the mind in the gender of male. By means of the pair of words, Jung tries to explain the duality of human mind, namely the mind contains two kinds of human potentialities: femininity and masculinity.<sup>102</sup> Thus the

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<sup>100</sup> Fuxi: a legendary ruler of great antiquity, the first of the Three August Ones, credited with the invention of hunting and fishing and the domestication of animals. See *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (revised edition) (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2002), 365.

<sup>101</sup> Nüwa: a creator-goddess who patched with some blocks the holes in the sky made by Gonggong, the Spirit of Water, in a conflict with Zhuan xu, the Spirit of Fire. Ibid. 891.

<sup>102</sup> Eleanor Bertine, “The Collected Papers of Eleanor Bertine,” edited by Elizabeth C. Rohrbach, *Jung’s Contribution to our Time*, Published by G.P.Putnam’s Sons for The C.G.Jung Foundation For Analytical

completeness of the mind means a mutual accommodation of masculinity and femininity.

In this sense, Jung's theory has something in common with the cosmological view of the Yin-Yang School in the Pre-Qin period of Chinese culture. The Yin-Yang as a concept consists of two polar elements, originally referring to the shady and sunny sides of a valley or a hill, eventually developing into contrasting pairs such as female and male, negative and positive, cold and hot, wet and dry, weak and strong, disintegrative and integrative etc. These paired oppositions constitute the relationship of wax and wane in combination with the rotation of Five Elements—metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, and finally evolve into the Yin-Yang School on a cosmological basis. According to Zou Yan, the representative thinker of the Yin-Yang School, the Five Elements are opposed to each other, succeeding each other, or complementary to each other, and finally conceived as overcoming one another or producing one another. Through the interaction of the two conflicting forces, all things are produced.<sup>103</sup>

According to the psychoanalyst Bertine's reading on Jung, a complete mind should embrace both conscious and unconscious, contain every human potentiality, and so it should be both masculine and feminine.<sup>104</sup> She borrows the conception of Yin (Femininity) and Yang (Masculinity) from China's Yin-Yang School to explain their polar qualities:

Yang, the masculine principle, represents creative power and fertility; it is strong, active, direct, and clarifying, and is symbolized by the sun; Yin, the feminine principle, on the other hand, is quiet, receptive, fecund, and concretizing, and is symbolized by the moon.

The masculine principle may be called logos, creative understanding or wisdom; the

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Psychology, INC., (New York, 1967), 102.

<sup>103</sup> Guo Shangxing, *A History of Chinese Culture* (1993), co-authored by Sheng Xingqing, revised by Qiu Ke'an, Zhang Jin. Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 41-42.

<sup>104</sup> Eleanor Bertine, "The Collected Papers of Eleanor Bertine," edited by Elizabeth C. Rohrbach, *Jung's Contribution to our Time*, Published by G.P.Putnam's Sons for The C.G.Jung Foundation For Analytical Psychology, INC., (New York, 1967), 102-103.

feminine, eros; and eros is blind and amorphous without logos.<sup>105</sup>

Nonetheless, Yin and Yang are both diametrically opposite and absolutely inseparable. If such qualities as creativity, activeness, directness, and clarification mark the masculinity of human mind, then, such attributes as quietness, receptiveness, concreteness, and amorphousness, which are what the masculinity lacks, must be an indispensable part of a whole mind. In other words, if the sun symbolizes the form of the mind, then, the moon colors the disposition of the mind; if logos construct the rational principle of human mind, then, eros condenses the impelling passion in the depths of human heart. Accordingly, the completeness of the self depends on the complementarity of the other, and vice versa.

Similarly, in Chinese literature and culture, the Great Land is usually compared to “mother,” to glorify her virtues of accommodation and the solidness of root. On the contrary, Heaven is often worshipped as the “ruler of human,” symbolic of the patriarchal order, ruling and majesty. Heaven and Earth, the Yang and Yin, as two pairs of polar forces, jointly build up a homeland for human beings. In this metaphor, if Heaven is referred to as the rational society, then Earth is symbolized as the emotional human mind; if Yang signifies the creativity of human mind, then Yin is symbolic of its permanent magnanimity. It is the cooperation between Heaven and Earth that creates our phenomenal world and its intelligent people; it is the balance of Yin and Yang that harmonizes the rational society and the emotional human heart. Thus, the most harmonious state of being between Heaven and Earth and Human would bring to human the greatest success: it usually relies on the combination of three factors—heavenly timeliness, favorable terrain, and friendly people.

The traveler in *Lingshan* follows the guidance of his heart, roaming in various cultural ruins along the Yangtze River Valley, dreaming of a return to the “romantic charm of Chu Culture” in South China. Such a culture is far away from the dustiness of the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 102-103.

clamorous human world, deeply inscribed with the tradition and belief of ancestors. Quietly standing in the green forests and misty rain, she has been awaiting over thousands of years for an understanding traveler. This is the very culture described by some critics as “Another Chinese Culture.”

According to Gao Xingjian,<sup>106</sup> Chinese culture are categorized into four sections. Firstly, it is what is called as “orthodox culture” under the ruling of successive feudal dynasties of China, symbolized by the Great Wall and the Imperial Palace, also including the ethical teachings and morality-cultivating philosophy represented by the Confucian School, as well as corresponding early established literature, such as *Shijing* (The Book of Songs), *Chuci* (The Songs of the South) and Hanfu (Han Prose Poem), Tangshi (Tang Poem), Songci (Song Ci Poem), Ming qing baguwen (Ming-and-Qing Eight-Part Essay) etc. This is a culture represented by the culture of the Yellow River Valley in North China, and the whole history of Chinese culture is in fact a reflection of this ideological culture centering on the imperial political ruling of the North.

In contrast to the orthodox culture of the North, the culture represented by the Chu Culture of the Yangtze River Valley is always suppressed by North official culture. Nonetheless, the nourishing southern land is rich in originality and creativity, and has produced countless great names and famous works in the history of literature and culture. This is “another Chinese culture” reflected in *Lingshan*. Gao Xingjian views it as the integration of the following three cultural patterns, which is full of a “spirit of hermit.”

The second section includes Daoism evolved from primeval witchcraft and Buddhism passed on from India but transformed at the basis of Chinese culture. Both have preserved an independent form of religious culture, but had never replaced political

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<sup>106</sup> Gao Xingjian, “Literature and Metaphysics: about *Lingshan*,” *Without-ism* (2000), Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 179.

power to be orthodox. Thirdly, it refers to a folk culture, including multi-ethnic myths and legends, customary habits, folk songs and folk rhymes, storytelling and singing, dancing and musical performances, sacrificial ceremonies, as well as colloquial stories. The fourth type is purely embodied as an “eastern spirit,” which contains the natural philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi, the metaphysics of Wei and Jin, as well as Chan or Zen Buddhism that has separated itself from the form of religion. The literati often embrace this as a lifestyle to escape political oppression.

From what is discussed above, it may be seen that what Gao Xingjian is after is a culture that is diametrically opposite to the orthodox Chinese culture; or alternatively, what he seeks is a spirit of eastern culture rather than an ideological culture which is closely linked with imperial political ruling. This is a comprehensive culture, which integrates religious and philosophical Daoism and Buddhism, fuses into a variety of forms of folklore, and pursues a “purely eastern spirit” based on Lao-zhuang natural philosophy, Wei-jin metaphysics and Chan Buddhism. The critic Zhao Yiheng interprets Gao Xingjian’s cultural view in *Lingshan* as follows:

The national culture in Gao Xingjian’s heart is neither the mainstream culture represented by the Confucian School nor the political culture with the slogan of nationalism. It is the fusion of “culture of witchcraft” and conventionalized Daoism and Buddhism. It is latent in Wu and Chu and the upper and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, and constitutes a kind of cultural pattern particularly rich in charm and human touch. The spirits and ghosts are both frightful and amusing. This has a comical and tearful effect on a symbolic level but it is shocking on an implicit level.<sup>107</sup>

This kind of culture is “rich in charm and human touch” because it is far away from the rationality of orthodox ethical teachings and from the tyranny of political culture. Instead, it integrates “culture of witchcraft” with the “conventionalized Daoism and

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<sup>107</sup> Zhao Yiheng, “The Song of Traveller: Preface to Collected Novels of Gao Xingjian,” introduction to *2000 Library—Intensive Readings on Contemporary Chinese Books: Gao Xingjian* (1999), Hong Kong: Mingbao, 1.

Buddhism,” and brings Heaven, Earth, Human, gods and ghosts together into the spirit of human culture to recreate, and then produces a culture full of human flavor and local mysterious color. This kind of cultural ecology extends human imaginations towards every corner that the time and space of culture can reach, linking the heavenly laws, the religious doctrine, the ways of gods and spirits with human ethics, to kindle the darkness of human spiritual world and discover an accessible road to human mind.

On the superficial level, this fusion generates a seemingly entertaining mixture of culture. In the deeper sense, it reflects and raises some questions that are worth pondering: how can humans establish a harmonious relationship with Nature? How can human find a spiritual path towards the self? And how is the marginal able to walk out of the shadow of the mainstream?

These questions on the relationship between humans and nature, between the marginal and the mainstream have been discussed in different fields of study. As to how to link the natural world with cultural psychology, Jung explains it by archetype:

Whether he understands them or not, man must remain conscious of the world of the archetypes, because in it he is still a part of Nature and is connected with his own roots. A view of the world or a social order that cuts him off from the primordial images of life not only is no culture at all but, in increasing degree, is a prison or a stable...<sup>108</sup>

For Jung, the world of the archetypes is the origin of man's root, which makes man become a part of Nature. The negligence to “Nature” and “origin of root” not only means a “prison” to culture it is also possible to sow the seeds of disaster for the future of humans, for this is not simply the violation of natural laws but also seen as the restraint on human free imaginations. Thus, it may be said that rationality, to a

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<sup>108</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, “Positive Aspects of the Mother-Complex,” *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung*, Volume 9, Part I, London: Routledge Par. 174, P.93-94.



greater extent, as the most significant quality of human, when it is entirely used as a principle of making social orders and as the arbiter of right and wrong and good and evil, would be very possible to lead human to an extreme—cultural tyranny. For Jung, the consequence of cultural tyranny is indeed by no means different from the “Complex” caused by the repressed human mind. What is the difference between a cultural ecology lacking vitality and an individual being devoid of free personality?

Based on what is discussed above, it may be said that the harmonious fusion of the rational social order and the irrationality of human mind may be seen as both a social philosophy and a natural law. Following this philosophy or law is to counterbalance the rational by the irrational to give human mind a wider space to think and imagine freely. Moreover, the balanced state of being may be regarded as a workable method that psychoanalysts probe human mind and an idealistic plane that philosophers seek to know the world and the cosmos. Both intend to open up an accessible path to the exploration of human’s relation to external worlds.

Accordingly, the full integration of human sociality and spirituality means a parallel extension of human cultural spirit in the boundless space and time, with no more distinction between nobility and humility, between profundity and superficiality, and between elite and margin. History has repeatedly justified such a point of view. In the long history of Chinese culture, the culture of witchcraft is one of the most arcane types in folk culture. In the eyes of elites, it is no more than a “low culture” excluded from “high culture.” It is generally thought that only people at the grass roots blindly hold such a belief, and so it is devalued as “feudal superstition” or “unorthodox ways.” In fact, this arbitrary view reflects a fairly ignorant bias against “culture of witchcraft.” The spiritual realm of human beings is boundless, utterly going beyond humans’ cognitive scope for the physical world. In contrast with the vastness of the cosmos, the capacity of human cognition is ultimately very limited, what has not yet been known does not necessarily mean that it does not exist at all.

In China, the topic on witchcraft is often closely linked with literature. This is a literary world that links human world with the realms of gods and spirits. So it is both humanly and transmundane. It may be said that it is such a literary style that underlies the everlastingness of some literary works. It arouses readers' boundless imagination for the myriads of worlds beyond the human world. Such great works as *Xiyou ji* (The Journey to the West), *Liaozhai zhiyi* (Tales of Ghosts in Chatting Study Room), and *Fengshen bang* (Titles Granted to the Gods), all involve myths, legends, and stories between man and ghosts and gods, reflecting the heavenly laws, the ghostly ways, and the spirit of human concern. These works with diverse forms establish an interactive communication with vast time and space, where is a world that has transcended human world, extending man's imagination towards the different realms of the boundless universe.

In a cultural sense, one of the aims of the journey to Lingshan is to discover the natural intelligence of "culture of mountains and rivers" and resurrect the spirit of folk culture. As opposed to the patriarchal orthodox culture, this is a marginalized existence with feminine cultural mind. In the history of Chinese culture, "she" is named as South Chu culture. Like the forgotten goddess of Muse, she remains latent in the misty rains of South China over centuries, quietly displaying her uniqueness and mystique. Speaking of the cultural theme of *Lingshan*, Zhao Yiheng writes the following:

The theme of *Lingshan* serves as a kind of resistance: the Yellow River—the Central Plain—the Confucian School—rationality—is educated to become an official culture. Another is a naturally fused anti-system, anti-mainstream culture—the Yangtze River—Bashu, Chu, Wu and Yue—Buddhism, Daoism and Witchcraft—anti-rationality.

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<sup>109</sup> Zhao Yiheng, "Lingshan," *Jianli yizhong xiandai chanju* (Towards a Modern Zen Theatre) (1999), Taipei: Erya, 114.

In contrast to the tyranny of the male-dominating official culture along the Yellow River Valley, the culture of the Yangtze River Valley is rich in the elegance and sublimeness of female temperament. The orthodox always tries to shackle human natural instinct using teachings and constrain the free development of human nature. Instead, the marginalized folk culture gives human mind a wide space to think and imagine freely, which stimulates and nurtures endless imagination and creativity of the literati. In this sense, the traveler's journey to *Lingshan* is not a purely personal escape from the real society but an attempt to activate again a marginal culture and bring it back to the human world.

Based on what is discussion above, three parts would be used to interpret *Lingshan*: "witchcraft and femininity," "witchcraft and spirits," and "witchcraft and wanderings." "Witchcraft and femininity" involves some sorceresses the traveller encounters, such as the witch that exercises magic, the sorceress that receives messages from the spirits, the goddess Tianluo who urges the carpenter for retribution, the seductress's revenge on villagers, the legendary women Bandit wife and Zhuhuapo, as well as the ghost of the wronged beauty incarnated. "Witchcraft and spirits" seeks to explore the ways that mountain folks link the living with the deceased, including the sacrificial ceremony that Yi nationality singer makes to send off the departed, the memorial ritual performed by Miao nationality shaman by chanting *Jigu ci* (*Drum Sacrifice Songs*), and the traveller's discovery of a folk song book *Heian chuan* (*Copy of Darkness*), as well as the Taoist rite performed by a folk Taoist. The simple form of folklore expresses humans' reverence and awe for Heaven and Earth, the gods and ghosts, and deceased ancestors.

In "witchcraft and wanderings," the traveller visits Buddhist temples, listens to Buddhists' stories, makes friends with Buddhist monks, resides in Taoist temple, and explores the Way of Taoists. In virtue of his spiritual wanderings, the traveller intends to comprehend the plane that Buddhists attains and the purport that Taoists pursues.

What follow are some chapters of *Lingshan* involved in the discussion. Chapter 8 sets a tone for the traveller's wandering through a botanist's proclamation "Human follows Earth, Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows Dao, Dao follows Nature." It shows that the traveller's roaming in Nature may be seen as human's communication with Heaven and Earth, Nature, as well as gods and spirits, aiming to realize a harmonious common existence between the boundless Nature and myriads of worlds and all manifestations of the universe. Chapter 36 tells a story of a senior monk's death, which incurred a fire disaster in the temple. In chapter 37 the traveller stands before the ruins of the temple, looking back to its story and legend. In chapter 48 the protagonist retells the story of "a nun's intestine-washing by cutting her abdomen." The traveller's recollections are not intended for the rises and falls of the temple but for a permanent Buddha-heart. In chapter 47 the traveller encounters a Buddhist monk and several Taoists, and discusses with them the ideal of being a traveller and the plane as a Taoist. In chapter 63, the traveller talks with a senior Taoist about the world view of "Oneness of Heaven and Human," which again echoes with what the botanist quoted in chapter 8.

The common existence of Heaven and Earth, the vying luxuriance of all the creations on the Earth, the mutual complement of Yin and Yang, and the interaction between human and gods and spirits, all these together constitute "culture of Lingshan," presenting to the traveller an ability to look as wide as the eye can see, and to reach as far as the heart can sense. This is the spirit and soul of folk culture in South China: her natural intelligence being able to penetrate human heart offers a boundless prospect for the traveller's journey of life.

## 9. Witchcraft and Femininity

The protagonist roams along the Yangtze River Valley, tracing and exploring a lost civilization. This is a simple folk culture, which is far away from the materialized

modern civilization and from the center of political culture. It includes storytelling and opera-singing, seeing geomantic quality and performing rites, fortune telling and divination practising, Buddhism worshipping and Daoism debates, ancestor-worshipping and funeral-attending, folk songs and folk rhyme, fables, myths and legends. Each comes to emergence according to the opportunity of its own. It presents to readers a scroll of picture of panoramic life in the human world, displaying the vigour and thriving of an ancient commercial port of culture.

The “culture of witchcraft” as a representative of folk culture would be the first to come on stage. Witchcraft is generally based on a certain belief that worships supernatural power, conducted by professional or temporary staff, accompanied by mysterious rituals, aiming to know and transform the world. In ancient China, witchcraft was usually seen as an extremely significant activity of folklore. Professional shaman or priest is invited to perform memorial ceremonies and sacrificial rites, through which people could establish contacts with the deceased, the ancestors, and the gods and spirits, to pray for blessings, ward off calamities, gain good luck but avoid ill luck, have a good harvest, have a growing family, as well as cure illness.

According to this definition, “witchcraft and spirits” and “witchcraft and femininity” may be categorized into one part. However, both highlight differently so are discussed separately. “Witchcraft and femininity” places stress on the magic of witchcraft by closely linking it with woman; “witchcraft and spirits” lays emphasis on the content of chanting. The former intends to show the mysterious feature of ceremonies, but the latter focuses on displaying the cultural connotation of witchcraft. Additionally, “witchcraft and femininity” mainly consists of sorceresses, but what the latter involves is male “master of singer”, “priest”, and “folk Taoist.”

Speaking of witchcraft, people are used to associating it with woman or evilness, due to an established image of evil women in some literary works. In the context of

western culture; a woman riding on a broom has generally been seen as a symbol of evilness. Similarly, “witch” or “sorceress” in Chinese people’s understanding is usually used to negatively describe those who deliberately mystify simple things to make troubles. In addition, “witch” can be explained in different terms. Such as “shaman” usually refers to those who have religious authority in some tribes and are able to talk to spirits and cure illness. But “sorcerer” refers to a man who uses magic and receives help from evil spirits, especially in stories. In this section, “witchcraft” is seen as a synthesis of the ceremonies of manifold folklore, full of magical local color and mystical female aura.

Thus, this research views that the conception of witch is somewhat similar to the disposition of Jung’s Anima. Jung points out that Anima is not a specific woman figure but an absolute female image. It may be traced back to an original “imprint” left by woman’s experiences, a sedimentation of woman’s “imprint” in the long time. Therefore, Anima may be read as a mixture of the dispositions of a woman, who is rich in feelings and emotions, symbolizing woman’s holiness and pureness, danger and taboo, magic and limitlessness:

Everything that the Anima touches becomes numinous—unconditional, dangerous, taboo, magical...<sup>110</sup>The relation with the Anima is again a test of courage, an ordeal by fire for the spiritual and moral forces of man...<sup>111</sup>The picture I have drawn of the Anima so far is not a complete. Although she may be the chaotic urge to life, something strangely meaningful clings to her, a secret knowledge or hidden wisdom, which contrasts most curiously with her irrational elfin nature.<sup>112</sup>

For Jung, Anima may be seen as a condensation of numinous serenity and chaotic urge of life, so she is both magical and dangerous. With both the delicacy of elfin and

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<sup>110</sup> C.G.Jung, “The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious,” *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung* (1968), Volume 9, Part I, London: Routledge, Par. 59, P. 28.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, Par. 61, P. 29.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, Par. 64, P. 30.

the knowledge of the wise, so she is both irrational and profound. Therefore, to Jung, Anima means both a holy innocence that can purify human heart and an unleashed force that can break down our moral inhibitions. Therefore, to understand Anima may be seen as a process of man's spiritual and moral ordeal to temper the courage of the self.

It is hard to say what a complete Anima is like, but Jung is certain to say that Anima is "not the soul in the dogmatic sense" but a "natural archetype" that satisfactorily sums up all the statements of the unconsciousness, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion.<sup>113</sup> It is clear that what Jung highlights is an all-embracing spirituality of Anima's existence rather than its dogmatic notion, because she symbolizes an image associated with the unconscious, the primitive mind, and the history of language and religion:

It is a "factor" in the proper sense of the word. Man cannot make it; on the contrary, it is always the priori element in his moods, reactions, impulses, and whatever else is spontaneous in psychic life. It is something that lives of itself, and that makes us live; it is a life behind consciousness that cannot be completely integrated with it, but from which, on the contrary, consciousness arises.<sup>114</sup>

For psychoanalysts, Anima is originated from a chaotic impulse in life, symbolic of the irrationality of the unconscious, and represents various huge spontaneous moods, reactions and emotions in human's inner life. Thus Anima is oriented towards an instinctive realm of human mind, which houses infinite potential of the mind and conceals unfathomable changeability of internal life. All this shows a mystical perception that human has for his own psychological existence.

In *Lingshan* Anima is incarnated as a cultural mind embodied by woman, standing for

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. Par. 57, P. 27.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. Par. 57, P. 27.

the accumulation and sedimentation of folklore along the Yangtze River Valley, imprinted with a magic horn of Nature, the mystery of creation, and the solidness of root. Placing himself in the mystical atmosphere of the journey to Lingshan, the protagonist could not but contemplate on everything he sees, he feels and he experiences. He listens to stories about witches, encounters bewitching women, and even personally goes to see how a witch exercises magic. In chapter 14 in *Lingshan*, introduced by a friend, "I" pays a pious visit to a sorceress, who can communicate with spirits and deities to make a divination for people:

Inside is an extremely small room. There is only a desk used as incense altar, on which are memorial tablets worshipping Most Exalted Lord, Brilliance Emperor and Goddess of Mercy. Below the incense altar are offerings of cakes, fruits, clean water and wine. On the wooden partition hang many red banners edged with black or embroidered with yellow fang, on which are words to request good luck and dispel calamities. Sunlight penetrates through a transparent tile on the roof, and smoke from burning incense rises in the ray of light, causing an atmosphere that prohibits sounds.<sup>115</sup>

This is a typical folk rite for offering: an incense-burning altar, deity tablets, offerings, and command banners. On the altar are worshipped deities, and various offerings are placed below the altar; on the walls there are hanging banners with spells, and strings of smoke of burning incense are quietly rising. All this immediately evokes an awe-inspiring aura that causes deterrence to people and the spirits. Looking at these pious furnishings for offering, smelling the fragrance of burning incense, "I" couldn't help giving rise to a kind of piety, so that "I" knees down on the cattail hassock honestly worshipping for three times, despite the fact that "I" is not a devout believer.

However, she warns me of an unlucky year, for "I" will encounter "White Tiger Star" and it will be difficult for me to escape from it. Even a great calamity will be imminent, and it is impossible to survive, even if "I" would like to burn more incense

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<sup>115</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 81.



and pray for it. So I ask her for a method to avoid this disaster. Then she enters the state:

She is probably exercising self-hypnosis and already in a state of hysteria...she is still babbling...I see a fat convulsing body at my feet, gradually arching her back and slowly recoiling at the foot of the cane chair, like a wounded animal...I believe she has indeed had an attack of hysteria.<sup>116</sup>

Her hysterical performance is extremely incomprehensible to me. But “I” has to believe that she indeed enters a realm that “I” fails to know. She eventually told me that “I” would be still unable to survive my ill luck even though “I” was willing to spend more money to burn incense and pray for it. “I” feels scared of something, but does not know whether it is my destiny or her cursing. “I” has no idea of whether or not my fate is doomed or my heart is not devout enough? As a consequence, “I” has to suffer her cursing, because of being unable to be forgiven?

The traveller “I” has early heard about the magical performance prevailing among mountain folks. But it is simply labelled by him as “folk witchcraft,” with no deeper understanding of that, possibly because it is not in his own interest. However, once his fate is related to it, the detachment with nothing disturbing the mind does not exist any longer. Obviously, the spirituality of man is closely linked to the self, of which both inner peace and worry are born. If always getting obsessed with the self, one would impossibly become truly free in spirit, and so eventually fails to escape from the bondage of the mind.

Chapter 7 and chapter 13 in *Lingshan* tell the legendary stories about Bandit wife and Zhuhuapo respectively. In the eyes of mountain folks, both are half-human and half-legendary characters. Bandit wife is the sort of woman that one may only watch from afar but not dare to “make a conversation.” Zhuhuapo is also the sort of “wild

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<sup>116</sup> *Lingshan*, 84-85.

flower” in the mountains, which one “can only watch but not dare to pick up at all.”

She is such a coquette but no one dares to strike up a conversation with her. People around her know clearly that beneath her basket contained with colored silk threads is a pair of shiny loaded black revolvers. As long as the boat is anchored and soldiers walk out of the boat, her delicate hands used to embroider would shoot them down one by one.<sup>117</sup>

On the mountain road with nobody visible, she immediately puts a spell on you. You certainly know that you can only love the seductive and beautiful Zhuhuapo with three percent, leaving seven percent for respecting, and that you can only yearn for her love but dare not act rashly...they say all the Zhuhuapo can touch the points of the body, and the art of her fingers is handed down from many generations.<sup>118</sup>

The beautiful but cruel Bandit wife has a pair of delicate hands and a pair of loaded revolvers. She uses the delicate hands not only to embroider but also to shoot people, so people knowing of her would rather stand in awe of her. Zhuhuapo is also a coquettish character but not easily to deal with. She is seductive to man, but men only show her their admiration rather than provoke her, because she has a pair of miraculous hands to cure illness and touch points, as well as a sharp tongue to arrange various matters. Nevertheless, both of the two powerful women had been the daughters of good family and suffered bullying and humiliation of bad people:

At that time she came to a river with a bamboo basket to wash vegetables. A *wupeng* boat stopped beside her. Before she realized what was happening, two men had grabbed her by the arms, dragging her into the boat; before she had time to call for help, a roll of linen thread had been stuffed into her mouth; before the boat had traveled five *li*, she had been raped in turn by several bandits.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 43-44.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 43.

They said that once there were three sworn brothers who didn't believe in this. They happened to meet a Zhuhuapo on a mountain road and had an evil thought. Couldn't we three men deal with one woman? They figured it out and rushed up to drag Zhuhuapo into a cave.<sup>120</sup>

Each woman has a sad story, so neither Bandit wife nor Zhuhuapo are exceptions. She would not have become the awesome bandit wife without being grabbed into the bandit boat. Zhuhuapo would not have been labeled as the bewitching "wild flower" if man had not always preyed on woman. Therefore, the two seductive women may be seen as the mixture of the beauty and the evil. They possess the charm of beautiful women, the evilness of witches, as well as the courage of rebellious women. In this respect, they distinguish themselves from most of ordinary women in real life. They have also had their stories and legends spreading generations after generations among local people and travelers, which not merely diverts the loneliness of the travelers, but also embodies a legendary color of this land, offering to the travelers an endlessly imaginative magic and mystery.

The mystical atmosphere of this land is not only resulted from the sorceress's magic performance and legendary Zhuhuapo and Bandit wife, but also emerged from the spectres of some departed beautiful women wandering around the wilderness. In chapter 9 and 13, "you" tells "she" of two stories. The first happens at Yudu, a ferry named as Yu Crossing, and it is also well known to local villagers as Resentful Ghost Cliff, for there frequently appear many beautiful women who had been wrongly driven to death for love. In addition, there is a kind of bird named as "blue head" in this place. This kind of bird looks like the "blue bird" in myth that had ever carried food for Queen Mother of the West,<sup>121</sup> so it is almost seen as a symbol for a woman who is blindly devoted to love:

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>121</sup> The Queen Mother of the West: a mythological figure, usually described as a beautiful immortal, who dwells at Jasper Lake (Yaochi) in the Kunlun Mountains; in her huge palace grow the magic peach trees, which bear the fruits of immortality once every three thousand years. See *A Chinese-English Dictionary* (Revised Edition) (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1997), 1319.

You tell her that the blue bird is just like a woman. It is true that there are stupid women, but the women you are talking about are those with feminine intelligence and feminine sensuality. However, women in deep love usually suffer an unfortunate fate. Men want women for pleasure; husbands want their wives to look after home and cook meals; parents want a daughter-in-law to continue the family line. None of these are for love.<sup>122</sup>

Here, it could be sensed that the storyteller conveys a meaning more than the story itself. He intends to say the stupidity of unswervingly loyal women, but he cynically compares woman as the clever blue bird. It is true that woman has the intelligence of the blue bird, but she lacks the magic of the breed of the bird, because she is often baffled by love and would rather believe in permanent love than face the cruelty of the reality. As a consequence, she cannot escape the tragedy of dying for love. This is the very fate of the Youngest Sister (Yaomei) in the story. She is unwilling to marry an old rich man to be his concubine, so plans to run away with her lover. But he breaks his promise, being no worthy of her loyalty:

Garrulous women would say about hearing the cawing of a crow in that early morning. It is always a bad omen to hear a crow cawing. The black crow cawed and wheeled in the sky, so it must have sensed an aura of the dying. People can give off an aura of death before they are dying and not die yet.<sup>123</sup>

The ominous sign foretells the doom of the Youngest Sister: a steadfast girl dies for love. Here, the author narrates the story by adopting metaphor and comparison to show and enhance the tragic fate of pure and innocent women. For example, the elfin blue bird and the inauspicious crow are symbolized as the intelligence of life and the shadow of death respectively, which adds to the story somewhat hidden bitterness and ghostliness.

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<sup>122</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 55.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

In chapter 13, “you” tells another story about woman and bird. A black shrike reminds “you” of a girl in your teens. She died in the river after being bullied and humiliated by a group of boys, so that she manifests her ghost on the elfin black bird to express her resentment:

You coward! These bastards harmed her but didn’t dare admit it. But you didn’t dare expose them either. So, for many years she has lingered in your mind, like a nightmare. Her resentful ghost makes you no peace and appears in various manifestations...the chirping black elf, the shrike with white toes and a red beak.<sup>124</sup>

It is believed that the ghost who was persecuted to death always bears a grudge in the mind. Just like the wronged girl in the story, she incarnates as a black shrike to hint that she was treated unjustly. This is just like a nightmare, frequently haunting “you,” making “you” uneasy and guilty, for “you” was a coward. “You” failed to help her survive the tragedy and now “you” are also unable to punish those wicked people.

It is said that among the people the sudden death of an unmarried girl leads to a consequence that her soul has no stable place to settle, so that she has to become a “lonely spirit” or “wild ghost,” wandering around the wilderness. So, those drifting ghosts are mostly women who were wronged and driven to death. Just like these persecuted young women in the stories, in order to dispel hatred and resentment in their hearts, they attach their spirits to birds or exercise magic arts to cause more innocent people’s death. This is why Resentful Ghost Cliff was named.

The two sad ghostly stories seem to imply that emotional women are both beautiful and stupid. They rashly give their precious life to those untrustworthy men, eventually resulting in an irretrievable tragedy. Here, the narrator narrates these beautiful tragic stories in a metaphorical way. The “blue head” and “black shrike” here are not

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 79.

ordinary birds but the incarnations of the grieved ghosts of infatuated women. They are the ghosts of river, frequently wandering around Resentful Ghost Cliff by the bank of river, either driving more innocent people to death or haunting someone to appease their grudge. Such ghostly stories about woman have added to the traveller's pirital journey a touch of mystique and sentimentality.

In chapter 17 "you" and "she" find a temporary lodging in a woman's home in a village. You two live in two different rooms separated by one wooden wall, so "she" can listen to your story from the other side of the wall:

"There is a small door," you grope your way in the dark.

"What did you see?" she asks in her room.

"Nothing, it is a door plank, without any crack, oh, there is a lock."

"It is really frightening," you hear her from the other side of the door.

"Be quick, what did you see?" she asks eagerly.

"An oil lamp with wick is burning in a small altar. The altar is fixed on the gable and there is a memorial tablet inside." You said, "The landlady of the house must be a witch. She is here to invoke the ghost of the dead and grab the spirit and soul of the living people. She makes the living lose unconscious, and then the ghosts attach themselves to the living and speak through their mouths."<sup>125</sup>

This is a place full of aura of ghostliness. An oil lamp lightens up the small shrine on the wall, where there is a memorial tablet, through which the witch exercises a magic game that "the ghost finds its rebirth in other's body." Before becoming a sorceress, she was an ill-fated girl: at the age of six she was arranged a prenatal betrothal; at twelve she became a child bride; she was raped by her father-in-law at fourteen; yet at her twenty her husband died. She has gone crazy since the day her husband was dead:

It was said that all the women in the village could not subdue her. It needed several men sit

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 105-106.

on her and twist her arms to have her tied up. From then on she became crazy and always predicted the calamities that would befall the village. She predicted that Ximao's mother would become a widow and it really happened...all the women were frightened of her curses and all the men tried to make conversations with her. She seduced them and then discarded them. Later on she powdered her face, installed an altar, and openly invoked the ghosts and spirits. Everyone was terrified of her.<sup>126</sup>

The crazy woman, in the villagers' understanding, is actually possessed by a certain supernatural being, so that she becomes incredibly strong and is able to predict the fate for other people. Now she is capable of connecting with the spirits, either to pray for blessings or curse for calamities, or even grab the soul of the living and invoke the ghosts of the dead. Such a sorceress both being respected and terrifying may be seen as a mixed being of kind angel and evil monster. Her unfortunate fate makes her grudging, so she takes revenges on men by first seducing them and then abandoning them. It is said that she is a being between the border of the nether world and the human world. She has been given a supernatural power to link human with deities and spirits, holding the privilege to govern the blessings and misfortunes of mortal beings.

The stories as such are believed to happen more frequently in remote villages than at busy modern cities. In this sense, it may be reasonable to say that, if a human being is not the only being in the vast thousands of worlds, those simpler people in the simpler places are more possible to sense, to realize, and even to communicate with various beings between Sky and Earth.

It is said that those who committed misconducts in the human world would be punished when they go into the nether world. This might not be superstitious but rather a natural law between Heaven and Earth. Chapter 29 tells a story of how Goddess Tianluo urges the end of a carpenter's life:

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 107-109.

He had committed too many wrongdoings, she says.

Did the Goddess Tianluo say so?

Yes, she said he wasn't a good old man, not an honest old man.

Maybe.<sup>127</sup>

The old man is clear about his wrongdoings. He raped a mute girl in his shed. But he drove her away when she was pregnant, so that she was reduced to a prostitute and beggar, losing the chance to be a dignified human and lead a normal life. Now she has incarnated as Goddess Tianluo to be revenged on him. She always appears in his mind, disturbing his conscience:

But her eyes fixedly stare at him.

It is the eyes of Goddess Tianluo.

It is the eyes of the girl who couldn't talk.

It is her eyes full of terror as he raped her?

The eyes full of revenge!

The eyes full of plead!<sup>128</sup>

The pair of resentful eyes has always haunted him. He is aware that he has committed unpardonable sins to a helpless mute girl. He is frightened and feels guilty so that he is tearful. But that cannot reduce the punishment that he deserves, which is just his retribution that the law of Heaven and Earth does justice to him:

Was it retribution?

Yes! Any girl who was bullied will hunger for revenge! If she is still alive, if she can still find him, then she will dig out his eyes, curse him with the most vicious words, invoke monsters to banish him into the eighteenth level of Hell, and use the cruelest punishment to

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 163.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 165.



torture him!<sup>129</sup>

Through the carved statue of Goddess Tianluo, the dumb girl revenges herself on the old carpenter. The story seems to remind people of a principle in the human world: those who committed serious crimes would be punished severely. Even though it might be possible for the offender to escape the punishment of the law in the human world, it would be impossible to survive the cruel punishment of the Hell. It may thus be said that this is the very causality between Heaven and Earth: whoever has committed evilness would be brought to justice, sooner or later. These savage tortures, such as digging out eyes, cursing, going to Hell, as well as throwing into oil pot, have been prepared to punish those offenders.

In this story, the old carpenter eventually fits his crime by falling down in the fire and being burned to death, leaving the carved head of Goddess Tianluo at his feet.

(The head) wears a crown of twigs from chaste tree. There are four small holes at the rim of the crown, from each hole protrudes a tortoise's head, also like an animal crouching in the hole, with its head stretching outside. Her eyelids droop as if in sleeping, the bridge of her exquisite nose joints with the slender bones of her brow, as if her brows are knitting. Her small but thin lips are tightly closed, with a slight scorn for human life, and her black eyes that can hardly be perceived convey a wisp of indifference.<sup>130</sup>

The delicately carved head of Goddess Tianluo serves as a final work that the carpenter has made, and also as a grave that he has dug for himself. So the head statue is not only signified as the goddess who rules over the death of human but also attached with the grudging ghost of the persecuted girl. Moreover, the slight scorn at the lips of the goddess might show her attitude towards death: death to the living seems to be an extremely terrifying thing; rather, to the gods and ghosts in other

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 164.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 166.

realms, being alive might not necessarily mean more happiness than death.

The old carpenter's story serves as a perfect example for such a point. He has been a well-known craftsman and carved various idols for gods and spirits, including Goddess of Mercy, God of Wealth, Judge of Wish-fulfilling, Monk of Picking up vegetables, half-man-half-god Zhang Kaishan, and half-man-half-animal Mashuai. From which it may be seen that he has already accumulated many merits for his present life. Nonetheless, he took advantage of a wretched girl, which is seen as a big evil, so that he cannot be given a good ending.

The good people died and the evil people died as well. Life seems to only mean a doom to reach the same destination by different routes. This may be used to explain that wisp of indifference from the black eyes of Goddess of Tianluo. She looks at the human world in an indifferent detachment: people take every means to grasp and grab, only to satisfy their selfish desires; however, all, without exception, would come to an end in death.

As what "you" said in chapter 25: "...all the old women in this mountain village are witches and almost all the young women are seductresses." What have been discussed above are about the legends of "witches," and what follows will be stories about "seductress."

"You" often debates with "she" over the subject of woman. This time it is triggered by an argument about "seductress" or "fox spirit."

This is a fox spirit, you say, after pausing seconds.

It is not only man who has lust.

Of course, woman is the same as man, you say.

Why isn't woman allowed to do what man is allowed? It is a natural instinct of human.

You say you are not blaming woman, you are only saying she is a fox spirit.

There is nothing bad with fox spirits.<sup>131</sup>

A woman who has lust is a “fox spirit” in your opinion but a “natural instinct of humans” in her understanding. “You” says that you are just stating the fact instead of biasing against woman. “She” defends that woman should enjoy with man the same right to have lust even if labeled as “fox spirit.” In fact, what “you” is narrating is just a story of how a woman’s lust is destroyed by the bias of social conventions.

In chapter 31 in *Lingshan*, it is told that a young woman’s husband in a village was dead. Immediately after that, calamities began to befall her. All the women who have husbands in the village guard against her in the way that a soldier defends against an enemy. But all the men in the village show their greed for her good looks. As a result, she becomes an acknowledged “fox spirit” in the eyes of women in the village. From then on, she often suffers bullying and humiliation from other women. They either had her hair torn down or got her face scratched, even got her stripped off, carrying and throwing her into far mountains:

They figured it out that, on the mountain road that she goes to fetch firewood, a few hefty women rush up and have her clothes stripped off, tying her up, carrying her on a stick. She keeps calling help. Even though her lover heard it and came to help her, once he saw so fierce women that they were able to strip the skin of someone, he even dare not appear. They carried her into the mountains to Peach Flower Place, where used to be a land blooming peach flowers but later became a lepers’ village, because it produced such a wanton woman. They threw her together with the stick on the only road out of the place, spitting her, stamping their feet, cursing her, and then left.<sup>132</sup>

This seems just like a slaughter between women. The “fox spirit” is mercilessly “slaughtered” by her sisters of the same gender. For these women, however, it is

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 174.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 177.

proper and right to punish the most wanton woman in the village by using the most mischievous means, for she deserves it. In their understanding, she has been confirmed as the one who violated the social ethical laws, so everyone is entitled to carry out the punishment.

What about the punished then? In China's long feudalism history, it may be said that it was the widowed women's doom to be seen as the common enemy of women with husband, and to be reduced to the desired object that men prey on. Just like the "fox spirit" in the story, as an object spat and cursed by villagers, she has no choice but is passively involved in, and even has to bear such a disgraceful mark throughout the rest of her life. In reality, she is not a deliberate wrongdoer at all; instead, she is only a helpless prey, wantonly hunted by men and relentlessly bullied and humiliated by other women.

The "fox spirit" was nakedly dumped into mountains and then it rained for several days and nights. After the rain stopped, someone saw that she was back to the village, wrapped in an alpine rush, wearing a pair of tattered trousers, looking ghastly pale. So, the villagers either close their doors and windows when seeing her or avoid meeting her, as if she could spread a pestilence. However, she becomes fresher and prettier later on:

A few days later, when she walks out of her house again, she had recovered and became even more bewitching. Her lips were shining red and her cheeks were as pink as peach flowers. But she no longer dared to walk around in the village and only went to the stream to fetch water and wash clothes in the early morning before daybreak or else after nightfall, always hurrying with her head down and walking close to the wall. If children saw her, they would shout from a distance, "Leper woman, leper woman, your nose will rot first and then your lips!" and then run off.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 177.

She is an object that the villagers swear and abuse, and also an innocent victim caused by the social conventional bias against widowed women. What she suffers is not only a physical abuse but also a mental hurting of being isolated and discriminated by her villagers. The most miserable is that she has no other choice but silently endure everything on which she has been imposed. She lives alone in the village, as if a visible ghost; she is a living human, but is not at all basically respected as a human. In the eyes of the villagers, a “fox spirit” like her should just get what she deserves. If there is anything to match her, it must be venomous spitting or cursing or even heavy beating.

As if as retribution, the villagers’ malicious curse at her has come true at last. Sores grow out of her face, later on it spreads through the village, men develop sores on their backs or legs and women on their heads or faces, either losing skin or losing hair or even died, eventually there are only unmarried girls and children who can escape the ill fate by leaving for other villages.

“You” and “she” start arguing about the story. “She” says that the story you told is evil and disgusting. “You” replies that this is a story of man and that man only believes in lust. But “she” has a faith in love in the human world. “You” answers that that is woman’s logic and woman’s innocent way of thinking.

This argument reveals a problem existing between man and woman: both are used to looking at a person or a matter from a fixed perspective. Man generally takes it for granted that woman should lead a life codified by social law and order. Otherwise, any behaviour that is possible to violate this rule would be regarded as a heresy or dissident to be rejected or to be destroyed. With respect to the story itself, it may be said that it is the shallow and savage social bias against widowed women that destroyed woman’s normal life as a human and twisted her personality. So, she eventually chose to perish together with those who had persecuted her.

The tragic ending of “fox spirit” could be seen as woman’s resistance against the patriarchal persecution at the huge price of life. The ill treatment from social conventions restrains and damages her normal desires of life. While she vanishes in the curses of the villagers, she is also revenged on them by the same curses for their persecution to her.

This is a sad story but provides us with a train of thought to establish a constructive relationship between man and woman. Because of immanent endowments, what man sees is usually what woman is unable to see, and vice versa. Man sees himself as a defender of the codified rational society and so tries to exclude “logic of woman;” on the contrary, woman as the embodiment of natural and original human nature tries to construct a perfect philosophy for woman.

Thus this is entirely a fruitless argument if neither is willing to think of the other in the other’s way of thinking. Whereas it would be a constructive communication if both are willing to look at the same thing from the position of the other. Only in this way can they observe more objectively and judge a person or a matter more fairly.

In addition, the doom that dominates the life and death of villagers makes readers sense a mysterious aura. For example, after being heavily beaten and continuingly left in the rain for days, the woman becomes incredibly more refreshing and more bewitching. This plot implies that the “fox spirit” has been given a supernatural power, and incarnated as a beautiful goddess of revenge to proclaim her challenge to the merciless world. This beautiful omen foretells a cruel revenge that she would take on those who mercilessly persecuted her. Another example is the sores spreading like plague, which can be seen as a long repressed indignation in her heart when she was bullied and humiliated. Resorting to this disaster, she conducts her “witchcraft” to annihilate those who wilfully insulted her. Only in this way can she feel less resentful of their relentless humiliation to her. In this sense, she is no longer the coquettishly seductive widow but rather the mischievous witch. Like a raging fire of revenge, she

intends to burn down and bury everything that had ever hurt her, including her own life, and then looks forward to another rebirth.

From above-discussed stories, it may be said that this is a topic developed around woman and revenge. The traveller first introduces “culture of witchcraft” by personally visiting a medium, what follows are legendary characters Bandit wife and Zhuhuapo, after that is about the revenge stories of three bewitching women. In these either real or legendary stories, woman is seen as not simply the witch with supernatural power but also the victim of the patriarchal society.

Here, almost all women had a miserable personal experience. They were insulted by man, or oppressed by the social conventions, or else cursed by fate. A similarity is that all of them used to be good women rather than inborn seductress. In other words, it is bad men’s misconducts and wrongdoings, and patriarchal prejudices against woman that change these innocent and kind women into venomous “avenger,” “resentful ghost,” seductive “fox spirit,” bewitching “wild flower,” as well as cruel “Bandit wife.” Seeing woman’s fate from this perspective, we can get a self-obvious fact: in the male-dominating society, woman’s identity is prescribed by man, so woman is restrained, suppressed, and even persecuted.

“The evil would be brought to an evil retribution” and “becoming a ghost would still revenge” are regarded as simple principles prevailing among the people. These revengeful actions, from the perspective of feminism, may be seen as a posture that woman takes to challenge man’s violent persecution. At the level of folk culture, “culture of witchcraft” begins with a marginalized position but seeking a topic on Buddhists: all phenomena are illusory only cause-and-effect is permanent. In other terms, life can be compared to a chain of ecology so every moment in this chain is integral to the whole life. Life must be restless and endless as long as such a chain of ecology exists. In this sense, from life to life constructs an interactive and interdependent relationship. Alternatively, as long as the cause exists, the effect would

necessarily come into being, sooner or later. Because of the permanence of the causality, the good and the evil would go to its own destination accordingly.

The traveller takes interest in the exploration of the witchcraft among the people because he has been weary of intriguing against each other in the human world. He would rather indulge himself in the mysterious feminine aura of the folklore to understand and realize the meaning of the self in relation to the mind. In other terms, if the self is compared to a grain of sand, the culture of witchcraft in *Lingshan* would be the unfathomably changing ocean. After the rises and falls of the waves of the sea, what are taken away are diabolical schemes and personal gratitude and resentment in the human world, and what remain are the peace and tranquillity of the mind after the return of life.

## 10. Witchcraft and Spirits

Walking out of the revenge fire of sorceresses, entering into the realms of the spirits secluded in the nether world, the protagonist is always interested in the exploration for diverse folklore. This section, “witchcraft and spirits,” would present the rituals that mountain folks use to link the living and the deceased. The human world separates the living from the dead in the nether world. Then, is there a spiritual road towards both the dead and the living, which enables the living to perceive the wishes of the dead and express the remembrance of the living?

Quite a few chapters in *Lingshan* record and explore such a subject, such as different ethnic communities perform sacrificial ceremonies and chant sacrificial songs. Chanting sacrificial songs aims to pray to Heaven for good harvests or worship ancestors for blessings. As a “collective unconscious” with the spirit of ancestral culture, these chantings and worshippings show the living’s mourning and respect for the deceased and reflect their aspirations and longings for a happy life.



According to Jung's "collective unconscious," praying Heaven and worshipping ancestors reflects a "universal" and "non-personal" mode of behaviour inherited from forefathers. In *Lingshan*, it is shown as various sacrificial rituals and memorial ceremonies, which are handed down generations after generations from ancient times, reflecting the mode of behaviours and the lifestyle of the people at that time. It may be said that these experiences are developed from the condensation and sedimentation of countless processes of similar experiences of human life. As Jung termed, it is a "deposit" or an "imprint" or else a psychological "remnant," which is inherited from the history of ancestors, shaping or reshaping the psychological qualities of descendants of generations.

For this reason, each memorial or sacrificial song in *Lingshan* is imprinted with human spirit and fate in the long human history, repeatedly showing a mixture of numerous joys and sorrows that the living offers and expresses to the departed. By means of "primordial images" and "recurrent motifs," Jung tries to explain a psychological representation of human unconscious and prove an immeasurable force of human belief. In *Lingshan* this is presented as mountain folks' lifestyle or simple belief in life to show their reverence for Heaven and Earth and Forefathers, such as chanting diverse songs for sacrificing, worshipping, and mourning.

The sacrificial song is one of the most important contents of ancestor worshipping. It not simply means a mystified ritual but also conveys a simple spirit of human concern. Moreover, it embodies an unaffected artistic value. The rhythm and lyrics of these songs reflect a simple purity and elegance, which embodies a unique art of music and literature. As a result, a comprehensive folklore comes into being. It is grounded in a spiritual mutual interaction between Human and Heaven, and Earth, and the spirits and gods. Its supernatural aura and spiritual appealing force forms a unique art, which is deeply rooted in the free and vast land, being far away from the sophistication of the human world.

Jung sees myth as an archetype, which establishes the relationship between literature and psychology. In his view, a myth bears a mystical impelling force. When it occurs to us, it can deeply strike the chord in our heart and generate a soul-stirring ecstasy. At this moment, life is no longer a single individual but an echo of the mind, which is from a nation even mankind as a whole. This accounts for the inner potentiality of the unconscious and the secret that artistic works appeal to readers:

From the unconscious there emanate determining influences which, independently of tradition, guarantee in every single individual a similarity and even a sameness of experience, and also of the way it is represented imaginatively. One of the main proofs of this is the almost universal parallelism between mythological motifs, which, on account of their quality as primordial images, I have called archetypes.<sup>134</sup>

The unconscious presents its huge potentiality through diverse representative manners of different traditions but guarantees an individual's similar or same psychological experience. For Jung, the "universal parallelism" between "mythological motifs" is given the qualities of primordial images. Jung terms it as "archetype," which has a "determining influence" to awaken different individuals to the similar experiences. This is how the powerful appealing force of "primordial images" or "archetypes" comes from.

In *Psychology and Literature*, Jung emphasizes the dramatic influence of "collective unconscious" upon the creativity of literary works. A great literary or artistic work must contain a message handed down generation after generation. Thus, for Jung, Goethe's *Faust* touches upon something in the innermost depths of German; Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* also achieves his eternal fame in the similar way. In Jung's view, both arouse a certain archetype latent in German national spirit,

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<sup>134</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, "Concerning the Archetypes, with Special Reference to the Anima Concept," *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung* (1968), Volume 9, Part I, London: Routledge, Par. 118, P.58.

namely a “primordial image.” These lasting classics absorb spiritual force from human life, which is a reflection of an ideological spirit of a certain era. Such a collective unconscious, like a desire of a time, can lead poets, prophets, or leaders to constitute and condense the soul of a whole epoch.<sup>135</sup>

Accordingly, humans have a psychological need to be identified through various manners. As an artistic form, music or literature can activate the objectively existing psychological awareness. In this sense, these sacrificial and memorial songs in *Lingshan* may be seen as a comprehensive artistic form. Such an art has a powerful appealing force, which can console the dead and give hopes to the living. Therefore, this inspiration from “collective unconscious” and artistic works offers human mind a profound influence or enlightenment. In this chapter, it would be interpreted as a magical power of “witchcraft and spirits.” These sacrificial or memorial songs are written in free verse and unsophisticated in theme, so they take on a free and natural artistic style and have a force that can comfort human heart.

In chapter 20 in *Lingshan*, a Yi nationality singer introduces the protagonist “I” to a Bimo, a Yi priest. He is invited from a big clan in the high mountains to perform a ritual for the Yi people living in the county. His eyes are “bright and clear, with which one dares not to communicate. Although he fixes on me, yet what he sees is somewhere else, another forest or a spiritual world.”<sup>136</sup> This is a pair of eyes that can only be possessed by the son of the forest, as if they could penetrate the noises of this mortal life and see through the life and death of the human world. What he observes and realizes come from a spiritual world that mortal people cannot reach and comprehend.

Yi people carry out traditional funeral practice by chanting scriptures. The Bimo has a sonorous voice and so his clear chanting sounds like a natural sound from highland, as

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<sup>135</sup> Lu Yang, “Jung: Psychology and Literature” in *Literary Theory of Psychoanalysis* (2001). Shandong: Jiaoyu Publishing House, 125-128.

<sup>136</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 121.

if its width and breadth can accommodate all the spirits who are wandering between Heaven and Earth and comfort their loneliness. The singer who came with me told me that the song he is singing is a dirge scripture for the dead. He gives a splendid account of the funeral event:

A funeral procession comes with people beating gongs and drums, blowing suona, carrying flags, paper people, and paper horse. Women ride on the horses and men fire shots along the way... on top of the coffin is the spirit house of woven bamboo pasted with coloured paper, surrounding the coffin is fenced with branches. Piles of firewood at the gravesite are all burned and each of the family clans of the deceased sits around one pile of firewood. The flames rise higher and higher in the sound of chanting that can almost penetrate through night sky. People there either leap or dance, either beat gongs and drums or fire shots.<sup>137</sup>

Such a grand ceremony expresses the living's respect for the deceased, which may also be seen as a filial duty that the younger generation should do to their deceased senior. The dead left this world alone, and so to sing the dirge and dance in the funeral can be seen as a send-off or a prayer for the dead, wishing there is no loneliness on the road to the nether world. In addition, as the author says, "People come to the world with a cry. So, before leaving the world they should make another big commotion, which fits the nature of human."<sup>138</sup>

The singing of the Bimo has an extraordinary magical power, because these songs have been sung for years and ages, from which one can feel a spirit from forefathers. This kind of spirit lingers on the ears of the present traveler, and extends it beyond this world towards the extremity of Heaven and Earth. The traveler cannot read Yi language but can sense a long and deep mourning in the songs. The Yi singer translates the scripture as follows: "The chanting is to guide a road towards the nether

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 123.

world for the spirit of the dead. It tells of the deities, from Heavenly deities to east-west-south-north four direction deities, from deities of mountains to deities of rivers, and finally tells us the sources of our ancestors. Following this route the spirit of the deceased can return back to his native land.”<sup>139</sup>

Among the people, it is generally believed that the spirit of the departed has no place to go within forty-nine days after death. During this period they have to wait the Hades to rule their fate in accordance with what they have done when alive. So, the dead during this period feels very worried and hopeless. Chanting dirges for them may be of solace to them. So the singing of the Bimo not only mourns their deaths but also guides them to home. The undetermined fate of the dead places him in the anxiety and uneasiness; therefore he needs the loud and clear singing like Bimo to waken up his chaotic soul and lead him back to home.

Southwest China is an area where minority nationalities live in compact communities. So, both Yi’s stockade village and Miao’s wooden house over the water reflect diverse local conditions and customs. However, one thing in common is that, wherever one goes, ancestral songs handed down from the remotest ages could be heard.

In chapter 41 in *Lingshan*, the author reflects and examines the decline of Chinese traditional culture by telling a story. At the eve of Spring Festival, a Miao’s venerable master of sacrifice recalled alone a spectacular ancestral sacrifice he performed, and sighed and weeped its current decline.

Nowadays, people show their respect for ancestors only with a bowl of wine, a bowl of bean curd, a bowl of New Year cake made of glutinous rice flour, and a bowl of cooked oxen entrails. However, in its booming years, each ancestral sacrifice meant a very important ceremony, and the family of making the sacrifice always offered him a generous reward. The dramatic change of the traditional culture reveals a problem that

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 124.

modern people have to concern: mankind shouldn't cut the cultural tie with ancestors.

He remembered a grand ritual to smooth out the ox's hair whorls before it was slaughtered. A decorated pillar was erected on the ground and all the members of the family wore their new clothing, blowing a reed pipe and beating gongs and drums. He wore a long purple robe, with a red felt hat on the head and the feathers of the big roc in his collar, waving the bronze bell and chanting the sacrificial songs:

Ox oh ox,  
Born in still water,  
Growing up on sandy banks,  
You cross the rivers with your mother,  
You climb the mountains with your father,  
...  
You guard the mountain passes with your mother,  
You guard the house gates with your father,  
To stop fierce demons harming people,  
To stop evil spirits entering ancestral tombs,  
So your mother will have peace for a thousand years,  
So your father will have warmth for a hundred generations.<sup>140</sup>

For the masters of the family who make the sacrifice, the ox is both their loyal helper and guard and one of the members of the family. Now it is chosen as sacrificial animal so that its masters should show their respect and gratitude for him by offering him a solemn ceremony and grateful songs, for the ox has the same right to live and should be respected in the same way that humans need.

The Miao master of sacrifice also remembered that a pair of dragon girls chosen in this ceremony was the sweetest and most beautiful in the stockades:

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 237-239. Please also refer to Mabl Lee's translation in *Soul Mountain*: 239.

Wives need husbands,  
Men need women,  
Go into houses to produce,  
Quietly to make people,  
Don't let roots snap,  
Don't let seeds lost,  
Bear seven clever, beautiful girls,  
Bear nine handsome, spirited boys.<sup>141</sup>

The girls are as soft as water and the songs are as beautiful as poems. They are chosen in the rite to express humans' tributes to Heaven and Earth and their praying for good life. For them, to be married and produce heirs is to fulfil their social and family responsibilities. The tradition emphasizes human's family duty and social role and holds a deep awe for Heaven and Earth. In this sense, it may be said that the right road to life should be a harmonious co-existence between Human and Heaven and Earth. Excessively neglecting or emphasizing any factor will possibly cause problems.

The following story reflects a harmonious relationship between Human and Nature. The master of sacrifice remembered those big trees used in sacrificial ceremony were no less than "the timber of twelve pairs of diverse trees, with same length and same girth. The white wood has to be blue spruce and the red has to be maple. Then the white can be chopped into silver and the maple into gold."<sup>142</sup> The old master thinks of a song of chopping trees:

Go along with the maple,  
Go along with the blue spruce,  
To the place where King Qi is,

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 241. Please refer to Mabel Lee's translation: 241.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 240. Refer to Mabel Lee's translation: 240.

To the place where ancestors live,  
Once the drum is sent the wedge will be pulled out,  
The Master of Sacrifice draws his sword,  
Raising his sword to chop the wood,  
Pulling out the wedge is to send the drum.<sup>143</sup>

All the beings in the human world have the natural intelligence of their own, so trees and woods are not an exception. They have the spirit and soul of their own and so should be treated and respected like humans. Modern people excessively misuse trees and forests so that natural ecology has been damaged even destroyed. Compared with the humane spirit showed by this chopping song, modern people who are getting indifferent should make a deep examination of the self.

Praying to Heaven and Earth and offering sacrifices to ancestors are the traditions that are handed down from forefathers. This can be seen as an ancient civilization or a simple belief of life. However, the lack of belief and the excessive pursuit of personal profits have led modern people to a self-centered nihilism. When the inner value of humans has been neglected then the loss of humanism is unavoidable. This is the retrogression of human's civilization rather than its progress.

The elderly master of sacrifice thinks of another song:

Go to shower in the waters of wealth and rank!  
Go to drench in the liquids of great riches!  
Waters of wealth and rank bear children,  
Showering rains bear sons,  
Descendants are like palm shoots,  
Offspring are like fish fry.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 240.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 242. Please also refer to Mabel Lee's translation: 242.



In this song, “waters of wealth and rank” and “liquids of great riches” are symbolic of prosperous life; “palm shoots” or “fish fry” refers to have a flourishing population. In this human world, humans are the subject of human’s civilization, and human’s civilization is showed as a positive pursuit for a happy life. However, such a happy life is based on human’s respects for Heaven and Earth, gods and spirits, and all the beings. In other words, the co-operation of Human and Heaven and Earth, and the myriads things can realize the co-prosperity of life:

All come to the family of offering sacrifice,  
Drink nine-cornered wine,  
Take food to offer Heaven,  
Take wine to pour Earth,  
Invite the gods of Heaven to receive it,  
Invite the spirits of Earth to eat it  
.....  
To redeem the lost souls of their ancestors,  
To reminisce the mother who bore them.<sup>145</sup>

By offering foods and wines, people show their gratitude for Heaven and Earth, mothers and ancestors, and gods and spirits. Worshipping Heaven and Earth, reminiscing mother and ancestors, and praying gods and spirits are seen by people as a simple philosophy of life. Such a philosophy is different from the philosophers’ eloquence on the theory of life; instead, it has entirely been fused into our realistic life. In the boundless worlds, it is impossible for Human to exist alone without establishing a harmonious relationship with other beings.

*Jigu ci (Drum Sacrifice Songs)* shows that the ancients had a firm faith that Heaven and Earth and deceased ancestors must be able to endow them with rich and generous

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 242-243.

blessedness, therefore humans should deeply feel grateful to them by piously praying and generously offering. On the contrary, as the master of sacrifice said, to forget one's ancestor is a crime and to forget one's ancestor will suffer retribution.

On a deeper level, these sacrificial songs record the cultural tradition and belief of forefathers. They have been maintaining such a way of life over thousands of years. Through such a tradition and belief, they establish a contact with Heaven, Earth, ancestors, and gods and spirits. This also reflects human's sincere hope for a harmonious co-existence between Heaven and Earth. In other words, it may be seen as an outlook that forefathers held to connect earthly affairs with heavenly events and ghostly realms. Moreover, such a humane concern can also be showed by the mutual nourishment and mutual promotion between humans and animals and plants. All this conveys to us a spirit: only getting on well with each other can all the beings share the happiness and peace in the boundless time and space.

From which it is evidenced that the spirit of humanism has early been inscribed in the spiritual world of ancestors and melt into the stream of ancestral culture in a simple manner. However, looking at current world, people's negligence and destruction for natural environment proves that the present is an era to pursue fashion and pleasure, so it is not surprising to see that traditional culture has been reduced to a situation of being forgotten and marginalized and even possibly permanently becoming history or ruins. In this sense, it may be said that time was and will always be the best witness to the current situation: the excessive material boom is going towards a doom of spiritual desolation.

China is a country with multi-nationalities. Each nationality has its own culture with characteristics. The changes of history made diverse valuable cultural ecology scattered or lost among the people. In this sense, the protagonist's roaming in Nature just serves as an opportunity to pick up again and activate the lost civilization in modern world.

While traveling in Shennong jia (The Holy Farmer Jia/神农架), the protagonist discovered a collection of songs from Han nationality—*Heian chuan* (*Copy of Darkness*). These songs are simple in style, fluent in rhythm, and entirely different from classical penta-syllabic or five-syllable regulated verse (wuyan lüshi/五言律诗) and septa-syllabic or seven-syllable regulated verse (qiyán lüshi/七言律诗). Compared with the strict tonal pattern and rhyme scheme of the regulated verse, the songs in *Heian chuan* show a free and natural disposition, taking on a transcendental aura. In this sense, it lacks the momentum and elegance of classical ancient poems. Its themes involve the aspects of daily life so it is much like a record and trace to the history of Chinese culture and civilization.

*Heian chuan* is an incomplete head song of a hand-written folk song collection, used as sacrificial songs and sung by mountain folks in funeral ceremony in earlier times. By virtue of the mode of antiphonal singing, it recorded the history of song and singing and traced back to the same origin of singing and the long Chinese culture. At the starting of these songs, the singer makes an eulogy of Heaven, Earth, the Sun, the Moon, the gods and ghosts, the sacred animals, Three August Ones and Five Lords, as well as successive kings and emperors, to show their awesome feelings for all the beings between Heaven and Earth:

...

One singing Heaven, Earth and waters,

Two singing the sun, the moon, and the stars,

Three singing the five-dimensional land,

Four singing the goddess of lighting,

Five singing Pan Gu separating Heaven and Earth,

Six singing the Three August Ones and the Five Lords, and the successive kings and emperors,

Seven singing the Black Lion and the White Elephant, the Yellow Dragon and

the Phoenix,  
Eight singing the fierce dogs guarding the gates,  
Nine singing the spirits of marshes and mountains,  
Ten singing tigers, leopards, jackals and wolves,

...<sup>146</sup>

This head song starts with an introduction to various topics of songs on all the beings between Heaven and Earth: from humans to gods and spirits, from emperors to kings, from the sun to the moon, from mountains to rivers, from stars to lighting, and from intelligent animals in Heaven to vicious beasts in Hell and so on. It may be seen that the belief of the ancients is a simple but all-encompassing philosophy of life, which sees life and death as a harmonious common existence with all the sentient and inanimate beings.

Therefore, these songs can be seen as a blessing that the living sings for the departed in the funeral ceremony. The living people are able to enjoy the happiness in the human world because the heavenly gods and earthly ancestors bless and protect them, while the dead also needs a peaceful life under the protection of demons and monsters in the nether world. The yearning for a peaceful happiness could be understood as a universal need in the spiritual world of human beings. In this sense, it may be said that the head song of *Heian chuan* chants for all the beings between Sky and Earth, to ask their help to lighten up a road to the nether world and protect the dead from being lost or harmed.

Where are the sources of songs then? And what are they about? The singer answers as follows:

There are three hundred and sixty loads of songs,  
Which load do you carry on your shoulder?

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<sup>146</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 364. Please also refer to Mabel Lee's translation: 357.

There are thirty-six thousand books of songs,  
Which one do you carry in your hand?  
Address you master singer please hear me for I know,  
The first book is the book that is inborn,  
The first script is the script that is inborn,  
...<sup>147</sup>

*Heian chuan* writes down the long history of songs and songbooks. Each load of song and songbook can be traced back to its origin. They are originated from inborn books and inborn scripts, from which it may be said that the history of these songs is the epitome of the long history of Chinese culture:

I am here to venture a question,  
In which month of which year was song born?  
On which day of which month was song born?  
...  
Fuxi made the string of the *Qin*,  
Nüwa made the pipe of the *Sheng*,  
With Yin there is language,  
With Yang there is sound.  
With the matching of Yin and Yang there is man,  
With man there is sound,  
With sound there is song,  
The songs grew many and the songbooks came into being.<sup>148</sup>

The interactive question-and-answer indicates the same source of songs and human life. Language and sound were born when the earliest ancestors Fuxi and Nüwa made the first *Qin* and *Sheng*. The *Qin* is male and *Sheng* is female, so the companion of

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 367.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 367-368.

*Qin* and *Sheng* produces harmonious music, and the matching of Yin and Yang gives birth to the human being. Mankind creates sound and music and then composes songs and songbooks. It could be said that the history of the birth of songs and songbooks may serve as a perspective to trace the origin of human beings, and human culture and civilization. Thus, the Confucian thought, as one of fundamental sources of Chinese culture, has, here, become the resource of songs and songbooks. What's more, it may be seen that the Confucian philosophy has seeped into the aspects of Chinese people's lives:

The scripts cut out by Confucius,  
Lost in the wilderness,  
One was blown up in the sky,  
So there came the story of the Herd-boy and the Weaving-girl.  
Another was blown into the sea,  
Fishermen picked it up and sing for the resentful ghosts.  
The third was blown into a temple,  
So Buddhist monks and Taoist priests sing their scriptures.  
The fourth landed in a village lane,  
So girls sing of their longings.  
The fifth landed in a paddy field,  
So farmers sing them as mountain songs.  
The sixth is the *Heian chuan*,  
The mastersinger picked up and sings for the funeral.<sup>149</sup>

Here, the singer answers that the deleted scripts by Confucius are the source of songs and songbooks. As a result, the subject matters of songs are all closely linked with Confucian thoughts, and cover aspects of social lives: such as the love story of herd-boy and weaving-girl, the fisherman's song on the wronged ghosts, the scriptures that monks and Taoists sing, the farmer's song on the labor in the field, the girl's

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 368-369.

lovesickness, as well as the *Heian chuan* sung for the deceased. It may be seen that the songbook records the aspects of Chinese people's life, from religious belief to personal feeling, from heavenly goddess to worldly herd-boy, from fishermen at sea to farmers in the field, even to the village girl in the lane, all of which forms a scroll of picture for the all-embracing human life.

The above-mentioned chapters in *Lingshan* give accounts of diverse songs sung in either funeral ceremony or ancestor sacrifice by different nationalities. These ceremonies had been seen as an important part of traditional lifestyle of Chinese people. On a cultural level, these sacrificial songs are of great significance to establish and develop a culture or a civilization, which in fact reflects an awareness of awe and a spirit of humanism that human holds for myriads of beings between Heaven and Earth. Just as the author has pointed out in the novel, for these beautiful songs sung to the deities and spirits, people should "listen to them by sitting up straight or being in a solemn manner or even being prostrate."<sup>150</sup>

It may be said that sacrificial ceremonies represent both a lifestyle and a civilization. In ancient China, it became integral to Chinese people's life. In modern world, though some declined or scattered among the people, as a philosophy of life or religious ritual, they should return to our human life. On the level of cultural heritage, its brilliance in cultural history should be written down on the historical pages as a beautiful chapter. Seen from the progress of human civilization, all the cultural ecology with the spirit of humanism should be preserved, be encouraged, and be developed. In modern world, the alienation of humans is deteriorating so the only right way is to pour the vitality for life by developing human's inner positive qualities. In this sense, all the cultural patterns with spiritual appealing force should and must be concerned and developed.

In chapter 49 of *Lingshan*, the protagonist's encounter with a Taoist also reflects the wretched situation of this kind of culture with natural intelligence. He told me that he

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 370.

was sent to a Taoist monastery at ten, that the first book to enlighten him was the *Xuanmen rike* (Daily Lessons for Taoists), and that he could practice many Taoist rituals, such as “Yin-Yang and geomancy,” “Five Thunder Finger Techniques,” “Constellation Dances,” and “physiognomy and bone-touching”.

“I” believes that the encounter with him is a lucky coincidence so “I” delightedly accepted his invitation to his home. He has seven sons, with the eldest eighteen and the youngest eleven, and all are at home except the eldest. The six sons have all the needed instruments prepared, such as, gongs, drums, small cymbals, and gong-chimes:

In an instant, a crescendo of music is accompanied by drumbeats. The old man comes down the stairs, wearing a tattered old purple Taoist robe adorned with Yin-Yang fish and Eight Trigrams, carrying a command tablet, a sword, and an ox horn. He looks totally different and majestic, walking in a slow but dignified pace. He burns a stick of incense and makes a bow before the altar in the hall. Startled by the drums and gongs, men, women and children in the village are all crowded outside the threshold. A bustling Taoist rite starts immediately.<sup>151</sup>

With Taoist robe and Taoist props, accompanied by the music played by his sons, the old man becomes a leading performer of Taoist rite. These complete instruments remind me of that he was a capable Taoist and must have performed many rituals. He burned incense and bowed to a shrine in the hall. His devoutness shows that he is an authentic Taoist:

He first takes a bowl of clear water, chants something, and then flicks the water into the four corners of the house. When he flicks onto the feet of the crowd at the threshold, everyone bursts out laughs. Only he remains unperturbed: his eyes partly close, his mouth slackens, so his face takes on a serious look, as if he is communicating with the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 298-299.



spirits. As a result the crowd laughs even more. <sup>152</sup>

In contrast to the roaring laughter of the crowd, his calmness proves that he is a serious and devout Taoist. The crowd might think that he is pretending to be serious. But for him he should offer his whole sincerity to his profession:

He suddenly shakes the sleeves of his Taoist robe, and slams the command tablet on the table. The laughter immediately stops. He turns and asks me: "...there are 'Song of the Big Journey Year,' 'Song of the Good Luck and Bad Luck of Nine Stars,' 'Song of Offspring,' 'Song of Transformations,' 'Mnemonic Chants for Negating the Four Inauspicious Stars,' 'Name of the Door Deities,' 'Salutary Texts for the Sacrifices to the Earth God,' and 'Invoking the Spirit of the Northern Dipper.' All will be sung, which would you like to hear?"<sup>153</sup>

These songs are usually sung to bless good luck and prevent bad luck, to show regards to deities and spirits of various directions, and to exorcise evil ghosts and demons, such as the "Invoking the spirit of the northern dipper:"

This is a song to protect small kids from illness and calamity...usually one has to stand a cooked egg on a bowl of rice, and then burn incense to invoke the gods and spirits. The kid kneels down and kowtows to invite them to accept the offerings: the True Ruler of Four Directions, the Great Emperor Ziwei, the Star Ruler of the North who Eliminates Adversity in Nine Shakes, the Star Ruler of Extending Age of the Southern Dipper Temple, the Two Guardian Deities of the Village, the deceased generations of clan ancestors, the descendants of the Kitchen God—<sup>154</sup>

The song inviting the northern dipper is similar to "soul calling" among the people to save the frightened child's life. Before chanting and praying, the Eight Characters of

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 299.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. 299.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 299-300.

the lunar birth of the child is usually required to confirm the location where the child was born. And then, the deities of four directions and the deceased ancestors of successive generations are devoutly invited to protect or rescue the sufferer by burning incense, kowtowing, and offering. Following that, he takes up his sword, flourishes it and starts singing loudly:

“The spirit—the soul—comes back after a play! In the east is a boy in blue, in the south is a boy in red, in the west a boy in white is on guard, and in the north a boy in black will bring you to home. Lost and wandering soul does not play any more, for the road to home be long and far still. I will use a jade ruler to measure the road for you, if you go to dark places. If you fall into the nets above and snares below, I will cut them with my scissors. If you are hungry, thirsty and weary, I have grain and rice for you. Don’t stay in the forest to listen to the bird’s singing; don’t stay by deep ponds to look at the fish’s swimming. Please don’t reply if someone calls you a thousand times. The spirit—the soul—hurry back to home! May the gods and deities protect you, but don’t forget their benevolence! From now on the soul will protect the body, and the spirit will guard your mind. The wind and the chill cannot enter, and the water and the earth cannot hurt. You are sturdier when being young; you will be stronger when being old. So you will enjoy longevity and be healthy!<sup>155</sup>

From the poetic Taoist scripture, it is not difficult for us to feel the transcendental demeanour of Taoists and admire the simple but flowing literariness of Taoist texts. Here, the kid’s soul is compared to a “lost and wandering” child; the “nets and snares,” the “dark places,” the “deep ponds,” the “forest,” and the “suspect call” may be compared to evil spirits. The boy deities of four directions act as his guards to escort him back home: they measure the road with a jade ruler, cut the nets and snares with scissors, and warn him of avoiding the traps of evil spirits.

In contrast to the glamorous pop culture that modern people daily consume, the Taoist scripture chanting takes on a simple spirit of humanism by a poetic language. In this

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 300.

sense, it can be said that the survival of Taoist ritual is a fortunate event. It should be concerned, preserved, and supported by the society and government as a cultural ecology.

To our pity, it was scattered among the people over many years, and regarded by the authority as a “problem” or “heresy”. This can be demonstrated by the sudden emergence of the Taoist’s elder son. His sudden appearing in the wonderful performance alludes to the official rude interference with folk culture. As the leader of the village, he may be seen as a cultural administrator. He quickly dispels the crowd and then examines “I”—the outsider and the suspect of the incident:

“I’ve been here from Beijing particularly to collect folk songs!”

“Papa, you know quite well this is against regulations!”...

As if being poured a bucket of cold water on the head, he is so dispirited that I feel sorry for him. I have to make a few explanations:

“Your father is a unique folk artist, so I’ve come especially to learn from him. Your regulations are right according to regulations, but there are still other regulations governing these regulations, even greater regulations—”

“Go to the village office tomorrow morning. You come back again if they approve to stamp their seal.”<sup>156</sup>

The presence of the village head discontinued the lively Taoist ritual. His father was blamed for being against “regulations” and “my” identification was also carefully checked. The old man looks very dejected, which is diametrically opposite to the previous majestic performer. “I” couldn’t help feeling regretful for him. The rite performing, for him—a folk artist, may be said to be his whole spiritual life, once it is judged by the village head as “against regulations,” which is tantamount to depriving him of his requirement for spiritual life, how could he remain cheerful and spirited?

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 306.

This story may be seen as a case of social political restraint to cultural ecology. On the one hand, the hospitable father symbolizes a defender of Taoism, and reveals the suppressed Taoist culture. On the other hand, his son acts as a guard of official “regulations”. Thus, it may be said that rationality and tyranny are the means employed by the administrators to carry out administration and show his authority.

In this sense, the dramatic presence of the village head forms an allusion to the suppressed Taoist culture. The political culture is usually characterized by rationality and indifference and so it has a deterrent from socialized administration. Rather, as a representative of the culture of witchcraft, the culture of Lingshan is attributed with Heavenly intelligence, worldly humanity, humanly friendliness, and the shimmering of the nether world. It can evoke human’s awareness in awe of Heaven and Earth, which represents a transcendental spirit from Heaven and Earth and shows a deep humane concern. This is because it can link the living with the deceased, connects humans with the gods and spirits, and seeks to construct a harmonious and peaceful world for human spirit.

Generally speaking, if we look on the orthodox as the culture of “father”—manipulative and administrative, then, the marginalized folk culture may be compared to motherly forbearance and forgiveness, so she is all embracing and more easily approachable. This is because she represents the qualities of being tolerant, stable, peaceful, and easy-going. At this level, “witchcraft and spirits” shows a female cultural disposition, which belongs to Anima in Animus’s reverie, symbolizing human’s spiritual pursuit and need in life.

However, a true harmony must mean a harmonious integration between the two cultural patterns; or a true harmony means a mutual accommodation between differences rather than mutual exclusion and isolation. Both mother and father’s culture are integral to the whole cultural ecology. Thus, the effective co-operation between the two will be conducive to the positive development of a harmonious

human personality.

Because of historical particular reasons, such a culture with natural intelligence has been in the marginal state for long. However, in China's contemporary new cultural context, an open cultural ecology is desirable and a broad mind and cooperative spirit is admirable. History has evidenced that the flourishing of culture must be rooted in a rich cultural soil, where diverse cultural factors can co-exist, co-nourish, and co-generate. In this new era, China needs large numbers of intellectuals with new personality. They can see love, reconciliation, and tolerance as a principle that guides their positive actions. The following passage is perhaps able to provide us with a train of thought:

In our new era, only being able to renew life can we bravely confront killings; only being able to love, can we shoulder resentments. Being able to update and love, can the mind be salvaged and witnesses the greatness and transcendence of human nature.<sup>157</sup>

Such an attitude towards life can be applied in many ways. Where there is contradiction and conflict, where there is love and reconciliation. Contradictions and conflicts usually result from excessive obsessions with various desires; but love and reconciliation always come from a broad mind and a merciful heart. This can be seen as the duality of a complete personality: ambition and virtue. Their harmonious condensation will create a perfect personality. Then, how do we properly handle this pair of contradictions? The answer is: this interlinking world needs those far-sighted people, who are willing and able to not only maintain the self but also encompass the others.

This essentially reflects the fundamental thought that Chinese culture advocates: to seek harmony but respect diversity. This ethical principle can be interpreted on different levels. Seen from the perspective of human personality, it reflects a virtue of a

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<sup>157</sup> Zhang Lugao, *The Pain of Pioneers: On Luxun's Spirit*, Anhui: Jiaoyu, 159.

noble man: to encompass differences in a benevolent breadth of mind, or to maintain unity and accommodate plurality. On the philosophical level, such a value embodies the dialectical union between individual awareness and collective awareness. This can be seen as a relative values, e.g. to realize a relatively free development of personality in the collective harmony, or to realize a relative collective hamony in the free development of personality.<sup>158</sup>

In brief, the self and the other jointly constitute the two aspects of a whole personality. Any realization for either must be accomplished within the common background that both depend on to exist. This is to say, life is an interrelated and interdependent being and so a thing's completion must have the other's participation. In this boundless time and space that all the beings commonly share, if the development of science is able to link people together in space, then a noble cultural mind must be able to shorten the distance between hearts and hearts, linking people together in hearts. To sum up, a truly cultural pattern must have a breadth of mind. In this wideness, diverse cultural factors can be developed and mutually recognized. This is the only path towards the co-existence, co-nourishment, and co-prosperity.

## 11. Witchcraft and Wanderings

For the traveller, life means an aimless journey that he is willing to take throughout his life. As if a gust of wind, rootless and carefree, he wanders to whichever place he can reach. His footsteps always follow his mind, as if stepping on a train without destination, to whichever destination that has been destined. This kind of life that is unwilling to take root, that is reluctant to worry about, and that is on the trip, is named as "life on the road."

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<sup>158</sup> Han Jingtai, *Zhongguo shixue yu chuantong wenhua jingshen* (China's Poetics and the Spirit of Traditional Culture). Sichuan: renmin, 215-219.

Life as such would be defined by this study on three layers of meaning. Firstly, life is a long journey, with birth as a starting point and death an ending, so the traveller is a passer-by on the trekking. Secondly, the mind of the traveller is often on the roaming, for what he or she yearns are the vastness of the world and the boundlessness of the universe. Thirdly, the life of the traveller is a life of detachment. He or she is often observing and thinking while roaming: this life is boundless to travel and limitless to comprehend.

Therefore, the traveller indulges himself in an exploration and cognition for life, the world and the universe. If a human is thought of as a miniature of the world, if the self is looked on as a small cosmos in the whole universe, then, the endless roaming in the boundless Heaven and Earth may be viewed as a human's fusion with Nature, or a return to the Great Land, or a harmonious being in the space and time of the universe.

Jung has made a philosophical interpretation for "collective unconscious," which provides a theoretical prerequisite for this part. According to Jung, collective unconscious may be understood as "the unlimited sum of fundamental psychic conditions accumulated over millions of years," so that it is "a realm of immeasurable breadth and depth. From the very beginning of its development it is the inner equivalent of Creation, an inner cosmos as infinite as the cosmos outside us."<sup>159</sup> Jung is here to point out that the human itself is an internally small cosmos in which stores a huge potential of life. So, through adjusting humans' various relations with the external world, human beings can realize the self's inner balance and harmony. This opens up for life an immeasurable inner space and time in breadth and depth, which is as boundless as the infinity of the cosmos outside us.

However, this explanation from western psychoanalysts essentially reflects the purport of eastern philosophy on Buddhist and Taoist thoughts: to what extent is an

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<sup>159</sup> Jolande Jacobi, *Complex, Archetype, Symbol in the Psychology of C.G.Jung* (1971), translated from the German by Ralph Manheim, N.J. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 59.

individual able to understand and realize the true nature of life in the universe? For Buddhists, becoming enlightened is to “internally awaken to the nature of life and externally realize the true essence of universal environment.”<sup>160</sup> The universe would be governed and the human would achieve a “big freedom” or “big liberation” if one truly achieves such an awakening. Conversely, life and the universe would govern humans and human mind hence the absence of real freedom and emancipation. Thus it may be said that the true nature of all things and the big freedom of life are the core that Buddhists seek to understand and realize.

Taoist thought maintains that the myriad creatures in the universe are always in perpetual self-transformation, and so letting things alone and following their own Way is the fundamental to attain the freedom. For Taoists, the Way as the highest principle is spontaneous and in a constant flux, repeats itself in endless cycles, and finally returns to its root. Therefore Taoist philosophy is fundamentally to seek humans’ harmony with the great Way of Heaven and Earth through ceaselessly dynamic transformations of the thing itself.<sup>161</sup>

In brief, both Buddhists and Taoists meditate on the true nature of human and world at the cosmological level. Therefore, it may be said that it is the discussion on the universality of human mind that links western psychoanalytical theory with eastern philosophical thought. Both western psychoanalysts and eastern philosophers aim to explore and discover a workable solution to emancipate the self from various bondage of modern society.

In *Lingshan*, the traveller’s roaming prompts to us a question: why do more and more modern people get obsessed with pursuing the self? A simple answer is that they are looking for something that has been lost in their pursuit for the self. Another deep explanation is that they have been trapped in a vicious cycle of modern society: they

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<sup>160</sup> Li Bingnan, *Fourteen Chapters on Buddhist Philosophy* (1997), Sichuan: Sichuan News Publishing, 4.

<sup>161</sup> Guo Shangxing, *A History of Chinese Culture* (1993), co-compiled by Sheng Xingqing, revised by Qiu Ke’an, Zhang Jin, Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 23-26.



grasp and grab maximum material gains but at the same time suffer a maximum emptiness in spirit. Such a paradox exactly uncovers the spiritual dilemma that modern people have to face: the obsession with the socialized self and the ignorance of the immanent self. Then, can the traveller in *Lingshan* attain enlightenment after his journey to Lingshan?

In *Lingshan*, the traveller's enlightenment means his awakening to the traditional philosophical thoughts on Buddhists and Taoists. On the one hand, Buddhists' wisdom and Taoists' aloofness inspire and awaken a simple faith in the traveller's heart. On the other hand, by sensing Taoists' disposition of "sitting in forgetfulness (坐忘)" and feeling the witticism of "sudden enlightenment (顿悟)" in Zen or Chan Buddhism, the traveller's spirit is veiled in the simplicity and detachment of the culture with natural intelligence. The mysterious spirituality of Buddhists and Taoists has become integral to the Chu Culture standing in the misty rain of the Yangtze River Valley, soaking into the mind of the roaming traveller, leading him to a boundless meditation on Nature, Heaven and Earth, and life. However, the eastern pursuit for the fusion between the self and the world may also identify itself with the idealistic relationship between Jung's subject and object:

No, the collective unconscious is anything but an in-capsulated personal system; it is sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world. There I am the object of every subject, in complete reversal of my ordinary consciousness, where I am always the subject that has an object. There I am utterly one with the world, so much a part of it that I forgot too easily who I really am. "Lost in oneself" is a good way of describing this state.<sup>162</sup>

Jung gives "collective unconscious" a self-portrait: its self may be seen as the world itself, which orients towards a limitless extension, a spaciousness in uncertainty. However, it is also universal, representing a common spirit embodied by a nation or

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<sup>162</sup> C.G.Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung*, Volume 9, Part I, London: Routledge (1968), Par. 46, P.22.

the whole mankind. As an object, the mankind as a whole is experiencing it; as a subject, it experiences the human's universal psychological consciousness through the self. At this very moment that it places itself in the vastness of the world, it forgets for the time being its own identity in the vastness of the world.

The psychoanalyst's statement and the ideal that Buddhists and Taoists seek are both intended to remind humans of a possible understanding for life: the human could liberate himself from the puzzlement of life through other's inspiration and self-awakening. If the development of the mind means a gradual awakening to the self, what is it then?

In the eighth chapter of *Lingshan*, the traveller "I" enters into a primeval forest area with an elder botanist. He is here to collect the specimens of Cold Arrow Bamboo—the food of giant pandas. Rather, what I want is only to escape from the complex logic and thinking of the human world, aimlessly roaming in Nature. Seeing some valuable trees being cut down and sold for timber, the botanist couldn't help proclaiming loudly: "Human follows Earth, Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows Dao, and Dao follows Nature. Don't take actions that go against the nature of Nature, and don't do deeds that should not be done."<sup>163</sup> What he said embodies the principle that Taoists advocates—harmony of Heaven and Human, a cosmological outlook on human and Nature. Here, it has set a tone for the "life on the road." What the traveller pursues is an ideal of life, which means to realize a human spiritual harmony with Heaven, Earth, Nature and all the beings. This is a limitless spiritual life that can be comprehended rather than a social life restricted by ethical teachings. One would be able to attain it if one could comprehend the deep serenity from Buddhists and Taoists, the natural sensuousness of Nature, and the boundlessness of the universe.

In chapter 36 of *Lingshan*, it is told that mountain wind is slowly corroding the ruins of a broken wall, which brings the traveller "I" back to a deep thought for Buddhists.

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<sup>163</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 47.

It is said that there used to stand a temple here. At that time, a venerable monk presided over the temple. There would be a ceremonious Buddhist congregation held at the day the monk passed away in sitting posture. With their own thoughts and desires, people came to the ceremony, gathering at the thriving holy place, the place being burnt with incense, the place being pervaded in the deep sounds of evening drum and morning bell,<sup>164</sup> and the place overflowing the fragrance of cassia trees:

...Buddhist pilgrims hearing the event from hundreds of miles fought to witness the old monk's passing away in sitting posture. On the mountain roads and paths towards the Buddhist territory were crammed with man and woman devotees hastening to worship. ...It is said that all the believers wanted to gain the grace of the old monk, and multitudes of disciples all wanted to become the direct line handed down from him.<sup>165</sup>

The temple is a place to transmit and practise Buddhist doctrine, so those Buddhist devotees, believers, and pilgrims are expected to be people who long for the wisdom of Buddha and pursue the tranquillity of the mind, and its followers and disciples are also expected to be practitioners who have no worldly desires and seek no fame and wealth. However, this final preaching given by the old monk means more than the preaching itself. Who would become the one that is able to gain or benefit most? The mellifluous voice of the venerable monk, who sat on a lotus-shaped altar, was clearly heard:

Buddha tells Subhu<sup>ti</sup><sup>166</sup> that Tathagata<sup>167</sup> cannot be identified by physical manifestation. It is meant that all manifestations are false and empty, so one sees Tathagata if one can see all manifestations as no manifestations. If manifestations are erroneous manifestations, then these erroneous manifestations are also manifestations of erroneous manifestations. All that I teach is nothing more than what Buddhist patriarch has said. What Buddha has

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<sup>164</sup> In a monastery it is done for the purpose of the exhortations to virtue and purity.

<sup>165</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 207.

<sup>166</sup> Subhu<sup>ti</sup> in Sanskrit, one of the best of Buddha's ten disciples, is good at explaining "emptiness."

said cannot be obtained but has to be obtained and also cannot be verbally transmitted. This which cannot be verbally transmitted and which cannot be obtained but has to be obtained is what I teach to all of you, as is also the Great Buddha Dharma imparted by Tathagata. Are there any other questions?<sup>168</sup>

The venerable monk imparts Buddha Dharma to the listeners, hoping that all the disciples, followers and devotees could comprehend the essentials that Buddha patriarch tries to teach. Buddha intends to say, “All the phenomena are false and empty, so erroneous phenomena are also false and empty.” In the eyes of Buddha, everything that appears solid in the human world is in nature illusory, because they are only the falsified manifestations of the manifested worlds. Therefore trying to grasp these empty and illusory manifestations is totally illusory and empty.

Here, the venerable monk tries to teach everybody to relinquish their grip on worldly wealth and fame, which are all illusive manifestations of various desires. However, to his disappointment, none of his disciples can understand and realize it, because what they really want is not the truth that Buddha tries to teach but the final decision that to whom the master monk would hand over the huge property of the monastery. Seeing that the old monk has no intention to mention this matter, the senior disciple has to make bold to ask for the question:

The old monk nodded and took out an elm bowl from his cassock. As soon as he said the words “take the bowl—” the stick of incense burnt it out. ...It is said that his two senior disciples were too slow-witted to hear others words “and go begging” after “take the bowl.” ...Both wanted to be the direct line handed down by the master so both grasped the elm bowl, but the bowl soundlessly disintegrated. The two were startled to realize their master’s true motive but dare not to reveal it. Only the venerable monk knew the monastery would be destroyed in an instant. He couldn’t bear to see it, closing his eyes and holding his breath. He dignifiedly sat on the lotus, with one hand placing on the other,

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<sup>168</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 208.

concentrated on the gate of vitality, and ended his own life with will silently.<sup>169</sup>

The venerable monk was disappointed to find that nobody could understand his true intention, because all of them were reluctant to relinquish their hold on wealth and fame and power. This is exactly like an irony: no one among the multitudinous practitioners is a true practitioner. Indeed as what Buddha says: all phenomena are false and illusive, so human heart is also false and pretentious. The venerable monk came to the realization that the temple would be in disaster in a moment. So, using the bowl's disintegration, he hints at an impending punishment from Buddha for those greedy practitioners.

This story intends to reveal that it is extremely hard for humans to eradicate their attachment and grasping for worldly power and fame and wealth. Even for Buddhist practitioners, such as the venerable monk's senior disciples, they also keep personal selfish motives to benefit themselves. So it may be more reasonable for multitudinous ordinary devotees to cling to their selfish thoughts—to fight to have a final look at the looks of the deceased venerable monk in sitting posture. As a result of selfishness and greed, a merciless fire at the sacred place serves as both a punishment and a teaching from Buddha.

The grievous punishment can be seen as the will of Heaven, resulting from humans' greed and their ignorance of the greed. The spirit of Buddha aims at rejecting worldly attachments and achieving limitless wisdom. Buddha believes that all the beings are inborn with Buddha-hood, which is concealed from view, for it is tainted with pernicious habits for "greed," "hatred," "craving," "jealousy," and "ignorance." Of them, "greed" comes as the first, for it is the root of evilness. Therefore, giving up greed should be of the first importance for practitioners of Buddhists.

This story serves as a negative example to teach people a good lesson. Truly, it is no

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 209.

easy for humans to essentially eradicate “greed.” However, it is the very difficulty that proves it noble to become a true practitioner. Rather, the practitioners in the story practice Buddha Dharma with greed in their mind. The two senior disciples intend to become the successor of the huge monastery property; the common followers want to be benefited from the final preaching; even the devotees from afar cling to the idea of catching the final glimpse of the death-in-sitting of the elderly monk. In this sense, this story may also be seen as a teaching from Buddha: greedy people are those who try to tightly hold on to worldly desires, therefore they cannot be empowered by Buddha. For Buddha, the false and illusory greediness can only lead people to ignorance rather than a true wisdom. Just like the tragic ending of the practitioners, followers and devotees in the story: evil doings have incurred an evil consequence.

Though local officials in charge of county annals are always able to trace the origin of each ruin and record each moment of tremendous changes in human world, the traveller “I” would rather roam around the ruins of broken walls and eroded tablets, attempting to comprehend something more than the surface meaning of stories.

In the following story before 1500 years, a hermit dwells in the same place and enjoys an immaculate life:

...Back to a time before the ancient monastery existed, when there was only a thatched shed. A resigned famous scholar resided here as a recluse. Every morning before dawn, he faces the east, practises the solar emanations, and absorbs the essence of Ziwei. Then he cranes his neck uttering a long and loud cry. It is so pure sound reverberating in the deserted valley that monkeys climb on the sheer cliffs to respond him. Occasionally bosom friends pay a visit so they drink teas to replace wine, or play chess, or have pure conversations at moonlit night. Even though old age is coming he does not mind it at all. The passing woodcutter from afar points to him as a strange tale. This is how Immortal

Cliff was from.<sup>170</sup>

An official scholar would rather withdraw from society and live in solitude in the mountain. Drinking tea, playing chess, and having a pure conversation with friends are seen as a refined lifestyle, preferred by the literati, especially those who are not satisfied with excessively corrupt society. Here, the morning practice of the solar emanation, the absorption of the essence of Heaven and Earth, and the mutual response with monkeys in the mountain, is exactly in agreement with Taoists' doctrine on "oneness of Heaven and Human." Thus, the wondrous tale demonstrates a perfect ideal of life that is pursued by ancient men of letters.

Standing in the dilapidated walls in the temple, the traveller has traced these stories repeated for hundreds and thousands of years, not for the temple on the rises and falls but for the transience of our life in the long history and the self's insignificance in the endless time and space. Indeed, the changes of Nature and the cycles of the good and the evil imply nothing more than a truth: the flourishing and decaying of all the beings in the human world, the rises and falls of the affairs of human life, and the honour and disgrace of life, all these only justify the transient nature of all the beings, because nothing can last forever compared with the everlastingness of the boundless time and space. This is the relativity of all the beings.

However, before the traveller can see through this principle in the human world he still has to face various perplexities in life: to join in the society? Or be away from endless worldly disputes? In fact, what perplexes him is something commonly shared by human mind. Then, what is the fundamental cause of the puzzlement? It may be seen from the story about "the nun's washing intestines by cutting her stomach" in chapter 48 in *Lingshan*. It is told that a Minister of War in ancient China is a compassionate, filial and ambitious man. As a result, a nun comes from afar particularly to perform a forty-nine-day fast for his deceased mother. One day, while

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid. 214-215.

walking through the nun's wing-room, he happens to hear a sound of water, and then he peers inside:

...He then sees a soft white hand take a pair of scissors from the bathtub, thrust them hard into the navel, so red blood instantly gushes out from it. ...The nun drenched in blood pulls out her intestines into the tub! ...She takes length after length of the soft intestines into her bloody hands, washing and rubbing, then winding them around her wrists. It goes on for a long time. When finally finishing washing, she presses the intestines neatly together and crams them back into her stomach. Then, with a ladle of water, she washes in turn her arms, chest and abdomen, between her legs, legs and feet, and even each of her toes. She is whole again.<sup>171</sup>

Buddha says that the suffering of all the sentient beings is as boundless as the sea. It embodies at least two layers of meaning. On the one hand, to live is to suffer and suffering is inescapable; on the other hand, the suffering of life is originated from the existence of the self, and so the perplexities of life would unavoidably arise without abandoning the desires of the self. As for the Minister of War in this story, he has both an ambition to usurp state power and the filial devotion to become a good son. To be a son with filial obedience is seen as a virtue of Five Constant Virtues, but disloyalty to the emperor is the biggest violation for proper human relationships in Three Cardinal Guides. Even though he is a worthy son, his mother would still feel disgraceful if he really betrays his country. This is the very puzzlement that he has to face, and the real reason that the nun comes to his house. By purifying herself in body and spirit, she intends to urge him to reflect on his duty as a subject of emperor, and to warn him that he must under no circumstances betray his country.

This story has a power of sudden enlightenment from the mind. Supposing all the people have the nun's courage to daily bear the pain of death and birth only for the benefit of others, how is it still possible to feel puzzled at "in the society" or "out of

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 289-290.



the society?" To her, self-dissection is a process of suffering, but suffering can purify the mind. If one transcends suffering one can transcend the puzzlement of life. If one is unable to see through the truth of death and birth, or alternatively, if one is unwilling to relinquish one's grip on the self, then, one is only exhausting one's passion and energy in the false schemes and ambitions in the human world. Consequently, that which suffers is nothing but the mind. This is a silent struggle in the innermost depths of life, yet the mind cannot be emancipated.

However, in the explorer's understanding for Buddhists and Taoists, birth and death are both beginningless and endless. Then, is it still necessary to argue about which is more joyful or sorrowful? In chapter 47 of *Lingshan*, the traveller "I" takes shelter in Qingcheng Mountain and meets a Taoist in his thirties, who dwells alone in the cave. His family is just located in a village at the foot of the mountain. But he said that he is tired of the human relationship that is solely bent on profit. So he left home and quietly practises Tao in this cave. Although not yet formally accepted as a Taoist in the Taoist temple, he firmly believes in his sincerity. On the contrary, "I" feels somewhat doubtful of his perseverance:

"Don't you feel bored living in the cave on your own all the time?"

"It's more peaceful and easier than in the village," he calmly replies, not minding that I'm trying to provoke him.

"May I ask what you are studying?"

He pulls out a *Daily Lessons for Taoists* printed with stone block from under his quilt.

"I can't work in the rainy day so reading some novels." He explains when he sees me looking at the magazine on his bed.

"Do these stories affect your study?" I am still curious to find out.

"Ha, they're all about common occurrences on men and women," he dismisses with a laugh. He says he went to senior high school and studied some literature. He does some reading when he is free. "In fact human life is all like that."

I shouldn't disturb him any longer, quietly sitting with him for a long time, sitting in

forgetfulness in the sound of rain.<sup>172</sup>

My doubtful questions cannot spoil his inner serenity. To him, all the encounters are caused only by chance and “I” is also only one of passers-by in a hurry. Here, “I” is more anxious than curious. The saying that “the tree may crave calm, but the wind will not drop”<sup>173</sup> can serve as a proof of his peaceful mind and my doubtful anxiety. If “I” cannot transcend the right and wrong and success and failure in the human world, “I” would not be able to profoundly understand his detachment from gains and losses in life. Therefore, “I” fights in the perplexity of my own but always seeks confirmation through others. Nevertheless, what “I” longs for is still an idealistic plane to forget and be forgotten in life—exactly as the momentary “sitting in forgetfulness in the sound of rain”<sup>174</sup> with him, the instant to be oblivious of myself, and to be free from all the anxieties in the human world.

However, as long as there are still attachments for worldly desires, one is impossible to be really in obliviousness, and so the exploration for the self is of impossibility to end. As a consequence, the tangles and entanglements in the human world are still restless and endless. In the same chapter, chapter 47, “I” encounters with an around fifty-year-old monk at the old stone pagoda on the island in the middle of the Ou River. “I” would very much like him to give me some advice on Buddha dharma:

“The Venerable Master seems to be leaving for a distant journey?”

“I’m first going to Jiangxi to visit a few old monks, and then also going to a number of other places.”

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 282.

<sup>173</sup> It implies that things take their own course regardless of one’s will. It reveals the conflict between the true nature of thing itself and the free will of the self. In fact, it reflects the essential doctrine of Taoists: the nature of Tao is to follow as it is rather than to go against the natural way.

<sup>174</sup> Sitting in forgetfulness (zuowang): it is from Zhuangzi’s ideal personality—to be a “perfect man,” or a “true man.” According to him, the perfect man “fasts in his mind (xinzhai),” that is, to keep his mind void and tranquil, and “sits down in forgetfulness.” This means to discard knowledge, forget first the outer world, then the body, then the mind, and become one with the infinite. In this sense, it may be said that such a man has transcended the worldly gain and loss, good luck and bad luck, so it is named as “perfect man” or “true man.” Please refer to Guo Shangxing’s *A History of Chinese Culture* (1993), co-compiled by Sheng Xingqing, revised by Qiu Ke’an, Zhang Jin, Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 28.

“I’m too a lone traveler, but unlike the Venerable Master, you are so much steadfast and have a sacred goal in your heart.”

“The true traveler has no goal at all. And the traveler without goal is an ultimate traveler.”

“Venerable Master, are you from the local? Is this a journey to farewell your hometown? Aren’t you coming back? ”

“A monk makes his home wherever he is, and it makes no difference whether he has or not.”<sup>175</sup>

For the traveler who still has various doubts in the heart, this monk is more worthy of the title of “traveler,” for a true traveler looks forward to the vastness of the world and so is never bound by the name of hometown, for a true traveler yearns for a detached life and so never sets limits for the ideals in his heart, and for a true traveler never makes a distinction between sacredness and vulgarity, between “in society” and “out of society.” Thus, he is always steadfast and sincere and so sanguine:

“Just ask whatever you want to know, there isn’t anything that cannot be talked about for a monk.” it is he who speaks first.

“Seeing the Venerable Master walks briskly, I am somewhat envious of you. I don’t have any specific goal but I still can’t renounce.”

“What can’t you renounce?” He still smiles.

“Renounce the human world.” After I say it, both of us laugh.

“The human world can be renounced when you say you renounce it.” He is straightforward.<sup>176</sup>

The pursuits for human life are the attachments that are not easy to be shaken off, so “I” cannot renounce immediately, and so “I” fails to walk in a free and brisk pace like the monk. However, each who has fully awakened to the true nature of human life had ever been the one who lost one’s way in the sea of suffering. The monk joined in the

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<sup>175</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 283.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

revolution at the age of sixteen, became a doctor after graduation from an institute of medicine college, was labelled as a "Rightist," became a farmer to cultivate land, a father with three children, once dreamed of becoming a Catholic, but eventually converted to a Buddhist:

Do you still think of your family? I ask.

They can all earn their own living.

Don't you have any worry about them?

A Buddhist has neither worry nor hatred.<sup>177</sup>

He had gone through the vicissitudes of affairs of human life. But he has already extricated himself from the cares and concerns in mundane life and attained the serenity of heart. Therefore, he is delighted to accept the endless wanderings in his life. "I" is really envious of his being unrestrained and broad-minded. However, "I" also understands a principle that all things naturally come and go in the human world, so this encounter with him is not an exception:

"Maybe one day I'll follow your footsteps." I am not clear whether I am joking or not.

"Then we are connected in destiny." He is, however, quite earnest. With these words he gets up, puts his palms together and bids farewell to me.

He walks very quickly and I follow him for a while but in an instant he vanishes among the throngs of visitors. I am clearly aware that I still have the bonds of this world.<sup>178</sup>

Although the protagonist "I" has the idea to renounce the society, eventually he still keeps some bonds for this world, so that he is unable to walk as briskly as the monk and unable to leisurely travel around without any traces left in the mortal world. Just as the monk said, Buddha is always in the heart, so he has not the self, and so he has been able to relinquish all his pursuits and attachments for this life. Instead, it remains

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 285.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 286-287.

a difficulty for “I” to forget the self and be a true traveller like the monk. Therefore “I” cannot become entirely free and easy.

In chapter 63 of *Lingshan*, the traveller “I” roams around to the Dragon and Tiger Mountain situated in the Guixi of Jiangxi province, and dwells in the Shang Qinggong Taoist temple in Qingcheng Mountain—the well-known sacred place of Taoists. There used to have a number of well-known scholars, who lived here in seclusion to write books, such as Fan Changsheng of Jin Dynasty, Du Guangting of Tang Dynasty, and the painter Zhang Daqian had resided in the temple for many years. However, “I” is not “a hermit, and also wants to enjoy the cooked food in the human world.” This is the problem of my own: “I” is neither able to hold myself from earthly unfortunate turns in life nor able to endure the tranquil “inaction” of Taoists, so that “I” can be seen as a “connoisseur of life” at most, only hoping to gain certain understanding and realisation of life through all kinds of personal experiences.

In contrast to the majesty of Buddhist temple and its various commandments and taboos, “I” prefers the simplicity of Taoist temple and its fresh elegance:

My room leads out onto the quaint temple hall. There are a long narrow table made of nanmu, square armchairs and tea tables. Calligraphy and painting are hanging on the walls. Horizontal inscribed boards on the hall and couplets on the pillars of veranda are survived woodcarvings at earlier years. In the square courtyard grows ancient cypress and blackish green indigo plants, and on the artificial stone mountains in the pond are completely covered with pale yellowish green moss.<sup>179</sup>

The temple’s external decoration and its internal furnishings perfectly embody the idealistic level of Taoist thought—union of Heaven and Human. The furniture in the hall, the calligraphy and painting on the wall, the horizontal scrolls on the hall, the couplets on the pillars, the ancient cypress in the small yard, the artificial mountains

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 415.

in the pond, and the moss on the ground, all these sketch out a painting of the impressionist school, in which humanity and nature are visually antithetical to each other but aesthetically harmonious with each other.

The Taoist temple is indeed a place with quaint simplicity and fresh elegance. In contrast to the nerve-racking noise of the human world, the secluded tranquillity here is definitely a luxurious enjoyment. It is not hard at all to understand the reason that those refined scholars such as Zhang Daqian, Fan Changsheng and Du Guangting chose to live in this place over the years.

“I” observes a couplet inscribed in the round pillars in the centre of the main hall. The couplet is as follows:

Dao gives birth to one, one gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, three gives birth to the ten thousand things of creation.

Human follows Earth, Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows Dao, Dao follows Nature.<sup>180</sup>

This couplet echoes each other with what the botanist quoted in the eighth chapter; or alternatively, the botanist has found its quotation in this couplet. Here, the head Taoist’s explanation for this couplet again annotates the purport of Taoists’ “union of Heaven and Human.” For Taoists, Dao or the Way is the first principle of the myriad creatures between Heaven and Earth. So following the nature of myriads of beings embodies the highest law of Dao or the Way, namely, Tao not only gives rise to the ten thousand things of creation but also acts as a fundamental natural rule to which humans must conform.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 415. The first line of the couplet is originally from chapter forty-two of *Daodejing (The Classic of the Way and its Virtue)* by Laozi. Please also refer to the translation by Philip J. Ivanhoe in *The Daodejing of Laozi: “The way produces the One. The One produces two. Two produces three. Three produces the myriad creatures.”* New York; London: Seven Bridges Press (2002).

In a way, the Way or Dao creates and respects the “innateness” of myriads of things. This “innateness” may be referred to as a natural human personality in terms of human nature, as a spiritual cultivation in terms of belief, as a philosophical position in terms of human’s outlook and worldview, and as a restlessly creative “spirit of Heaven and Earth” in the cosmos. That is to say, human can attain a higher plane between Heaven and Earth by fully fusing the self with myriads of things in Nature. Such concepts in Taoists as “a unified entity,” “one integrated mass,” or “an integral whole” in essence touch upon the fundamental of Taoist thoughts, which is to pursue the naturalness of the myriad creatures and seek the harmonious common existence among diverse beings.

Moreover, Taoist thought could be understood as an aesthetic outlook, which advocates a refined ideal in simplicity and a natural harmony in multitude. This is the highest spiritual harmony between human and Nature, displaying an unconstrained state of mind when the self enters the natural flux of the boundless time and space. Just like the protagonist in *Lingshan*, at the moment that he places himself in the spacious serenity of the great Nature, he truly comes to the attainment of such an ideal. This is a fresh refinement that “I” am feeling in the dusk of Shangqinggong temple:

The upturned eaves display pure and simple lines. Imposing forests stand on the mountains behind me, soundlessly swaying in the night breeze. In a moment, all is quiet and still, and then a clear and pure sound of bamboo flute can be indistinctly heard, serene and graceful, in a twinkling, vanishing. Then, the voices of the brook under the stone bridge outside the temple and the sougning of night wind all seem to be suddenly overflowing from my heart.<sup>181</sup>

Observed from nearby, the lines of the temple’s eaves rise upwards, and the swaying forest trees in the wind can be seen from a distance. At the moment of stillness and movement, my heart becomes quiet, and is able to hear a sound of bamboo flute, the

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<sup>181</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 416.

voices of mountain streams, as well as the rustling of night wind, as if all this is overflowing from the depths of the heart. It is at this moment that human and Nature has been fused into one, quietly listening and being listened. The traveller residing in the place of Taoists has already entered into the plane of Taoists, and so a sense of detachment in an instant extends through the limited time and space towards the longer and farther.

From what have been discussed above, it may be summarized that the traveller's journey in the great Nature has offered him a marginal perspective to re-observe and re-think human and society and the world. In other words, in this marginal quest for the self, he has come to a non-marginal realization over the self and the other. To take a further point, human's obsession with the self-realization is the root of all the puzzlement in life.

Some western psychoanalysts basically see desire as a repressed potential in human unconscious. For example, when a certain mental "Complex" fails to be dispelled, one tends to turn one's attention to realistic pursuits. In other words, the stream of energy of life may function as a drive for people to seek self-actualisation in real society. This is one of the reasons that modern people fight each other to grab fame, wealth and power. As a consequence, human is reduced to a deeper loss of the self instead of its full fulfilment. This underlies the protagonist's quest for *Lingshan*: he is weary of fighting in the human world, so he roams around in Nature to look for its natural intelligence.

On the contrary, eastern traditional philosophers look on desire as a spectre in the depths of human mind. For Buddhist practitioners, eradicating human's attachment for worldly desires leads people to an awakening to the self. For Taoist practitioners, roaming in the great cycle of Nature embodies a plane of Heaven and Earth, a supreme free spirit that human can attain between Sky and Earth. Both in nature may be seen as the abandonment for the obsessive self and returns to life its inner radiance.



The protagonist in *Lingshan* enters Buddhist monastery and visits Taoist temple, seeking an understanding and awakening to Buddhists' wisdom and Taoists' detachment. Nevertheless, he claims to be neither a Buddhist nor a Taoist. This may be seen as a manner that the scholars comprehend life and the world: life means to travel, to observe, to think, and to enlighten. It is unimportant about which way he adopts to attain the "Way"; rather, what are important to him are the aimless roaming and endless meditations on humans and the world through the spiritual journey. In the traveller's point, life is seen as a long journey on the way, and so how far one can go actually means how deep one can meditate. If one indeed comprehends the truth of life, then there would be no necessity to argue over which is better or which is truer, because everything has been embodied in the mutual forgetting of subject and object. Conversely, if invariably obsessed with various desires and schemes, even though having gone through a long march of ten thousand *li* and read through thousands of millions of Buddhist and Taoist scriptures, one might remain unable to attain the true principle to live in the human world.

## 12. Femininity in Folklore

As far as the structure of *Lingshan* is concerned, the dichotomy on different levels runs through the traveller's stories: I—you, the self—the other, man—woman, Heaven—Earth, the reality—the memory, the real—the imaginary, the physical travel—the spiritual journey, the orthodox culture—the folk culture, in-the-society—out-of-the-society etc. Such a dual relation juxtaposes multi-leveled contents into a parallel structure, reflecting the protagonist's self-contradictory state of mind, revealing his continuous psychological conflict with the reality: to be a fighter in the reality? Or be a hermit in the mountain? Join in the society or escape from the society? These perplexities would eventually be dispelled from his bosom as he steps further into the quest for Lingshan. He seems to see suddenly the light of life

through the inspiration of the ancient culture. This kind of natural ecology is grounded, unaffected and unsophisticated rather than hollow, sophisticated, restricted, thus it is of simplicity but does not lack vitality at all.

Here, the folk culture in *Lingshan* can be symbolized as human's cultural mind with serene femininity. It has been neglected and suppressed over thousands of years by the mainstream culture. However, it was inborn with a natural intelligence that the orthodox lacks, for it has been founded on a simple philosophical belief from mountain folks.

In *Lingshan*, the stories on the sorceresses' revenge exhort people to know a simple principle in the human world: evildoers will receive retribution for their evildoings. The diverse rituals to worship ancestors, pray Heaven, and invoke gods and spirits show a humane ethical value and express people's respect and admiration for Heaven, Earth, and gods and spirits. Additionally, the traveller in pursuit of "life on the road" seeks the attainment of unrestrained Buddhists' broad-mindedness and refined Taoists' tranquillity, which has further promoted the folk culture to a level on human spiritual pursuit. All this attributes the cultural ecology with a mysterious simplicity and spacious serenity, which help it weather numerous changes in history. Thus, it is the romantic charm of mountains and rivers that guides the traveller to a boundless roaming and profound thinking about the life of Heaven and Earth.

In some chapters in *Lingshan*, by virtue of memories, imaginations, reverie etc, the author symbolizes "ice and snow" and "woman" as the natural charm of the Chu Culture. They represent various incarnations of Anima dwelling in the poet's heart. Compared with mainstream culture's publicity and ethical connotation, these pure, quiet and sustained images build a spiritual shelter from the clamour of the human world. These archetypes for life, in *Lingshan*, could be seen as a metaphor for folk culture, sending off her aroma to the roaming traveller. However, in the aroma that can penetrate the soul, it is not only permeated with the poet's personal values but also

inscribed with the author's meditations on life and the world and the cosmos. What follows would be a glance back to the two "archetypes of life."

In chapter 70, the author constructs a deep and serene dreamland for his spirit in virtue of a snow scene scroll by the painter Gong Xian:

Facing the snow scene painted by Gong Xian, what more can one say! It is so serene that one can hear fallen snow fluttering, as if it is audibly soundless.

It is a dream world.

The wooden bridge is over the river. There is an abode alone overlooking the crystal stream. One can sense the signs of human life, but it is also of remoteness and solitude.

This is a condensed dream. An intangible darkness at the edge of the dream is still dimly visible.<sup>182</sup>

The human world is tumultuous and human heart is peaceful, yet the protagonist always seeks the tranquility in the clamor. This is the style of Gong Xian's painting. If dynamically observing the static objects in the scenes, one can realize a mutual fusion and mutual creation between human and Heaven and Earth, between the reality and the imagined, and between the signs of this world and the dreamland of previous life. This approach to understanding painting leads to a realization that diverse elements are not only able to visually present in one flat but also able to be spiritually condensed into a whole entity. Would it be better to say that such an aesthetic view from the observer exactly embodies his outlook? Or alternatively, wouldn't it be a reflection of the worldview of the harmony of human and Nature that Taoist thought embraces? Furthermore, wouldn't it be a perfect cooperation of Anima with Animus?

This is indeed an idealistic ideal of which the protagonist dreams. It takes on a mysterious female complex in his mind. In his memories covered beneath ice and snow, there is a hidden dream, a deep dream that extends across the time and space of

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 462.

life towards the farthest land. This is a tranquil night with fallen snow. There are some quiet traces for this mortal world and also a dimly chaotic impression from previous life. Both are preserved at the edge of dream, as if it is an impression that can be sensed in the painting, or a rhythm that is reverberating in the depths of life. In the 80<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Lingshan*, the protagonist “you” goes against the broken walls of flowing glaciers. All around is surrounded by a deep stillness of cold night, as if “you” is deeply lost in the meditations upon life and death:

...Isn't this precisely a plane that you have been seeking to attain? Like a world of ice and snow, there are only various blurred images constituted by some uncertain shadows, telling nothing, being meaningless, being in utterly deathly silence. ...You circle upwards. In the spirals—between life and death, you are still struggling as a being. That is to say, blood in your veins is still circulating. Your life has not ended yet.<sup>183</sup>

“You” strives perseveringly for a perception of life and death, seeking to realize the intrinsic nature of living and dying. What “you” aspires to attain is to confirm a certainty in uncertainty and to infinitely comprehend finite existence. At this moment, your thinking has been frozen as if life enters a coldly deathlike silence. However, life is such a tenacious existence, fighting in the uncertain images of shadow. Upwards against the current of death, “you” feels again a surge of life in the ice and snow, as if a sound of bell in memory, tinkling in the collision of ice crystals:

The tinkling being clearer and clearer awakens a palpable beat of your heart. You see a woman riding on the horse. The horse head and she both emerge above the snow line, with the gloomy abyss of ice as a background. You seem to hear a song accompanied by a tinkling of horse bell.

Woman from Changdu,  
Hair plaited with silk ribbons,  
Green jade earrings,

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 522.

Glittering silver bracelets,

Sash of many colors...

She looks like a Tibetan woman on a horse you once saw by road signposts on a snow-covered mountain 5600 feet above sea level. Glancing back and smiling to you, she entices you to fall into the abyss of ice crystals. At that time you couldn't help walking towards her...<sup>184</sup>

The sound of bell and song brings “you” back to a woman in your memory, which restores your vitality of life. In this sense, the beautiful Tibetan woman on the horse is in fact seen as a symbol of life. To people at the verge of death, she is the very irresistible desire to keep alive, leading one to dreaming of life again, even if it would be an “abyss.” Therefore, “you” is no longer afraid of the repeated glance at the edge of the precipice, but rather “you” looks forward to her mysterious smile, in which there is a limitless magical power—a determination of life in face of death:

All is no more than memory. The tinkling is only anchored in your mind, also seems to be a sound in your brain. It is unbearably anguished when life is torn apart. The heart pulsates wildly and chaotically. The brain will explode. The blood will be congealed in the veins after explosion. It is a soundless explosion. Life is vulnerable but a tenacious struggle is only rooted in its instinctive obstinacy.<sup>185</sup>

Like a rhythm, the tinkling is anchored in the depths of the heart. It would be aroused as long as you go back into those remote memories of life, in which you can again perceive the instinctive tenacity of life. This is the anguish of life being disintegrated—being torn, breaking, exploding, congealing and palpating. Every moment of pain of being disintegrated brings to life a deeper desire for a new birth after recovery. The word “life” is defined in the mortal world as the flesh, weak and fragile; on the level of spirit it is instead interpreted as a perception and realization for

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 523.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 523.

the profound and limitless mental world. The visibility to invisibility, and the finitude to infinitude, is forever a mysterious and boundless subject!

Accordingly, the “ice and snow” and “woman” are two images in the protagonist’s unconscious. On the one hand, they represent his repressed desires, an undercurrent turbulent in the depths of his mind. The irrational energy would surge through out of unconscious darkness by a certain channel at a certain moment to manifest its irresistibility. On the other hand, these images are attributed with woman’s clarity and quietness, deepness and solidness—a personality of water and the character of mountain. The idealized human qualities in *Lingshan* are shown as human’s cultural mind with feminine temperament. The gentle but unshakable composure enables life to be detached from desires, schemes, frustrations, and anxieties, and ensure an original dreamy disposition and peaceful warmth in human spiritual world. This is defined by Jung as Anima, and further explained by Bachelard in *The Poetics of Reverie* as follows: “But in our reverie, in the great solitude of our reveries, when we are so profoundly liberated that we even no longer think of the virtual rivalries, our entire soul is impregnated with the influence of the *anima*.”<sup>186</sup>

The discussions above can be summarized as the following points. The journey to Lingshan serves as the protagonist’s tracing to folk culture and his perception and cognition for life itself. On the cultural level, the traveler trekking in Nature discovers an ancient folk civilization. This is a potential cultural treasure in the ocean of human spirit, so it would activate and motivate the vitality of a nation’s culture, and provide the heart with a shelter to weather the wind and rain of the human world.

Thus, the folk culture in *Lingshan* is an incarnation of the natural intelligence of mountains and rivers, embodying a primordial natural sensuousness and its impelling power. It can be comprehended by heart instead of ethical teachings. If one once

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<sup>186</sup> Gaston Bachelard, “Reveries on Reverie (‘Animus’ –‘Anima’),” *The Poetics of Reverie* (1971), Boston: Beacon Press, 62.

forgot various schemes of the human world in the boundless Nature, one could realize what worry-forgetting is; if one once re-kindled the ardour of life in the solitude of the heart, one would be able to comprehend what a truly free life is; and, if one once saw the selfhood in the eyes of others, one would become aware that life is indeed a process of self-assertion, a process to constantly identify oneself by virtue of countless illusory others.

On a thematic level, the traveler's quest for Lingshan through thousands of miles, in actuality, may be thought of as an awakening towards his own spiritual world, and as an insight into human nature. In chapter 76, the traveler has an abstruse conversation with an elderly man, which leads his wanderings to a philosophical thinking:

He is alone in the world, wandering around for a long time, and eventually encounters an elderly man wearing a long gown and walking with a stick. So he goes up and asks politely:

"Venerable elder, could you tell me where Lingshan is?"

"Where did you come from?" the elderly asked as a reply.

He says he is from Wuyizhen.

"Wuyizhen?" the elderly man hesitates for a while, "It's on the other side of the river."

He says he has just come from that side of the river. Did I take the wrong way? The elderly man frowns and says:

"The road is not wrong, and it is the traveler who is wrong."<sup>187</sup>

In Chinese classical literature and Jung's archetypes, the elderly man is generally signified as a wise man, because his words usually inspire people with wisdom. Here, what the elderly man said seems both abstruse and meaningful. The traveler perhaps grasps the arcane truth or not at all. How can it be interpreted then?

As the elderly man answers, Lingshan is on the other side of the river and the road is

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<sup>187</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 495-496.

not wrong but it is the traveler who is wrong. This could be understood from two perspectives. Firstly, if Lingshan is “on the other side of the river,” human is then on this side of the river; in other terms, if Lingshan is “on the other shore,” human is then “on this shore.” People in the human world know that there is a Lingshan in the other shore, but it is not easy to reach. As a result, the traveler’s long trek to Lingshan proves that he is still merely a wanderer of this shore. Then, why is it said that it is the traveler who is wrong rather than the road? The following explanation accounts for the second layer of meaning. The ling (intelligence) of lingshan (Soul Mountain) hints that the quest for lingshan is an intelligent and wise choice for human beings. However, what humans can do is only to search and trek on this side of the river, but can never go through beyond this shore to the other shore. In this sense it may be viewed that the traveler as a representative of human beings has done his uttermost to quest after the intelligence of lingshan, while he remains anchored in this shore, which is perhaps because he is still bound by something in this side of the river, so that the wisdom of Lingshan is merely pursuable but unattainable.

When the protagonist has undergone the transformations in life, from being perplexed at life to pondering over what life is, the development of human mind has reached the second stage. It is true that life is a process of numerous quests, so that it is inevitable to go through various spiritual sufferings such as puzzlement, frustration, anxiety, and contradiction. However, liberating the self from suffering is also an anguished transmutation. That means the hardship of seeking a road in the dark wilderness and a wordless relief after suddenly seeing the light, which may be considered as what the traveller has comprehended from his trek to Lingshan. In other words, persisting in a pursuit of life is truly respected, but accomplishing nothing is not necessary to become obstinately obsessive. Just as what the author quotes in chapter 76 from an ancient proverb: “return after gains, return after pains, not linger around the river, being blown by cold wind.”<sup>188</sup> This is because life is originally a numerous turns of currents and adverse currents; or alternatively the meaning of life is just to get through

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 497.



one-after-another “disintegration and recovery” of life. As what is shown in the 80<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Lingshan*, it reflects the traveller’s comprehension on life and death: “The fear of death to the flesh is so concrete that the physical body that you failed to abandon recovers its consciousness.”<sup>189</sup> Life and death is a process of individual perception. Only having gone through various anguish of being disintegrated in life can one thoroughly comprehend what a true life is.

How could one truly comprehend life then? This is a question that can only be personally comprehended but unable to be verbally demonstrated. In other words, an essentially feasible choice is to emancipate the self from various imprisoned social bondage. Some stories in *Lingshan* on Buddhist doctrine and Taoist thought reveal a truth that it is precisely the self itself that chained human natural nature. Therefore, Taoists adhere to the principle of “forgetting the self”—seeking the “union of Heaven and Human.” In Jung’s view, this is shown as the realization of the mutual reconciliation between Anima and Animus by balancing opposing forces of the mind. But Buddhists concentrate on meditative cultivation to discover and revive the immanent nature of the mind. Buddha says: “all the phenomena are illusory.” So when all illusory ideas and thoughts are eradicated, the innermost essence of humans would naturally come to appear. Thus Buddha is always in the heart rather than in the mouth. Accordingly, Dao or the Way would become attainable when subject and object reach a mutual fusion, and Buddha-hood would be achieved when all false ideas die out. Dao pursues a harmonious spirit between Heaven and Earth, but Buddha-nature justifies the permanent splendour of original human mind.

From which it may be seen that all these have much in common in understanding human’s selfhood. For human beings, supposing that one is able to utterly forget the difference of right and wrong, of gain and loss, of gratitude and resentment, of success and failure, only maintaining a free and unrestrained life, one would be able to lead a peaceful life without worry and dissatisfaction. This is a life of plane that the traveller

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 525.

seeks to attain through the long trek: the serenity like snow falling. Just like what is described in the 81st chapter in *Lingshan*: “All around is very quiet. Snow is soundlessly falling. I am surprised at the tranquillity. In Heaven it is as peaceful as this. There is no joy. Joy is termed in contrast to worry. Only snow is falling.”<sup>190</sup>

The third chapter as a whole presents to readers a unique folk culture in virtue of explicating *Lingshan*. This has been discussed from three perspectives respectively: “witchcraft and femininity,” “witchcraft and spirits,” and “witchcraft and wanderings.” Based on the above readings for this novel, it may be summarized that this is a subject concerned with human spiritual exploration.

The theme on the exploration of life in *Lingshan* is interpreted as human’s “collective unconscious”, which is symbolic of a cultural mind with natural intelligence. By searching, tracing and recording the long marginalized cultural ruins, the traveler attempts to explore a wide and open cultural space for human mind.

This cultural ecology totally differs from the rational teachings from the orthodox culture, for it represents a fresh and simple manner to understand life, society, the world and the universe. This is a meditative way of thinking, constructed by sensuous sensibility and perceptual comprehension rather than logical reason and social rules and regulations. It is therefore a reflection of human aspirations for ideal and freedom, and an escape from orders, norms, conventions, and taboos under the shadow of the mainstream.

Nevertheless, there is no such an absolute cultural gap between the marginal and the mainstream. This is because the so-called marginal and mainstream are relative, namely they are mutually conditioned and mutually complemented. In other words, they jointly constitute a whole cultural entity. Because this is an integrated mass so they are inseparable and should and can share weal and woe.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid. 526.

On a cultural level, the cooperation between the marginal and the mainstream is hugely significant. On the one hand, without co-existence, the so-called harmony only means an empty talk; on the other hand, without mutual reconciliation, the so-called mental emancipation means an empty talk likewise. In terms of the theme of the research, life is a complete being. It is true that the increasingly systemized modern world indeed benefit human life. But excessively socialized life has constructed various fetters of human personality. What is the possible consequence of the excessive socialization as such? This topic would be picked up and further discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter Three

### *Yige ren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible)

#### ——The Re-construction of Personality in Modern Society

#### 13. A Man with “Without-ism”

Based on traditional psychoanalysis, the previous chapters have explicated Gao Xingjian's earlier novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (Buying my Grandpa a Fishing Rod) and his influential novel *Lingshan* (Soul Mountain). The female characters in the former symbolize the innocence of human mind at its tender age. In contrast to the patriarchal domination, the innocence appears so vulnerable that it could not survive the fate of being distorted in personality. This suggests a process of being socialized of human mind. From innocence to sophistication, this marks an indispensable change in life.

*Geiwo laoye mai yugan* reflects the author's literary idealism. In this collection, tracing back to childhood and childhood pals, as Gao's favorite topic, makes his

novels present a nostalgic mood. This is a beautiful dream of which every innocent child has dreamed in childhood. Their reveries on a perfect life lead readers back to old days. In these unforgettable memories, one can sense a slight sorrow, hidden in the warm nostalgia, pervaded into our rumination on childhood, on the youth, on the girls and boys, on dreams, and on life. This novel collection reflects the author's attachment for an idealistic life, marking a turning point of his outlook and worldview.

Such an idealistic sentiment has reduced in *Lingshan* to the least so that one can hardly find any trace of optimism. Rather, what one can sense and feel throughout this novel is a contradictory soul in chaos, who dwells upon his past questing after the self. The protagonist at this stage is a man baffled by social "Oedipus Complex": where is the right road to life when the self is subjugated by the will of the society? Is it to follow the society or to maintain the self? Is it to escape from the order of "Father" or submit to it?

This is a painful experience to fight with the self. For Schopenhauer, three ways may alleviate suffering—aesthetic contemplation, sympathy for others and ascetic living. In Goethe's view, the fundamental nature of the world is aesthetic. Mencius (孟子) from China thinks that compassion is common to all men. Some religious practitioners maintain that an ascetic living can overcome desires. Of these different views, one common aim is to purify the mind by discovering the beauty of the world, by cultivating the goodness of human, and by leading a simple life. This evidences that human beings can gain a deeper insight into life by internally examining the mind rather than externally swelling personal desires. However, the awakening to the self is fundamentally resulted from the cognition and comprehension for the suffering of life.

Accordingly, this state of being may be seen as the second stage of the development of human mind. It is a stage of self-salvation and self-awakening in face of the suffering of life. In contrast to the innocence of childhood, this is a stage full of the conflict of personality. The protagonist's awakening for life and the self is based on

his comprehension for a folk culture. The marginalized cultural ecology with natural intelligence in *Lingshan* underwent and survived numerous changes of national history, inspiring and awakening the traveler to the true nature of the self. This spiritual roaming makes *Lingshan* take on a complex temperament in terms of theme and language.

Then, what will be happening when human mind develops into its later stage? Can we reconstruct a new personality when the traditional defined human's desire encounters a ruthless deconstruction from post-modern philosopher Deleuze and psychoanalyst Guattari? Instead of emphasizing the stability and passivity of desire, they employ a wholly innovative method to re-define and re-build human's desire on its social and mental levels. In the following parts, the post-modern psychoanalysis would be employed to interpret Gao Xingjian's *Yige ren de shengjing*.

Compared with *Lingshan*, *Yige ren de shengjing* presents an utterly different style in content. The former portrays a man far away from real society, traces his wanderings in the great Nature, and explores his spiritual awakening to the self. Rather, the latter directly places the idealistic protagonist into the fights and struggles in the real world, to observe and examine how an idealist constructs his personal dreams and social values. Relatively, *Lingshan* could be seen as a personal escape from real society, but *Yige ren de shengjing* as an individual choice for the society and an ultimate escape after choosing—a positive escape after self-examination.

The protagonist in *Yige ren de shengjing*, a wanderer in the western country, traces back to his personal experiences during the 1950s and 1960s in China. In doing so, the author tries to present readers with a man's spiritual progression in real society. He is an idealist, dreaming to become a hero at the revolutionary time and possess a perfect love. However, the tragedy at the particular times proclaims a fact: his pursuits will come to illusion. With the disillusionment of his social ideal, he has no dreams any more. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that he chose to escape from the

reality. Rather, the reality has had his outlook and worldview renewed. He has emancipated himself from various isms and expects a new life. This is an emancipated new personality, a transcendental plane of life.

*Yige ren de shengjing* reveals the existential dilemma of a generation during the Cultural Revolution. For Liu Zaifu, this is a book being “close to the reality,” reflecting an “extremely anguished reality” that a whole generation went through:

The reality was incisive. The politics in the reality was in particular incisive. However, Gao Xingjian didn't evade it at all. He not only directly touched upon politics, but also uncovered without any reservation the vulnerability of human nature and their inner fear under the oppression of politics, vividly and incisively. This work profoundly revealed why political disaster could be on the rampage like a pestilence, and how people were poisoned by the pestilence and transformed until the total loss of human nature.<sup>191</sup>

The political disaster in China has become a known fact. However, a deep subject on human nature behind this fact might be neglected. As we know, the eradication of a pestilence must be based on a thorough study for the nature of this disease. Similarly, if a human being is willing to deeply think about and objectively reflect on human's factors behind all the events, the tragedy as such would be able to be avoided in the future. Then, what is the driving force that can have human's personality distorted and transformed? To a greater degree, it may be said that killings and violence in the human world are fundamentally imputed to the imbalance of human nature, which may be said to be a deep tragedy on human's mentality rather than a simple social historical event.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, modern values on the development of subjectivity put a direct obstacle in the way of human free will. A long-term fixed social establishment has the possibility to be pregnant with the seeds of radical personality

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<sup>191</sup> Liu Zaifu, “Postscript” to *Yige ren de shengjing* (One Man's Bible) (1999), Taipei: Lianjing, 452.

in the concealed self.

Every social system has been established based on a set of social values and so constitutes its own social orders and ethical connotation. Likewise, every dream is born out of an individual and in each self bears a personality. However, the spirituality of personal ideal forms a contradictory relationship with the subjectivity of individual social personality, which is the same as the incompatibility of fire and water. This underlies the defeat of personal dream in social reality.

*Yige ren de shengjing* reveals the conflict between personalized pursuit and established values. The protagonist's experiences in the Cultural Revolution witnessed the disillusionment of his personal and social dreams. This shows the tragedy of a particular country at a particular time and reveals the distorted human personality in social movements. Thus, this tragedy may be seen as an epitome of human society as a whole: personal dream and socialized management constitute a paired opposition. If the established social system cannot be altered, then, it would be human personality that is tailored to fit the society. Accordingly, in order to construct a harmonious relationship between human and society, it is necessary to have a deep understanding for the nature of society and humans.

*Yige ren de shengjing* serves as the author's attempt to dissect and reveal human nature by exploring the self. Without evading the reality of national history, to a great extent, embodies the style of the novel's realism. At the same time, the author tries to expose the absurdness of the real society and the darkness of human inner world. Not only does this novel show the author's analysis and critique to a particular time, it also reveals the mentality of a whole generation, which is marked by their helplessness and fragility, gloom and sadness, and struggle and escape. Therefore, this novel is not only a reflection of historical facts but also an insight into human nature. This is termed by Liu Zaifu as an "extreme realism" of literature. Here, the "extreme" refers to "a refusal for any fabrication, a true and exact demonstration of a history. It is so true

that it is touching, it is so exact that it is precise, and it is so grim that it is nearly cruel.”<sup>192</sup> Thus, Liu thinks that *Yige ren de shengjing* is “not simply a solid witness to the history, but also a big tragedy that demonstrates human’s universal fate at a big historical time. It is given the quality of sentimental poetry, which is implied in the questions for the universal tragedy of human nature and in the strong sympathy for human beings.”<sup>193</sup>

Additionally, *Yige ren de shengjing* may be seen as the author’s declaration for his philosophy of life—“without-ism.” Some criticize without-ism as an “extreme individualism,” a personal philosophy to evade social responsibility, and a choice of an “extreme egoist.” On the one hand, it is reasonable because Chinese cultural tradition emphasizes collective awareness of nation, such as the advocacy of serving for the country, of a consciousness of worry to manage the country, and of a spirit of sacrifice to fight for the interests of the people. Such a tradition, on the other hand, is quite different from western personified values, such as western culture more often stresses the development of individuality. Thus it is irreproachable to choose a personified life as values. Then, before making comments on Gao’s without-ism, let us look at his complicated experiences of life and his dual backgrounds of education.

As a learner of eastern and western culture, Gao went through and witnessed the dramatic changes of life and time. He, as an individual, couldn’t change history but accept it. However, in his inner heart, he has a world of his own. Though he is a free wanderer in the world, yet he maintains a deep attachment for the place he was born. This is a very important reason to explain his “mother complex” reflected in most of his novels.

In this sense, Gao’s experiences reflect an existential situation that overseas Chinese people commonly face: no matter how far their footsteps can go but their hearts

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<sup>192</sup> Liu Zaifu, “Postscript” to *Yige ren de shengjing* (1999), Taipei: Lianjing, 453.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 455.



always attach to the same land: a place named as “motherland”. A person who had never wandered may not be able to understand such a “complex”. Instead, as long as one has once wandered, one always has an inner world that is particularly used to accommodate their nostalgia for their “motherland”.

On a territorial level, it is easy to judge where we are and to whom we belong. However, on a spiritual level, it is quite difficult to absolutely judge she or he is an individualist or a collectivist. Especially in this subject about life, life is defined in a broad rather than narrow sense. In this wide literary platform, every life should be welcomed and respected rather than isolated and excluded. Life is one dream so every life in the world is expected to join this dream and co-create a harmonious space of existence for human beings.

As an overseas wanderer, he or she must be included on this wide literary platform. Though each wanderer has his or her reason to wander throughout the world, yet for this encompassing land, he or she is always welcome whenever returning back to their motherland.

For Gao this wanderer, his contradictory feelings and emotions run through his works, which is reflected in his rough mental transmutation and his shifts on literary style. His early works bear an optimistic spirit of collectivism, *Lingshan* shows an individual’s spiritual exploration and self-awakening, but the without-ism in *Yigeren de shengjing* marks a significant turn in his life: his mind has been emancipated and no longer bound by isms.

This means his thorough abandonment for the obsession and puzzlement in his life, and means another determined choice for a positive life. For Liu Zaifu, “without-ism does not necessarily mean that he has no thought and philosophical attitude.”<sup>194</sup> On the contrary, his philosophy is characterized by “thoroughness,” for this is a

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 456.

philosophy that is not from “study and academy” but from “a deeply ingrained experience and realization to a tragic time,” thus it serves as “a philosophy that belongs to his own.” This view is partly sensible. In my opinion, it is true that his philosophy is thorough; however, his “thoroughness” comes from a thoroughly understanding for the suffering of life and a positive transcendence for this suffering. The transcendence is impossible without personally experiencing the vicissitudes of life. Alternatively, the transcendence means a man’s emancipation in spirit: he is no longer puzzled by the past so may start a new life calmly and confidently.

This transcendental attitude towards life shows the author’s positive exploration for a personalized life. In Deleuze’s philosophical system, this positivity is embodied as a theory of “rhizome,” a vigorous way of thinking. Its uniqueness lies in its expansion and creativity. The restless growth of stems means an all-reaching momentum of life. It is an endless energy of life, streaming through any dimension of life to enable life to be fully developed.

However, in my view, a truly wonderful life means more than this. It is true that a creative life should be encouraged to develop their different potentials. However, a truly strong life should also be able to condense its different dimensions into a consolidated whole. In other words, a complete life may be compared to a converged river, its multitudinous branches show its richness, and its consolidated strength shows its potentials and vigor.

Moreover, the theory of “rhizome” shows Deleuze’s refusal for a rigid mode of thinking. For him, to investigate a phenomenon does not necessarily mean to study its history, but it is necessary to examine what context it appears, what role it plays in different contexts, and what relationship it has with other contexts, as well as the way that it generates new relations. Therefore, some critics labeled Deleuze as “contextualism” and “relativism.” In fact what Deleuze proposes has gone far beyond a certain ism. Thus his works can be interpreted in different contexts. By doing this,

Deleuze aims to “prevent thoughts from becoming merely an idea, an opinion, a discussion, and a rumor.”<sup>195</sup> In my view, Deleuze has raised an extremely challenging philosophical way of thinking: a truly thinking on different thoughts should be able to produce a creative thought and show a strong posture for a positive life. Such a philosophical view not only updates the concepts of traditional philosophy but also presents thinking with a totally new personality. Thus, Deleuze’s re-definition and re-evaluation on philosophical conceptions, in fact, function as a profound re-thinking for human’s vigorous life, aiming “to give a life, to emancipate the imprisoned life, and to open up a ‘line of flight’!”<sup>196</sup>

In *Yige ren de shengjing*, the protagonist has made a personalized choice for his life: to liberate him from conceptualized life, no longer become confused with “isms,” and no longer get obsessed with “Complex”. Instead, he chooses without-ism as a philosophy of his own to start his transcendental life, a vital life beyond the confines of various “isms.”

It is true that this can be seen as Gao’s personified attitude towards life. However, this introverted life reflects his limitations in personality. From Gao’s works, it is not difficult to see that he is a passionate idealist and holds an aesthetical view for life. If he hadn’t been distorted for long, he should have become a man with the charm of personality. However, the sufferings in life overshadowed his personality. In this sense, his life hasn’t been thoroughly emancipated because there is a “Complex” in his heart: he remains a wanderer but cherishes a deep nostalgia for his mother. When he wanders around in another land, his “mother complex” has become a deep attachment to a land being symbolic of mother. This reflects a state of mind that overseas Chinese people commonly have: “mother” this word means a mood that always drives you return home. Therefore, for any wanderer, wandering is just like a kind of disease, it may be cured only when he truly stops wandering, not only in body but also in mind.

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<sup>195</sup> Guo Jun, “France’s Another Political Philosophy: 1970s—To Jointly Plan ‘Line of Flight’”. *Guangming Book Review*: [http://www.gmw.cn/content/2004-03/03/content\\_6012.htm](http://www.gmw.cn/content/2004-03/03/content_6012.htm).

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

Therefore a real emancipation must mean to thoroughly eradicate the “Complex” in the heart. So Gao is not a really free man. He is only a man who has objectively and deeply examined his life and the self. He did such a thing by writing *One Man's Bible*. The author structures this novel using the flashbacks of time. This retrospection reflects a progression of the protagonist's present life. Such a roundabout includes four steps: to depart from the past, to look back to the past, to return back to the present, and finally to depart from the present. Seen from this structure of time, it is indeed a process with twists and turns: the protagonist's recollection on the past, his profound thinking and thorough awakening to life, the society, and the world, and his resolute choice after the objective self-examination:

Now, you have no ism. A person without ism is rather much like a human. An insect or a blade of grass has no ism. You are also a being, no longer tricked by any ism. You would rather become a spectator, living on the margin of the society. Although still unavoidably having ideas, opinions and so-called tendency, you no longer have whatever isms after all.<sup>197</sup>

The protagonist chooses to leave his homeland and becomes a traveler in the vast world, leading a life at his will. For him, a person without ism needs not to be bound by a certain belief; a person being no longer in pursuit of ideal is also unnecessarily perplexed by identity; a man only “using” woman is not necessary to be responsible for extravagant love. He roves all over the world, firmly believing in “one man's bible,” enjoying freely writing, freely lusting, and a free life.

*Yige ren de shengjing* reveals a man's course of struggle in the real society: dreaming, disillusioning of dream, self-examination, and an ultimate choice. However, this does not utterly mean an individualist's choice. Rather, by looking back to the historical

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<sup>197</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Yige ren de shengjing*, 157. Please also refer to Mabel Lee's English version *One Man's Bible* (Flamingo: 2002)

reality, he intends to expose the “vulnerability,” “fighting,” “darkness” and “sadness” of people in crises. These tragic qualities that life is inevitable to possess, once being uncovered and looked at squarely, would become mentally curable for the sufferer; then the tragedy would be thoroughly forgotten, and the mental specter would be totally eradicated; hence the possibility to start a new life. Therefore, this is a book about a man’s self-examination, about an idealist’s profound self-reflection, and about his determined choice after self-examination. Just as what is commented by Liu Zaifu, it represents an “anguished but impassioned written confession” from a “greatly free man who places personal spiritual value on the top of the tower of life.”<sup>198</sup>

In my view, however, as a wanderer in the world, what he or she lacks is not freedom but rather a sense of belongings. Nobody can live in an absolute state of freedom except he or she lives a completely isolated life. But how could it be possible? Especially in this increasingly interlinked world, humans will come together in this or that way. Moreover, a human is a being with feelings and emotions. So she or he needs the other’s participation in mind to share happiness and shoulder responsibility. Thus, a wanderer needs a sense of root and instinctively tends to look for his or her root. This is a problem about spiritual shelter. Once finding this root, though still in wandering, he or she will no longer feel lonely and floating.

In brief, Gao’s self-examination aims to find the emancipated self in spirit. However, the emancipated mind needs a solid sense of belonging, which, for Gao, is showed as an attachment to mother: this is a mother’s deep and selfless feeling for his children. The more his original character was twisted, the more his longing for its original truth. Such a complicated pain in conflicts could be seen from Gao’s works at different stages. Can he struggle out of such a complex and finally find a true emancipation? The following parts will continue to discuss it.

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<sup>198</sup> Liu Zaifu, “Postscript” to *Yige ren de shengjing*, 456.

## 14. Go against Stream of Desire

Like the narrative style in *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* and *Lingshan, Yege ren de shengjing* employs pronouns as the name of characters. “You” and “he” in this novel are respectively referred to as the protagonist in the present and in the past. Thus, the story is narrated in two parallel plots, and gradually develops into one. “You” looks back to the past in the present reality, in which “he” was the “you” in the past; while “you,” only as the conscious of “he,” traces and records some old events during the 1950s and 1960s of China. “You” settles in the modern western society and “he” as some memories in your youth was left in China. “You” is an observer, calmly examining the process of development of “he” in body and spirit—how a child in reverie grows into a man in the real society. By doing so, “you” attempts to find out the truth of ideal in relation to reality, and that of the self in relation to life itself.

It is however extremely hard for “you” to thoroughly dismiss yourself from the memories. For this reason, “you” is frequently lost in a meditative state: what is it meant by the self as a being? Why is the self obsessed with its social identity? Is this the very meaning of life? Is the pursuit of the self just the root of puzzlement? Would it be possible to have a life that is both free and meaningful? And would there be a possibility to achieve the liberation of the self and ultimately emancipate human nature?

Another character, thus, becomes vitally important for “you” to think over these questions. This is the reason that “she” appears in “your” writing. “She” is not only the shadow of your soul, the bearer of your desire, but also the pillar of your spirit, the power of your heart. As a woman, “she” is the object of your desire; as a mirror that “you” examines the self, “she” projects the true workings of your inner world; as Anima, “she” is the other half of your mind and symbolic of your free will. In this novel, it may be said that “she” signifies a group of woman characters. She has

conceived an opposing force in your life, running right through your youth time, symbolizing the love and lust in your life, deeply influencing your feelings and thoughts and re-shaping your personality.

In *Yige ren de shengjing*, the author describes a group of women he encountered at different stage of his life. Each of them is different from others. However, in my view, the idealized woman in the protagonist's eyes is not any of them but a condensation of various female emotions and thoughts. Each of them only represents one aspect of the condensed image. Thus, she is eclectic of woman's conflicting qualities, combining sophistication with innocence, intelligence with indifference, contradiction with determination, and sensitivity with rationality. This mixture of virtue and taboo constitutes a mental tension in personality, orienting towards a female unconscious desire, which represents an unpredictably powerful surge from instinctual life.

For the protagonist, the emergence of Margaret in his life marks a huge transmutation in his spiritual world. As if a mirror, she enables him to have a panoramic review for his life and the self. Her existence alludes to an individual's challenging stance to face the pain of life and the absurdity of the reality. Namely, life means to question rather than to blindly follow, to expose rather than to passively forget, to contend rather than to be subjugated, and to mock or self-mock rather than to invariably glorify or eulogize.

Overall, the protagonist's contradictory mind is always in constant flux. It arises, develops, spreads, conflicts, disintegrates, merges, transmutes, and condenses. Such a process of integration, disintegration and reintegration in personality manifests to us that life is productive, creative, revolutionary, and autonomous. In a way, the protagonist has entered a life with post-modernity, e.g. one is not merely at war with the self, but also acts as the arbiter of life to seek self-emancipation from the pains of life.

Deleuze and Guattari, in their co-authored *A Thousand Plateaus*, construct a totally new consciousness of life by virtue of the theory of “rhizome.” For them, a rhizome is made of “plateaus,” which is always in the middle, beginningless and endless, avoiding any orientation towards a fixed point. This deconstructs the tree-shaped mode of thinking in western philosophical tradition:

We’re tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes.<sup>199</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari, in accordance with the characteristic of rhizome, construct and explain the plurality and disparity of thinking. The expansion of rhizome is restless and endless. It has been beyond a center so “beautiful” and “loving.” But I don’t think it is “political,” for politics usually follows a fixed mode. Yet, the beauty and loveliness of thinking lies in its restless contacts, growths, and promotion, and lies in an unavoidable result, namely, it can finally temper and condense manifold factors into one whole entity.

Compared with the rigidity of any stereotyped mechanism, Deleuze and Guattari understand life and world in a dynamic way. For them, the rhizome “connects any point to any other points,” is “reducible neither to the One nor the multiple,” “composed not of units but of dimensions,” “operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots,” “pertains to a map that must be produced and constructed.”<sup>200</sup>

Here, their theory demonstrates an unrestrained passion of life, a rebellious posture

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<sup>199</sup> Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1988). Translated by Brian Massumi, London: Athlone Press, 1988, 15.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. 21.



against oppression. Life for them means a stream of energy. Any attempt to hinder the stream of energy is regarded by them as an inhibition or suppression. Deleuze's idea on the fluidity of life could find its origin in the earlier dictum of European philosophy "we can't step into the same river of thought twice." For western philosophers, the mind is fluid, mobile, and irretrievable in the river of time. According to eastern Buddhist thought, this may be seen as a judgment for the nature of human's thinking: all the things are constantly coming into being, ceasing to be, but nothing lasts. Thus life in nature means a continuing dance of birth and death, a totality of flux of energy. Buddhist thought intends to stress that impermanence is the ground of all the beings. This is also what Deleuze has touched upon: the restless flux of life presents life with an immanent potential. In this sense, life is an inherently positive existence, which can integrate postmodern fragmented life into a whole being, and pour a new energy into the increasingly alienated life. Thus Deleuze's endeavor is, to a certain extent, consequential to help modern people to walk out the wasteland of human consciousness by giving desire an active motivation.

In *Yige ren de shengjing*, the woman group symbolizes the creative driving force of the desire of life. What they try to reject is the confinement imposed on them by the rigid establishment, that is, woman has been taken for granted by the patriarchy as the object of man's desire. Instead, these women in this novel take a rebellious posture against the patriarchal domination, by which they intend to show that there is no more whichever "Complex" to baffle them, and that they only follow natural desire, leading a life as it can go. For them, if the authority means "oppression" and "suppression," their choices would be to break, to negate, to deconstruct, and to overthrow; if the conventionally defined desire codifies woman merely as the desired object, as a response, they would choose to be the master of desire of their own: to desire rather than to be desired, to choose rather than to be chosen, and to decide rather than to be decided. The positively fighting for the master of life displays a challenging stance from modern women against ruling and oppression. In the construction of postmodern social personality, woman has no longer been the passively desired; instead, what they

positively seek is to influence, to promote, and to construct.

The stream of desire from the inner life, for Deleuze and Guattari, always attempts to break variously imposed social restraints on humans. What it embodies is a connectable open manner that “rhizome” grows and extends, and what it symbolizes is a restless disintegration and renewal of life. The continual disintegration and transmutation takes on an exuberant state of life—“on the road” forever. As they say, a rhizome is always “in the middle,” and is a “stream without beginning or end.” It may be said that what rhizome displays is a posture of life. This means an intrinsic nature of life: it is a process to limitlessly develop and boundlessly expand. In this sense, a vital life has a power that can liberate the suppressed self and that can re-construct a positive personality for postmodern world.

The deconstruction for the traditional definition on desire, to some extent, has created another chance for modern people perplexed by a variety of “complexes” to re-shape their personality. Seen from a female perspective, the revolt against the patriarchal oppression is resulted from woman’s awakening to the consciousness of life. Now that the desire of life is dynamic, productive, revolutionary, then humans should be brave to confront the frustrations in life by developing these potentials. For woman, they can be completely freed from the socialized personality and chooses a life at her will. The challenging initiative of life represents a stance that individual takes against being codified by the society. Therefore it can be seen as a refusal to be cultivated by decayed civilization, a refusal to be bound by excessively rigidified orders and laws, and a refusal to be constructed in thought and personality by the will of the society.

Margaret, in *Yige ren de shengjing*, serves as a symbol for woman’s natural desire, and as a representative for an emancipated woman. Her tenacious life, just as the ceaselessly extending “rhizome” in the mud, penetrates through various bonds of personal misfortune, social conventions and national disaster, to establish adequate connections with the external world, and to freely create and enjoy her life, however

joyful and painful it would be. The expansive quality of “rhizome” gives her life a creativity and vitality. Moreover, she is courageous to confront her national misfortune and personal suffering, which enables the protagonist to relieve his “Complex”, and objectively reflect on that particular national history in the China’s 1960s. Thus, through tracing to past events, the protagonist intends to forget forever rather than fearing to forget, and intends to prospect for the future rather than dwelling on the past.

The story of *Yige ren de shengjing* starts with the current life of the protagonist “you.” “You” at present has already settled in another country being distantly away from China, where “you” was born, in which your ideals had been pregnant and eventually ended in disillusionment. “You” now freely roams around different places of the world, taking it for granted that “you” has won a freedom for life, with no more puzzlement for the past, no more nostalgia for hometown, and no longer confused with woman. However, an undeniable fact is that all that happened have already been inscribed in your mind, frequently occurring to remind “you” of those absurd dreams in the Cultural Revolution.

“Politics” and “love” had ever been the ideals that “you” endeavoured to materialize in China. “You” not only aspired to become a hero in the “vigorous” cultural movement but also longed to possess a happy love. For the present “you,” that is just like a ridiculous dream. At this time, “you” met with Margaret, a Jewish-German woman, perplexed by her national “Complex:”

You say China is already very remote from you. She says she understands. You say you have no homeland. She says her mother is a Jew though her father is a German. She doesn’t have homeland either. But she can’t free it from memories.<sup>201</sup>

“You” and Margaret are fellow sufferers commiserating with each other. Both have a

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<sup>201</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Yige ren de shengjing* (1999), 16-17.

lawful citizenship in other's country but lack a sense of national identity. This is the dilemma that all the wanderers commonly have. Margaret identifies in spirit her Jewish descendant although she is lawfully German. Similarly, "you" is free to travel around the world but without a sense of homeland. Margaret has a spiritual need to affirm her national identity by remembering the suffering. Whereas "you" does not mind the marginal identity that "you" holds in western countries, nor is "you" afraid of thoroughly breaking with the past.

For the two, what often disturbs them is the "complex" of identity in their inner heart. So, both of them are seeking a way to mourn the loss in life.

"Yes, I'm buried." You say you are buried in her flesh.

"Flesh only?"

"Yes, there are no memories, only this moment."

She says she also needs to be fused in the darkness, a totality of chaos.

"Only to feel the warmth of a woman..."<sup>202</sup>

Here, it may be seen that both are releasing the anguish in the depths of the soul by use of flesh. They need corporal sensation to stimulate numbing heart. At this moment, the driving force of their desire is lust rather than love. Therefore, such a spiritual pain reveals a fact that they are not able to forget the past instead of having got the past forgotten, and that it is not because they have had too much freedom but rather because there is too much repression in their inner mind.

Margaret here serves as a mirror to reflect your spiritual world. She is not only evocative of your lust but also disturbs your soul. She tries to make you understand through her experience that it is impossible to erase what was experienced out of memory, because it has already become a fact instead of a nightmare.

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

Therefore, Margaret is the mirror of “your” soul, her fate is a reflection of yours, and her suffering is a projection of yours. For this reason, “you” comes to understand why she suggests that you recall and record that period of history. Only in this way could it thoroughly liberate “you” from the nightmares of the memory, and at the same time remind more people of preventing the repetition of tragedy as such:

...Perhaps, as she said, you should write down all this to have a review of yourself. You should look with detached eyes upon yourself, a man, or a conscious animal, a cornered beast fighting in the forests of human. ...You should return to a peaceful mind and look at the world in an ordinary heart. The world is like this, and will continue to be like this. A man is so insignificant that he can achieve nothing but make an expression.<sup>203</sup>

What the protagonist needs is an objective and honest self-examination, which is able to lead him to a new outlook to the self, humans and the world. As he termed, he needs to face up to the world in “detached eyes,” with a “peaceful mind” and an “ordinary heart.” In this sense, it may be said that human needs a spiritual reflection on the self, the society, and the world, which is the only path to the liberation of the self. In *Yige ren de shengjing*, woman’s desire thus plays a role of a mirror to reflect human’s mentality, which helps the protagonist look at the self and the human world more moderately. In other words, the suffering of the other has a power to awaken the self in suffering. Only when one has the courage to look squarely at the soul of one’s own, can one have the power to get the painful heart salvaged; only when one dispels oneself from the shadow of the past, can one truly emancipate the chained personality.

However, such a personality is tempered by many others represented by woman. This is a condensed personality, fusing various positive emotions and thoughts in human nature. This is also a filtered process, increasingly eliminating those negative moods and sentiments in life and nurturing those positive potentials. In other words, of the different woman characters, each reflects one dimension of the condensed personality.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid. 144.

Such as, solicitude is the manner that she gives to others, rationality is the way that she meditates upon life and world, tenacity is the weapon that she fights with the sufferings of life, and enthusiasm is the light that she re-candles the courage of life. This is an ordeal of purifying human personality. This is an attempt to discover the idealized man in this increasingly decayed but still hopeful world.

However, not all the people dare to participate in this ordeal for such an idealized personality. For these participants, life in their eyes is not simply physical but also spiritual, not only rational but also perceptual, not only practical but also aesthetical. Because of its multidimension, so life is profound, yet passionately and poignantly profound, for they are so sensitive and susceptible that they can sense and capture every bit of pleasure and pain from life and the world. Indeed, life to them takes on an intense passion and profundity, like the “beautiful or lovely” thought advocated by Deleuze and Guattari, manifesting the extensiveness and expansiveness of “rhizome,” glorifying the vitality and creativity of human mind.

These brave participants, in this research, refer to as a female group. They pursue an idealized beautiful personality and so place a natural life on the summit of life. They manifest themselves as a positive stream of desire in life, which goes against various negative emotions and thoughts in the human world to seek a limitlessly wide space for life.

## 15. Female Rebels

The protagonist “you” traces back from the West in the present to the China in 1960s, where he lost the self, and where he would make a close examination for the self and give it a new life. In order to give the “you” in China an identity, “you” creates “he”—“your” self-consciousness. Resorting to “him,” “you” is able to look back to the time when “you” was young, and makes an objective scrutiny for that period of

history. Your social dream and personal ideal were born in that time. That particular era witnessed your blind devotion and absurd ambition. To this “you”, that which would be written down is a man’s self-pursuit and the common fate of a particular generation.

You should let him, that child, that young boy, that immature man, that daydreaming survivor, that arrogant man, that fellow who gradually became sophisticated, that “you” of the past, who had not yet lost conscience, was wicked but still remained a little bit of kindness. You must not to defend and confess for him.<sup>204</sup>

This is a lonely voice, bursting out of a man who is struggling in the human’s forests. He seeks an objective examination for the self by placing him in the vicissitudes of personal life and the changes of national history. For him, life means to be a process of being numerously disintegrated and finally recovered. Each splitting erases some wild ambitions and gains some knowledge of how to conduct oneself in society. The following part would gradually go into the story of the protagonist to look at how “he” comes to know the self.

“He” experiences and ponders over his life in the story. “You” traces and records your experience of life in virtue of memory. “He” was born in China, where he received education and underwent the changes of life, until “he” left his homeland for another country, and then wanders around the world. However, the memory, for “you,” is just like a web; in each knot hides a “complex” for woman. Without having met with Margaret, “you” would not have had the courage to look back to this web, because each knot in the web means a repressed story to “you.”

Although the Cultural Revolution has become history, there remain shadows in his mind. That earth-shaking political movement changed all the people into “the gambler and rascal of revolution,” who either covetously eyed on their preys or were

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<sup>204</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Yige ren de shengjing* (1999), 188.

muddle-headedly preyed by others. In order to show they were progressive, everybody tried to rush towards the front of the revolutionary ranks: "Ah, that revolutionary time, girls were also crazily revolutionary, so much so that it is terrifying."<sup>205</sup> These women "he" encountered in different periods have much in common: all can be seen as rebels against the patriarchy of the family, of the society, and of the era; all have been stamped with the fanaticism of revolutionist and the ignorance for this fanaticism.

Lin was his colleague, the daughter of a vice-minister. Her husband was a military officer. Lin is both a revolutionary activist and a passionate beautiful woman. She is active both in revolution and pleasure. But, "he," to her, is more an object of her lust than the one she is in love. Therefore, what she cares is her own interest rather than his feeling. However, such a relationship is as dangerous as playing fire. Although Lin is never bored with it, the big gap of their social status results in a real inequality between them.

Lin dared to play with fire but he had to consider the consequences. Lin had no intention to divorce her husband. Even if Lin was to propose to him, her parents would not agree to accept such an ordinary man like him, even not yet a league member, as the son-in-law of a revolutionary family. Also, Lin's husband had a military family as backing. If he reported this to his work unit, Lin would escape punishment. But he would be the only victim. <sup>206</sup>

Indeed, what Lin needs is only passion rather than promise. She does not care at all whether or not her conduct has betrayed her husband or brought disgrace to her family. She does not mind the sacredness of a marriage contract, not consider the honour and disgrace of her parents in public, and even not understand his difficult situation as a lover. However, he is reluctant to seek pleasure with her stealthily, for what he needs is the dignity of being a man, is to stay with the one of whom he is fond, freely rather

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 91-92.



than secretly:

But he would rather meet with Lin outside, in the park or at the foot of city wall, in the shrubs of lilac and winter jasmine, ...under the sun, in the whistling mountain wind, as unbridled as possible. Only at this moment, lying on the weeds, looking at the floating clouds slowly walking, without any misgiving, without any risk, can he feel at ease to enjoy lust.<sup>207</sup>

Two points can be seen from this passage. On the one hand, it is a basic instinct for the self to need freedom. When such a natural need is unavailable in the reality, humans turn to seek it in nature. Just like this story, if Lin is seen as a taboo of lust in the real society, his pursuit for her has become an “illegal” dream, a repressed dream. Therefore, his dream can only be realized in the wilderness, where he is far away from her family and her social identity. On the other hand, it may be said that personal ideal always runs counter to the reality. Dream is always something about freedom, but the reality means various norms and laws to which one has to conform. This is the problem that the protagonist has to face: what he wants is a natural and normal feeling that can be shown in public, but the fact is that any social taboo is impossible to be accepted by the public. Such a “problem of taboo,” however, means nothing for Lin:

He said she didn't mind at all. But he did mind.

“Why?” Lin stopped.

“It is an unequal relationship!” he blurted.

“Why is it unequal? I don't understand.”

“Of course you don't, because you have everything but I have nothing.”

“But I'm willing!”

He said he didn't want favours, he was not a slave! Actually, what he wanted to say was the embarrassing situation he was in. What he hoped was to live an honourable happy life,

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 91.

but he failed to express it clearly.<sup>208</sup>

Lin is a simple-minded woman. Her superior social position makes it impossible for her to consider and understand those who are inferior to her. What she pursues is pleasure rather than promise. However, what “he” needs is his dignity as a man, which is to stand before the public, openly and uprightly, without any sense of guilt and shame. Therefore, it is impossible for “he” to give up his dignity to fight for the taboo. Between morality and lust “he” eventually chooses the former.

In China, the country with thousands of years of ethical civilization, such qualities as filial piety, chastity, and loyalty are taken for granted by the patriarchal society as moral norms that woman should follow and abide by. In this respect, Lin can be seen as a rebel against the authority of family and the society. She takes a challenging stance to confront three men in her life. “He,” husband and father are respectively symbolic of her lust, legal marital status and social position. “He” signifies her craving for free desire, her husband gives her a legal and decent identity, and the power of her father shows the superiority of her social status. Tradition requires that she should have been a respected virtuous woman, who is obedient to norms and conventions and sets a good example for other women. But she is not attached at all to the glory of becoming a chaste woman, a paragon of chastity. Rather, her choice is to place the authority of husband and the honour of father on the sacrificial altar of her lust to sing an elegy for the patriarchy. She reluctantly constructs her personality in accordance with the standard that social ethics requires woman. Instead, what she aspires is only to become an ordinary woman driven by desire to seek pleasure.

Seen from a natural life, this is a passion streaming out of a free life. Seen from a distorted time, this is a twisted personality. However, seen from an emancipated personality, she has overstepped the bounds of spiritual fetter, broken through the image of traditional virtuous women, demonstrating an uninhibited power of life.

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 94.

Nevertheless, a complete personality should be in a state of equilibrium. Though excessively rigid ethics easily restrict the development of natural personality, yet human's moral awareness is still an indispensable part in human's civilized progress.

Therefore, from an ethical perspective, Lin's choice obviously goes against traditional morality. This can be explained from two aspects. One is that that was a time that woman was emancipated so enjoying the same freedom and quality with man in personality and social position. The other is that that was an irrational times so rationality were neglected to a great extent. So people lack a sense of self-discipline in morality. An idiom goes like this: "Things turn into their opposites when they reach the extreme." To enjoy freedom and equality is a good thing. But it will lose an appropriate extent if being excessively used.

Nevertheless, morality can not be realized by compulsory means. Rather, whether or not a moral awareness is acceptable, it must be discussed, argued, and practiced. If a commonly acknowledged moral awareness is slowly filtering into the hearts of the people, then a positive moral habit is not difficult to prevail. Therefore, an effective way is to provide wide opportunities for airing different views rather than carrying out coercive measures to develop moral awareness.

As a spiritual mirror of the protagonist, Lin reflects his dilemma between motherly and fatherly culture. "Oedipus Complex" may serve as an example. Oedipus's attachment to his mother and awe for his father is originated from his obsession with his own identity or root. This is because mother is symbolic of human's natural personality but farther of socialized personality. Therefore, with his being socialized increasingly, he starts to seek a self-identity in the society, which equates the personal dream in life.

In *Yige ren de shengjing*, the protagonist's dream starts with an impulse to become a

“hero” at the revolutionary time. He held a belief that to become a “hero” was just to join in the revolution or to rise in rebellion. As for the true purpose of such an action, either for “justice” or “truth” or whatever else, he at that time was not quite clear about it. All that “he” could do was to fanatically follow the fanatical stream of people, and to become indignant by following the indignant throng. He still remembered the night that he posted the first poster in his working unit:

In the empty corridor, some old posters rustled in the wind. A sense of desolateness was probably a necessity for a heroic action. Such a tragic feeling aroused my impulse for justice. So he plunged into the gambling house. It was hard to say whether or not he wanted to gamble at that time. In a word, he thought there might be a fortunate turn—to fight for life and to become a hero, and both were possible.<sup>209</sup>

“He” is much like a political speculator in an era, not only embracing a noble principle of “heroism” but also hoping to win it by a gambler’s sheer luck. Probably “he” thinks that it is possible for him to become a “hero” produced by the current situation, so that for the subsequent two days he “comes and goes alone, being immersed in a tragic feelings and thoughts,” having a “sense of mission that as if a sacred disciple would salvage the world.”<sup>210</sup> Here, it may be seen that his feelings for becoming a “hero” or “gambler” are ambivalent. In face of the possible “favorable turn” in life, the excited self falls into a conflict on the sacred and the humble, the just and the mean: to fight for the self or to be a hero? It remains to him an equivocal question, because his action was only driven by an inexplicable enthusiasm and impulse.

However, to his disappointment, the rebellion fervor did not last for long. His unaccountable enthusiasm for justice faded away soon, and the “complex of hero” also became less strong. In chapter 24 of *Yige ren de shengjing*, there appears “the

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 160-161.

lord” who “instructs the state power,” which suggests the manipulator of the movement and disillusions his “dream of hero”.

Once you open your mouth to shout you fall into the lord’s trap. The justice you pursue is this lord, so you fight for the lord, so you have to shout the lord’s slogan, so you lose your own’s language, repeating another person’s words like a parrot, so you are transformed and memory is erased and brains are used up, so you become the lord’s disciple, with no choice but believe in, and so you become the lord’s pawn, the lord’s hatchet man, sacrificing for the lord. Upon being used up, you are dropped again on the sacrificial altar of the lord, as sacrificial objects or being burned...<sup>211</sup>

The bitter self-mocking proclaims the ending of his “complex of hero” and exposes the manipulative nature of this movement. In other terms, an individual’s dream, in contrast to the manipulation of the society, appears to be fragile and fruitless, only reduced to a tool that “the lord” controls and a “sacrificial object” on the “the lord’s sacrificial altar.”

“He” eventually comes to realize that such a movement like “rebellion” is no more than a “game” manipulated by politicians. Rebelliousness produces “heroes” but rather those rebels have changed into the chessmen on the political chessboard. “He,” henceforth, has no dream any more to politics, and no longer gets obsessed with various “isms”. In Deleuze’s reading, the socialized notions would ultimately develop into the fetters of personified personality, because the former intends to fix human’s natural dream into certain social uniform frameworks, which inhibits the vitality of life and the creativity of humans. Thus, the socialized individual’s pursuit in fact functions as a negative driving force to hinder the development of personalized life and free human nature.

In *Yige ren de shengjing*, the protagonist’s real experience of life gradually leads him

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 173.

to a realization: people enthusiastically pursue the dreams of life, but the ending of these dreams is virtually the same one: it would eventually prove to be illusory bubbles of dreams. For the protagonist, his pursuit for dreams could be shown by his “rebellion” and “love.”

“He” and Xuqian may be seen as partners in adversity. They met at a warehouse near a train station and then lost touch after a weapon conflict. Although they have only met by chance, “he” preserves a sincere caring for her in the cruelty of “fighting against each other like wild beasts.” In this sense, it may be said that compassion is common to all men. As Mencius believes, human is originally good by nature. As Buddha enlightens, human is inborn with Buddha-hood. But the inherent goodness is obscured by the evilness caused by human’s relentless fighting to survive in the human world, by their desperate struggling to secure personal safety in the troubled age. This may be seen as a “dim light of human nature,” which can bring a slim hope for the numbness of human nature.

It is however no easy thing to preserve the “dim light of human nature” in an era with the absence of humanity. Afterwards, Xuqian contacted him by letter, telling him that she had been assigned to be a teacher at a mountain village in the northern part of Shanxi province. However, the tone of hopelessness in her letter was indicative of her difficult situation—she is in despair and she needs help. As a result, the dying “heroic sentiments” in his heart revived again, and he immediately gave her a long call.

The strange voice makes him not know how to respond. ...he mumbled: “it’s good to know you are alive.” “You gave me a start! It’s terrifying to be shouted out at the dead of night!” Qian says. He wanted to say he loves her, in whatever cases she must keep alive! All words he prepared on the road couldn’t speak out. ...The telephone was still buzzing.

He said he had received her letter. The transmitter was buzzing again, and he didn't know what to say. She said coldly: "Call me at daytime if you like."<sup>212</sup>

Enthusiasm and indifference here conceive a sharp contrast. What "he" eagerly expects is her cold responses. So his well-prepared words full of encouragement and passion have all been frozen by her impatience. Xuqian here reminds us of another female character Shujuan in Gao Xingjian's earlier short novel *Ni yiding yao huozhe* (You must Stay Alive). Both are about a desperate village teacher, who was exiled to a remote mountain area because of her bad family origin. Both of them fail to see the prospect of life, and lack the ability to survive the misfortune, so that they have to bear the depression in despair. Just like Xuqian here, she has lost her trust for people in the turbulent society, and so the power of love is impossible to warm her frozen heart. It is clear that this is a girl who has lost humane concern from others and personal passion for life, and even the confidence to survive this unfortunate era.

In order to secure his safety, "he" decided to settle in the countryside, being far away from various campaigns. With the help of his classmate, "he" succeeded in beginning his "rehabilitation" at a village of south China. The changes of the times and the vicissitudes of personal fate have substantially changed his attitudes towards human, the society and the world:

...He lay there, listening to the patter of rains in the roof. The intermittent drizzles wetted through the season. The weeds along the road and the seedlings in the paddy fields grew up strong and sturdy, becoming taller and greener one day after another. But he was to spend his life in the paddy fields, growing and harvesting, year after year. Generations of life would be like rice straw. Humans would be like plants, they would be needless to have brains, wouldn't that be more natural?<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 292-293.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 319.

Continuously drifting in life makes him start pondering over the meaning of life. What is the difference between humans and plants? Human's thoughts and actions have to be restrained by social orders and laws but the plants can grow up as they wish. On this fertile land bestowed by Nature, the weeds and seedlings are all growing up crazily because their roots are deeply planted in the soil. Unlike mankind, they always lack a sense of root even though they could travel throughout the world. What would be the point of human's thinking if human beings ultimately fail to dominate the fate of their own? Why does the suffering of human being remain the same although life comes and goes and rises and falls throughout the ages and generations? Wouldn't it be that it is the biological existence of human rather than its social property that more naturally and truly manifests the original vitality of life?

Here, the protagonist makes a sharp contrast between human's existence and natural plants, intending to pose some questions for people to think over. Likewise, Deleuze draws an analogy between immanent desire of life and the natural expansion of rhizomes, which may be said to be perfectly appropriate and significantly profound. The metaphor of "rhizome" manifests itself as the extension and creativeness of myriads of beings. This in nature shows that life means a dynamic existence at multi-dimensional levels rather than static, unidirectional, and stable, and so it enables the possibility of human's multi-faceted personality.

In opposition to this, if such a huge energy of life streams only towards one direction, it would be very likely to shape a fixed personality. Deleuze therefore thinks that a long-term unchanged personality is likely to engender "personal worship" or "extreme narcissism." Both are possibly pregnant with the seeds of radical personality. It may thus be said that a long established social values does not necessarily mean peaceful stability, social civilization, and human wisdom. Conversely, there is a greater likelihood that some devastating genes of personality have already been fostered and concealed in a certain overly self-glorified or self-negated social value.



Based on discussions above, it may be said that the revolution that the protagonist went through reveals the misfortune of a particular era, the calamity of a nation, even the tragedy of mankind as a whole. It raises to us some questions for deep thought. The obsession with the self may cause “extreme narcissism.” Similarly, the obsession with the other may lead to “extreme worship.” Either is likely to break the balance of personality and then go to extreme. Its devastating consequence has already been proved by history, both in the West and the East, again and again. In the boundless cosmological time and space, human existence is only one of multitudinous beings, so that both the extreme narcissism and idol worshipping reflect human’s false cognition for the self. Supposing human simply thinks of the self as a speck, a grain of sand, a plant in the boundless worlds, would it be still possible to suffer these cruel disasters caused by the cruelty of human nature?

Just as the current protagonist in the novel, in order to survive the cruel struggles between humans, he escapes to the peaceful countryside and leads a life like plants. Here, the protagonist’s choice may be seen as an allegory, which implies that the survival of life has to undergo a transformation from human civilization to natural ecology, or a transmutation from human with intelligence to plants without brains. From the inhumane killings of human world to the carefree and simple life, the diametrically opposite choice, for the protagonist, might not mean a sheer bad luck?

The peaceful life in the countryside revived his hope for life. “He” wrote a letter to Xuqian, telling her about his settlement in the village. She may come to the village to teach if she was willing to live together with him. This sounds like a proposal to her:

...In the letter the only thing he didn’t mention was love. But he had a happy feeling when he wrote these words. He saw a hope of life again. This hope was realistic, and it would be realized as long as Xuqian agreed. He was even excited. There was still such a place to

take shelter in the chaotic times, as long as she was also willing to share with him.<sup>214</sup>

For the protagonist, what he expects now is no more than a shelter and a normal life rather than a high hope to say “love.” It may be seen that the reality has increasingly transformed an idealist into a practical man, a pragmatist without excessive demands of life. However, he feels happy and hopeful again. It might be said that happiness should have been like this, without dreams, passion, vows, blessings from relatives and friends, only with a hope to possess a shed to weather the rain and wind of the human world. “Xuqian is very excited and seems also very natural. She walks with him side by side in the fields to the village, getting very close to him, as if they have been in love for many years and he is just her beloved.”<sup>215</sup> It could be seen that both are content with the simple happiness in the turbulent days. This might just be the happiness that is traditionally valued by Chinese people as “relying on each other for survival:”

Qian was not so passionate, so emotional, so lustful, so charming as Lin. But he was embracing his own legal wife. He didn’t need to be worried that walls have ears, or be afraid of being spied on through the window. This is a minimum happiness as a human. Listening to the voices of wind and rain over the roof, he thought, when the rain stopped tomorrow, he would take Qian into the mountains for a walk.<sup>216</sup>

“He” used to become attached to Lin mostly because of her passion and beauty, as is much like his obsession with personal dream, beautiful but illusive. On the contrary, Xuqian is ingenuous and quiet, which gives him a warm sense of belonging after many trials and tribulations. Just as what he can feel at this moment, at this rainy night, having her as companion, he no longer feels the chilliness of rainy night, for she is sharing with him the dreariness of this season. It may be said that what he has for Xuqian at this moment is attachment, affection, and gratitude.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 322-323.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 331.

Such a simple but real happiness forms a sharp contrast with the turbulence of the external reality, which more profoundly reveals human's aspirations for a peaceful happy life. This feeling has already been reflected in Gao Xingjian's earlier short novel *Yuan en si* (The Promise Temple) (1983). It describes a pair of lovers' trip to the Promise Temple. This pilgrimage to the temple intends to show their gratitude for fate, which promised and fulfilled their wishes, so that this may be seen as a fulfillment of wish and a pray for permanent happiness.

However, life flows on like water but without going towards the direction that people wish. His trip with Xuqian around the mountain was enjoyable, yet an oncoming misfortune was just hidden in the joys of life, which gives a hint of the ending of their short happiness. To him, it is Xuqian's gratuitous hysteria that brings to an end of his dream for love:

"You're just using me, this is not love." Qian lay on the bed, expressionless, speaking in a very clear voice...

"Why are you saying?" he didn't want to provoke her.

"You ruin my life," Qian says. She remained lying there, not looking at him.

What she said hurt him. He didn't know how to respond and just sat there...

"You are an enemy!"...

"What are you shouting for? People can hear it, have you gone crazy?" He went up to her... (She) yelled: "You are a rebel!"...

"I'll kill you if speaking more nonsense!"

"It's not that simple to label me as insane!" She grins hideously. "I won't let you off either!"<sup>217</sup>

This is not a normal quarrel between wife and husband. Instead, it is much like a fight between enemies, with one hurting the other without any mercy. Here, it might be

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 332-337.

arbitrary to make any hasty judgment of right and wrong, for most people in that particular social situation were not in the normal state of mind at all. Their worries and fears to be persecuted are much more than their sensitivity about love and happiness. They were easily provoked and generated an instinctive sense of self-protection against any possible threat from others. From which it could be seen how human nature is twisted under intense social political pressure. Thus it is more reasonable to understand our characters by putting them in the specific settings of that time.

First of all, it may be said that Xuqian's hysteria results from her thorough despair for the society and man. On the one hand, her father had worked as a general engineer at a munitions factory of Kuomintang, so that he was labeled as a "historic counter-revolutionist." The "historic problem" from her family background determines that she has to be chosen by fate rather than to choose a life as she wishes, so that she was exiled alone to a remote place to be a village teacher. On the other hand, she does not trust him at all, thinking that his settlement in the countryside is only to escape from political campaigns and secure the safety of his own, and so marrying her is not out of true love but of his physical need.

She fails to feel love from people around her. The human world for her only means endless sufferings and repressions. However, she does not understand the true reason that results in her tragic fate. Thus, in her chaotic conscious, there are three people or three powers that lead to her ruin: the era, her father and "he." She hates her father's historical background to reduce her to a person despised by others. She bitterly resents the fanatical time that does injustice to her. She blames him for "ruining" her because "he" only uses her instead of loving her. It thus could be said that her hysteria is originated from a sudden outburst of her long-term repressed dissatisfaction, resentment and hatred.

Xuqian's misfortune, to a greater extent, reflects the psychological tragedy of a

generation as a whole. It might be sensible to say that a hysterical time must produce its hysterical people. They do not trust each other and there is no true love for each other. Parents and children, wife and husband, friends and colleagues are likely to fall out at any time and treat each other like "enemy." The atmosphere of fighting each other and defending against each other reveals the absurd tragedy in the human world, which cut off the stream of wisdom in human life, changed the tender place of human heart into a wasteland, and reduced the spirit of China's humane concern over thousands of years to a bleak wilderness. An era that has lost its spirit and soul naturally harvests the loss of human nature.

Looking at the tragedy of Xuqian from another perspective, wouldn't it be that her hysteria represents a revolt against the social tyranny over human nature? Her wretched situation reminds us of associating her with the crazy woman Bertha imprisoned in the attic all the year round, who is one minor woman character in the British novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. It is true that Bertha is still alive, but she has lost the normal freedom and identity and dignity as a living being. Even if a mad woman might not be able to clearly think what is happening around her, yet human desire for freedom is a basic instinct of life. Thus, for Bertha, only through hysterically shouting and screaming can she feel slightly released. Although her existence, in the eyes of most of people, is insignificant, and her personality is far from being noble, in the depths of her chaotic unconsciousness of life, likewise there exists an instinctive call for freedom and dignity.

In this sense, it may be said that it is just because life is vulnerable and fragile, so that human should be given a basic freedom and respect, however noble or humble they are. Therefore, in the relationship between "madness and civilization," what the mad needs should be the freedom to be "hysterical," screaming out the repression and depression in her or his heart, rather than to be compulsorily treated by the "civilized" society in "civilized" methods until she or he learns to keep silent, and finally becomes an "civilized" madman.

Here, Xuqian's hysteria could be explained from three aspects as follows. Firstly, the scaring atmosphere pervading every corner of the country throws her mind off balance. They meet with each other at a "violent weapon conflict" causing chaos and panic, make love in the horror of night interrogation and examination, and finally lose touch with each other in the inspection of ferry. Just as what "he" said, "this was an age that there was no battle field but with enemies everywhere, and that there was defense everywhere but no way to defend."<sup>218</sup> Human's mental capacity in such a circumstance nearly reaches the verge of collapse, therefore there might be countless people, who have gone mad and would go mad. Xuqian is only one of them.

Secondly, Xuqian's hysteria is caused by her despair of love. "He" also admits that his love for her is not pure:

...he didn't love her and only used her out of a need for woman, for her body. What Qian said was right, too: he had not shown her tenderness. All was pretentious, trying to fabricate an illusory happiness. His expression in his eyes after ejaculation must have betrayed that he didn't love her. But in that situation, terror drove their lusts, which hadn't changed into love, simply leaving disgust after the release of physical desire.<sup>219</sup>

What "he" said is honest but indifferent. The honesty in indifference reflects an undeniable sad fact at that time: heart was a wasteland without love. In this frustrating heart there was no place for love to grow. Even though with some tender moments, that was not born out of natural desire at all. Even if being natural, it was only transient. People's normal feelings and emotions were overshadowed by external social pressures. It was physical lust rather than tender love that helped them temporarily forget their inner worries. Nevertheless, such an instinctual "need" failed to bring them relaxation but a mutual "disgust."

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 337.

Lust is unable to cure fear, and also impossible to evoke true love. One would become more frustrated if one seeks a frustrating way to reduce the frustration of the inner heart. In this sense it may be said that this heart without love shows the sadness of human nature, and that the era without love produces the poignant tragedy of human beings. However, time influenced and determined human's destiny. She wrote to him in a letter: "No one can escape from the reality and is destined to be first together with each other, not to say so-called love!" These rational words prove the impossibility of true love in a turbulent time. Now that love was unavailable, it was not surprising that people had to fall into a deep frustration after fighting against each other.

Last but not least, for a woman who was unable to make a self-salvation in spirit, "going mad" might become the sole way that she could resort to express her anger and frustration. For Xuqian in the story, she lacks a good family background, and has no relatives and friends. What is waiting for her is just to drift helplessly in the society. It is perhaps because she has a higher hope for the marriage so that she is destined to become more disappointed. That was an age when it was hard to make a self-protection, and so she was destined to become disappointed if she placed her hope on others.

The tragic fate of Xuqian reflects the real existential situation of a whole generation. Such a tragedy might be unavoidable when the ecology of human and the society suffers a drastic damage from human itself. In some ways, it justifies the causality of the relationship between Human and the society and Nature. *Dao De Jing* (The Classic of the Way and its Virtue) says: "Heaven and Earth are merciless, and look on all things as straw dogs."<sup>220</sup> Lao Zi means that Heaven and Earth love all the beings, respect them as a natural being, without imposing any restrictions on them. This is the fundamental of Dao: namely, letting things take their own course, not interfere their own ways of existence. It essentially reveals the rule of natural and humane ecology

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<sup>220</sup> Yang Ruzhou, *Lao Tze Tao The Ching* (2006), Taipei: Lao Zhuang Academy Foundation, 30.

between Heaven and Earth: each thing goes spontaneously to its own destination, and so the human society should not set artificially imposed obstacles.

Accordingly, Xuqian's tragedy was resulted from the manipulative society and the ineffectualness of personal existence. In contrast to the irresistibility of the real society, an individual's call is more easily drowned out by the clamor of the society. So Xuqian has two choices: one is to accept being treated like a madman and then transformed into a silent patient, and the other is to "go crazy" and shout out her inner repression, to show her revolt against the tyranny of the society.

Furthermore, the tragedy of Xuqian reflects the protagonist's eventual disillusionment with his dream. For him, the so-called pursuit such as "heroism" and "perfect love" are both illusory ideas, fabricated by man, aiming at identifying the self with certain values in the society. So he thinks that it is purely a "stupid impulse" of young people to naively place personal hope on a certain "revolution or rebellion." As for the "perfect love," it is likely out of "being so young and energetic that he needs somewhere to let it off." What, then, is the true meaning to be alive if life has no dream?

To understand the world using the theory of "rhizome," all the things should always be in constant modifications, so people have no stable social values to follow. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that humans can do nothing but wait for the ending of life. Instead, the existence of life itself means a surprising value: it offers us an opportunity for us to explore and practice this life. In the myriads worlds, in what way can humans confirm the values of life? If life is seen as a restless stream of energy, then, its meaning is to establish various connections with others. For Deleuze, this is a dynamic "connection" without the limit of time and space, aiming at an innovative development of existence of life.

In *Yige ren de shengjing*, the female group takes a positive stance to challenge those



negatively formulated social norms and laws. They choose a personified life, a life that orients towards a natural but meaningful life, to explore the openness and infinitude of life. Compared with traditional woman's obedience to these norms and laws, such a posture of life seems revolutionary.

This can be seen as a positive attitude of life from the female group, which will cultivate a totally new awareness of life. Such a life follows the orientation of heart and is not puzzled by socialized life. Such a life is needless to please others but remains a transcendental concern for others. The "others" here, for the protagonist, could be understood as a person, a thing, a system, an ism, an environment, a concept, or a way of thinking. When these "others" no longer puzzle him, he has gone beyond various social constraints and won for the self the volition of life.

From which it could be seen that the development of the protagonist's mind has come to a new stage: he has emancipated himself from the shadows of isms. A life that is not disturbed by this or that ism means a return to the true being of life. However, all the discussions unavoidably fall into paradox. In order to confirm the self, the others must be involved as reference. Similarly, in order to realize the emancipation of the self, the shadows caused by various others must be abandoned. In other words, an emancipated life should not be confused with various discussions about isms; rather, the right way to life is to experience and cognize this life by establishing various relationships with others. The value of life will become self-evident during these positive contacts and communications. In this sense, the emancipation that the protagonist has regained is an escape from isms codified by conceptions, and is a return to a life beyond descriptions of language.

Nonetheless, the complexities of life determine that it is impossible to absolutely escape from the perplexities of life. This is just like what is happening on "you" in the novel: "you" couldn't help becoming sentimental although "you" has freedom to fully enjoy yourself. This is much the same as Qianerwei's attitude towards love. She freely

“enjoys man” but the limitless freedom often depresses her.

“You” thinks that Qianerwei is a fairly typical individualist in western world. What she cares about is her own matters, her love, and her mood. She has no interest at all with what you said, in particular with those past events in your memory, because what she is after is what is “new and fresh” rather than old events. She does not care about what happened on your past, and has no patience to be a good listener. She even impolitely interrupts “you” if “you” talks of politics.

In this way, she utterly differs from Margaret, probably because it is no necessity for her to worry about her race and nationality. Here, it may be seen that some essential differences between the West and the East are indeed deeply rooted in different political system and national culture as well as ethical values. In brief, an individualist is needless to consider much beyond individual rights and interests. Similarly, people with “belief of collectivism” and “national complex,” like “you” and Margaret, are quite easy to reach an agreement concerning such topics as nation, nationality, politics, as well as old events in life. Therefore, people like “you,” who had gone through national disaster and personal misfortune, are able to understand Margaret’s national complex. Rather, a woman like Qianerwei, who was born in a highly materialized modern western world, lacks a collective awareness to think about issues on national history, national “complex,” and national identity.

Nonetheless, “you” thinks that Qianerwei is the most frank woman that you have ever met. She talks to you about her different sexual partners and views against marriage because “she is not particularly for one man.” Therefore, she often goes travelling to different countries and makes boyfriends with different nationality or different race, attempting to experience a “new and fresh life.” But, to her sadness, every time it goes to the same old story.

Then, where is the love that may not be reduced to the conventional pattern? Is there

indeed such a thing in the world? What is the thing that drives her to the restless pursuit for love?

What was she searching for? Was it the ultimate love and the maximum pleasure? This, just as something like ideal or dream, is a utopia. She was aware of this, so that she was sad. Her sadness was deep, and it was a deep sadness of human being, an eternal sadness that could never be extricated.<sup>221</sup>

“Most love” and “maximum pleasure” are not only what Qianerwei tirelessly pursues, but also totally similar to certain dreams of “hero” and “perfect love” for which “he” had strived. That eventually proves to be illusions of life. Thus, these questions annoying Qianerwei used to have puzzled “you” and are puzzling you now likewise. It may be said that, for “you” or Qianerwei or humankind, all the pursuits, spiritual or physical, social or personal, are no exception shown to be an autonomous cycle. For Qianerwei, she constantly searches and constantly becomes disappointed, repeatedly searches and repeatedly becomes disappointed, but has never discovered a “fresh” love and a love that “frees itself from convention.” As a result, human beings are destined to fall into certain inexplicable sadness.

Qianerwei’s sadness is caused by her successive failure in pursuit of love and marriage. In Qianerwei’s words, “she is not reluctant to have a stable relation, as it is very hard for both to be in stability;<sup>222</sup> also, “she is not unwilling to give birth to a child, but there should have a steady family first. She hasn’t found such a man yet, so she gets frustrated.”<sup>223</sup> It may be said that Qianerwei’s sadness in some ways reflects a spiritual crisis that modern people have to face. This may be termed as “nihilism” at a level, a cyclical “psychological despair” caused by a desperate frustration after constant pursuit but invariable disappointment, which actually reveals a problem on how to find a balance between freedom and limit:

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<sup>221</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Yige ren de shengjing*, 389.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

Her anxiety was deep. It was the most essential anxiety that everybody had: the contradiction between freedom and restriction. In other words, where was the limit of freedom? ...But what was worth devoting oneself to it? To be frank, it was only love. Yet being able to manage love was difficult, which was not something determined by her alone.<sup>224</sup>

As a being, Qianerwei is fighting all the time with the self. She wants a stable relationship with man while she enjoys her independent freedom. She also tries to maintain her individuality while she dreams of a complete marriage. She falls into the contradiction between freedom and restraint, between independence and responsibility. This results in her deep sadness in frustration and anxiety. Likewise, the protagonist “you” feels the similar sadness while fully enjoying the freedom that he has gained. But he holds a special understanding for this sadness:

Freedom may be manifested in pain and sadness, if one is not overwhelmed by the pain and sadness. Even if you are immersed in the pain and sadness, by way of inner meditative visualisation, this pain and sadness also becomes a certain freedom. You need the freedom to suffer and the freedom to grieve, so life will be worth living. It is this freedom that brings you happiness and peace.<sup>225</sup>

To the protagonist, the pain and sadness can be seen as one of the forms of freedom. Alternatively, a positive pain and sadness can help the self make an examination, which will bring to life bliss and peace. It may be said that the bliss in pain and sadness reflects a detached plane attained by the protagonist after having deeply and thoroughly experienced his life. Furthermore, his detached understanding for the suffering of life shows his eastern way to confront the “nihilistic” state of life.

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 307.

By contrast, it may be summarized that Qianerwei's sadness is colored with the "European nihilism" raised by Nietzsche. But the protagonist is somewhat like a "nihilist" influenced by "eastern spirit." Just as Robert Morrison has pointed in *Nietzsche and Buddhism*, there exist "ironic affinities" between Nietzsche's thought and Buddhists.<sup>226</sup> Here, it may be said that human spiritual malady have something in common, for which both the West and the East try to find an accessible way to heal it. To the emptiness and frustration of the mind, both western thought and eastern spirit have proposed some sensible methods. Nietzsche resorts to "self-overcoming" but Buddha orients to "mind-thought" or "meditation." Fundamentally, the illness connected with human's mentality is impossible to be cured by maximizing material consumption; rather, it needs human's honest self-examination to have a deeper understanding of human nature.

Accordingly, it may be said that neither freedom nor limit is absolute. Instead, how to balance the relationship between freedom and limit is a subject that is worth modern people's attention and consideration. For Qianerwei, it is a matter of mutual cooperation and reconciliation between man and woman in terms of individuality and responsibility. But to the protagonist, this is a question about to what extent one can enjoy freedom and accept limit. Qianerwei requires both freedom and love so that she is continuously after. But her continuous frustration also proves to her that love is a matter of two people, so that it has to be dealt with through the efforts of two sides. Likewise, her frustration is equivalent to your irresistible melancholy sometimes. However, the protagonist prefers to see the sentimentality as a way to express freedom, because he has no dream any more in the heart, so it is needless to become really sad, thus he is able to enjoy this bit of sentimentality in pain.

From what is discussed above, she is always renewing her love, for she believes that

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<sup>226</sup> Robert G. Morrison, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities* (2001), Oxford University Press. In this book, the author comes to a conclusion that, ironically, as he said, some notions on Buddhism have help Nietzsche in his quest for a practical answer to nihilism; for example, 'meditation,' like Nietzsche's 'self-overcoming,' is rooted in man's natural psychological make-up.

she was created not only for a certain man but rather to experience different men. Qianerwei represents a creative impulse for human instinctive life, and so her life may be seen as an embodiment for natural life. Life, at the same time, also means a paradox. Qianerwei tirelessly seeks after a “new and fresh” life and freely fully enjoys it. However, as a result of excessive freedom, she feels deeply disappointed and frustrated.

Thus, this proves again that there are always certain contradictions existing between the society and individual, between physical pursuit and spiritual quest. This is much like a positive vicious cycle, both enjoyable and unbearable, from which modern people’s joys and sorrows arise, but in which one is impossible to find something that can forever maintain the joy and ultimately heal the sorrow. As a result, what was left is only a fragile, frustrated, and fragmented self, who has been wandering and floating in the endless paradox of life.

This is the spiritual dilemma that modern people have to face. Humans aspire for freedom but get frustrated in the overused freedom, just like Qianerwei’s frustration and the protagonist’s melancholy. This is indicative of a profound disposition of human mind, which is permanently concealed in the depths of life but cannot be cured in a permanent way. It arises, fights, subsides, repeats, again and again, in the end leaving the mind some vestiges to prove that one has ever experienced, thought, and imagined in the world. For the protagonist “you,” those, in actuality, are only some fragmentations of images in his impression, some markings in his unconscious, and some fragments of sentences in his writings:

You need to make a pose, then keep motionless, and then become a statue.

You need to be like a thread of gossamer, floating in the air, dissipating into veiled clouds.

You need to be like a prickly branch on the jujube tree, like the remaining leaves of Chinese tallow tree in early winter, frozen into dark purple, trembling in the wind.

You need to trek across a brook, need to hear bare feet pattering on cobblestones.

You need to pull heavy memories out of a vat of dye, wetting through the ground.

...

You hope to be a pair of sad eyes, profound and melancholy, through which you can observe how the world sways, and the eyes are also in your palms.

You hope to be a mixture of many voices, in which a thin and soft voice is disintegrated into a background against the others.

You hope to be a piece of jazz, so random but unexpected, impromptu but so flowing, then turning into a strange pose, an ambiguous smile...<sup>227</sup>

Here, the author adopts a parallel structure such as “you need...” and “you hope...” to show the protagonist’s multi-layered state of mind. These sentences constructed by numerous images and imaginations reveal the richness and complicatedness of his inner world. This is a soul in chaos and it is rich in the exquisite texture of lyric poem and the elegant sentiment of jazz music. The multitudes of elements of poetry and music compose a sumptuous feast of sense, sound and sight. Life thus can be framed as a thread of “gossamer,” a sketch of “landscape,” a moment of “memory,” a mixture of “sound,” some “hopes,” some “needs,” a kind of “mood,” a “smile,” a “posture” etc. It could be seen that the protagonist is an extremely sensitive man. He is capable of sensing and capturing every subtle instant of life. Each momentary perception represents one layer of his life, mirrors his meticulous observation over life, and reveals his deep experience of life.

The multi-tiered mental consciousness reveals a soul struggling in multitudinous contradictions between the reality and the self. “He” and “You” construct a dual psychological structure for the protagonist, in which “he” represents the past spiritual visions of “you” and “you” reflects the currently social aspects of “he.” “You” recalls and narrates the stories in the current reality. “He,” as the protagonist of your story, is actually the “you” in your memory. In such a structure of characters, the “you” in the real society and “you” in the story or “he” appear in an overlapping way. In the end

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<sup>227</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Yige ren de shengjing*, 253-255.

“he” is fused into “you” to become the same man.

Overall, this novel in fact could be seen as a man’s spiritual progression. By virtue of “he,” “you” traces back to the past, seeking an objective judgment for the reality, making a final self-determination in the present. “You” negates the falsity of the society’s “sacredness and hegemony”, and deconstructs the vanity of individual “self-actualization”. However, “you” couldn’t help mourning the loss of the self. “You” calmly observes and objectively describes the absurdity of those turbulent days, but couldn’t help performing yourself as a “blue jazz.” “You” fully enjoys the pain and pleasure to “mock and self-mock” by writing, but couldn’t help wanting a “loud cry,” wanting “the whole world in tears,” wanting the sky “fluttering with rains and snows,” through which “you” deeply mourns the “self,” which has gained freedom but lost soul.

Here, it is not hard to see that the protagonist is a man with an extremely complicated inner world. He has a pair of eyes that not only can pierce through the true nature of the reality but also can thoroughly see each layer of his life. He observes the world with his eyes but perceives it using his heart, so life to him means a painful pleasure. This is a mixture of a variety of feelings and thoughts, and a condensation of a multitude of emotions and moods. The contradictory dimensions of life generates a psychological tension, from which one can sense his love and lust, feel his sorrows and joys, touch his spirit and flesh, see his shallowness and profundity, understand his freedom and tyranny, and realize his pain and pleasure.

For “you,” woman, the mirror that “you” observes and examines the self, serves as both the carrier of your body and the engine of your spirit. Woman here may be compared to a natural desire of life. For “you,” life without desire is exactly the same as the mind without spirit, lacking the vitality of a creative life. Looking back to your whole life, what woman generously gives “you” is the freedom of the heart, the strength of the mind, and the texture of life. She accommodates your whole spiritual



world and comforts your heart. Therefore, “you” always entertains a special attachment and gratitude for woman:

...you long for female tenderness, forgiveness and acceptance...she looks at you with gentle eyes, fondling your hair. You are deeply grateful, hoping to rely on, on the woman who gives you life, happiness and consolation. You call it as love, as lust, as sadness, as desire that disturbs you, as language, a narration, a need to express, a pleasure after release, excluding any morality and justice, without even a bit of falsity. It has completely and thoroughly got you purified. You are as transparent as a thread of conscious of life, as if a ray of sunlight from behind the door.<sup>228</sup>

Woman in your life, from mother to those “you” encountered, is symbolized as a thread of transparent conscious of life, a return to a natural spirit of life. She is tender, forbearing, accommodating, persevering, and dependable. This enables “you” to forget about the rational indifference and fully enjoy the tranquillity of life. In the depths of your heart, woman is in fact the same as a ray of warm sunlight, penetrating through your mind, dispelling those negative feelings and emotions that cloud your true nature, bringing “you” back to an inner spaciousness and radiance of your natural being.

The protagonist is frank to admit his deep gratitude for woman, because it is woman who gave life to him, and it is woman who serves as a spiritual force on which he could trust and rely and in which he could seek happiness and solace. For the protagonist, it is hard to clearly name what such a feeling is, for it has permeated into each cell of his body and mind. In his life full of trials and tribulations, this feeling forms the softest and most resilient part in his life. It is its existence that maintains the balance of his mental world. In face of countless suffering in life, it embodies those positive feelings and emotions about love and peace, and it transforms such negative feelings as anxiety, frustration, sadness, anger, stress etc into a positive strength,

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 427-428.

which is able to again lift human's spirit, and so it is a power that can help humans face up to whatever pains and sufferings in the human world. Just like a special language, it can nurture his simplicity, reduce his sophistication, assuage his anxiety, and express the subtleties of his inner world. Only when such strength dwells in his life can he feel deeply emancipated. Only at that moment can he totally wear off the pretentious mask of personality, can he truly perceive a wholly natural and true self, which is a child who has been washed clean both in spirit and body, a fresh and crystal new-born being.

## 16. "Disintegration" and "Condensation" of Life

After having gone through the ups and downs of life, the protagonist begins thinking over the relationship between individual and society. This marks a huge turning point to the author's outlook and worldview.

The society functions as a relatively stable operating mechanism so it tends to be administrative, dominative, and manipulative. Instead, life means a process of dynamically changing so it is natural, free, and renewable. The former aims to standardize the aspects of the society to bring them in order; the latter intends to fully cognize life and develop a positive personality. In terms of social structure, both are integral to a whole social mechanism so interrelated and inseparable. So their mutual cooperation will conduce to mutual nourishment; rather, mutual confrontation will cause mutual hurting. Such as: the excessive neglect for social development will result in serious social lagging; similarly, the excessive socialization will restrict the development of a natural personality. This is a common problem that modern people are facing: the loss of the meaning of life, the lack of humane spirit, and the bondage of human spiritual world.

The protagonist in *Yige ren de shengjing* eventually emancipated himself from various

socialized concepts and psychological complexes. He is no longer confused with any imposed shadows in his mind. He has abandoned the twisted personality and regained a renewed personality. How is the twisted personality emancipated then? To return back to the origin of life is the answer. A whole personality represents a human's natural, lively, and rich being. It cannot be achieved by only categorizing, explaining, and demonstrating. Instead the right way is to fully experience life. Only in this way can people understand that life itself is far beyond various isms. As we know, any ism is only a discussion within a theoretical framework. In a sense, every ism builds up a fence to surround some then exclude others, which have led or will lead to the alienation between people, the separation between communities, and the isolation between nations. This leads to different communities, races, genders, religions, nations, as well as various discriminated topics, such as the West and the East, the mainstream and the marginal, the low and the high, the elite and the masses, the male and the female, the noble and the ordinary etc. The contrast as such can be endlessly invented, reproduced and listed, only to prove their relativity in expression, due to their limited division of conceptions.

The without-ism to which the protagonist adheres in actuality suggests a true state of life. When the self removes social mask, he, as a being, is personal, perpetual, and spiritual. This means an ultimate choice to the freedom of life and the beauty of life.

Freedom is not given, nor can it be bought. It is your own awareness of life. Such is the beauty of life. You enjoy this freedom. ...Freedom doesn't care others and has no need to be recognized by others. It can only be obtained by transcending restrictions imposed by others. ...Freedom can be manifested in pain and sadness, if it is not overwhelmed by the pain and sadness.<sup>229</sup>

To the protagonist, the beauty of life means a natural and lively awareness of life. This may be seen as an understanding and realization that an individual has attained to life

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 306-307.

and the world. It may not be compulsorily restrained by such external factors as the society and nation. It may be a personal experience of life obtained directly from the external society, or some abstract cognition for the society and the world, even an embodiment of personal poetic pain and sadness. Just as what the protagonist is perceiving at this moment: “you” is just like “a blue Jazz,” only hoping to return to “the origin of life,” “living in this moment,” “no physical existence,” “no significance,” “as if a flake of falling leaf,” not wanting to “find a permanent home,” only wanting to leave some “traces of life” or “dissipate into the wind,” by “ruminating and pondering words and characters,” and by “mocking and self-mocking.”<sup>230</sup>

The protagonist discards “isms” yet he “values life.” To him, life is a “wonder,” can constantly produce “discovery and surprise,” so that only life is worthy of perceiving and praising. Just like the current “you,” traveling around the world, without being chained by family, identity, and nation, is totally “a free bird. The inner freedom has no cares and concerns, as if a flake of cloud or a gust of wind.”<sup>231</sup> “You” seems quite content with the state of drifting around:

Now you have no “isms.” A person without “isms” is more like a person. An insect or a grass has no “isms.” You are a being too and no longer manipulated by any “ism.” You would rather become a spectator living at the margins of society. Although you unavoidably still have perspectives, views, and tendencies, you, after all, have no “isms.”<sup>232</sup>

This can be seen as the protagonist’s final determination for his life. Living at the margins of society, for him, is neither “in society” nor “out of society.” He is only ready to be a man without “isms,” a “spectator” with only “perspectives” and “tendencies.”

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 426-427.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 157.

This stance shows a fact that life in actuality dwells in everybody's heart. It is a consciousness of life rather than a favor given by "others." So this is a placid strength of human mind, which cannot be transformed by external factors. The protagonist understands it as a transparent consciousness of life, signifying a different realm of life:

...It is better to say that it is a kind of realization, a trace, a process of consumption, or a result. Before its exhaustion or death, you are only a message of life."<sup>233</sup>

The protagonist's tone is peaceful and detached. His "realization" for this moment has become totally different from his self-actualization. Life at this moment only means a "trace" rather than an "ambition," a "consumption" rather than a "belief," a "result" rather than a "dream," and a "message" rather than a "pursuit." This "message" in life is oriented towards a new birth, or a return to simplicity and innocence.

Life, for the current protagonist, seems like a circle: the self is in the middle, and around the self is a totality of chaos. He can perceive his existence in any dimension of the beginningless and endless chaos. He can perceive every moment at each dimension but he is needless to confirm these questions on "where I am" and "who I am," due to existential relativity.

The self of you is also an existence born of nonexistence. It exists if saying it does exist. It is a totality of chaos if saying it does not exist at all. Is the self you try to create really so special? Alternatively, do you have the self? You suffer in the endless causality. But where is the cause and effect? The causality, just like worry, is your creation. You don't have to create the self, still less to search for existence from nonexistence just to identify with the self. You may as well return to the origin of life—the lively present moment. What is permanent is this present moment. You perceive therefore you exist. Otherwise it is just a

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 203.

totality of chaos. So you just live in this moment, feeling the soft sunlight in late autumn!<sup>234</sup>

Here, the protagonist has come to a deeper cognition for the self. It is absurd to seek a permanent personal realization on a certain point in life. Each point is only one of chains of endless causality, and so the attachment to any point will result in endless explanations and demonstrations of “endless causes and effects.” Instead, the present moment is perceptible. The self does not wear social masks any longer so it takes on a totality of transparency and freshness. In this sense, his “without-ism” may be seen as both an escape from socialized life and an amendment to his outlook and worldview.

Based on the discussions above, the socialized life may be compared to be male, mechanical, rational, logical, and so indifferent. It is true that the socialized life is inseparable part in human's life; however, the excessively obsessive pursuit for such a life will possibly lead to the loss of human free spirit. In contrast to man's manipulative nature, woman can be symbolized as a place that accommodates human free will and dream. In this sense, human mind is female, perceptual, irrational, soft and warm, and chaotic. For Gao's woman characters, their giving is selfless and sustainable, but their challenging is also thorough and determined. She streams out of human desire, displaying a deep source in which human nature is rooted, suggesting an unconstrained potential that can go against any forms of inhibitions.

This may account for the protagonist's ambivalent attitude towards woman: she is both the opposite side of man and the indispensable part of male spiritual world. In *Yige ren de shengjing*, the protagonist “you” holds a contradictory feeling for woman from start to finish. Truly, he has a bias against woman, which, as some argue, could be seen from his “using” woman rather than “loving.” Nonetheless, he maintains his gratitude to woman. Mother, Margaret, Lin, Xuqian and Qianerwei have jointly constituted a metaphor in his spiritual world: that is man's permanent spiritual need

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 437-438.

for woman, just as loneliness needs consolation and children need mother.

You are full of gratitude to woman, but it is not just for lust. You want them but that doesn't necessarily mean they must give you. You are insatiable, but it is impossible for you to get them all. God didn't give them to you, so you don't have to thank God. But you after all have a universal gratitude to the wind, to the trembling trees in the wind, to the Nature, and to the parents who gave birth to you.<sup>235</sup>

“God,” “parents,” “woman,” “Nature,” “wind,” “trees in the wind,” these images that ever inspired “you” can be seen as diverse spiritualized existence, so they are female and spiritual, representing the source of human perceptual world, nourishing human's mental need and cultivating human's spirit. Therefore, “you” holds a universal gratitude for them. They gave “you” life and the feelings and thoughts of life, which brighten up the gloom of the reality and enable the hardship in your life endurable and acceptable. This deep gratefulness proves that the protagonist still maintains his positive attitude towards the human world, even though it had ever led him into hardship and suffering. This is the same as his attitude towards woman: he preserves his invariable respect and gratitude for woman in the heart, despite his bias in words.

Of women the protagonist encountered, Margaret reflects one aspect of his personality. They are residents with social identities but wanderers in spiritual world so they are often puzzled by life. Lin, as the mirror of his lust, shows his instinctual life, his exploration for lust, as well as a latent rebellious force that passion demonstrates. Xuqian, as one of his dreams, reflects his pursuit for happy life and his thorough disappointment at marriage. She is the only one that evoked his strong desire for a family and also the only one that aroused his repugnance for her hysteria. Until his encounter with Qianerwei, he comes to understand a paradoxical fact: humans pursue after freedom but at the same time are confused by excessive freedom. As could be showed by Qianerwei's attitude towards love: it is easy to satisfy the need of pure lust

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 447.

but difficult to gain a mutual fusion in spirit. This proves a truth that freedom is a two-edged sword: too less means burdensome responsibilities, but too much proves it deeply lonesome.

In summary, these female characters symbolize the plurality of human mind. They together constitute the challengers of rational society by leading a perceptive life. In this interpretative construction, Margaret, Lin, Xuqian and Qianerwei respectively represent one aspect of his complicated personality. In this integrated personality, Lin signifies his lust, showing his passionate life; Xuqian represents his pursuit for spirit, symbolizing the happiness that he had ever dreamed of; Qianerwei is symbolic of a disposition of his mind, presenting the texture of his sentimental life.

Chronologically, they appear in his life in the sequence below: Lin—Xuqian—Margaret—Qianerwei. They together witness the different periods of the development of his personality. Lin may be seen as his youth and passion, Xuqian mirrors his pursuit and loss for happy love, Margaret acts as a listener to his past and an inspirer to his future. In many ways, Margaret embodies the self of the protagonist that he has been observing. As for Qianerwei, her melancholy reflects his unique temperament.

The female group symbolic of woman's desire represents a condensed irrational force in the rational society. The condensed stream of desire seeps through the protagonist's inner world, increasingly leading him to the examination of the self. This is a self-observation after observation and self-examination after examination. In this retrospection for the self, these woman characters play a role of the mirrors between the society and human mind. Through which, the protagonist has explored the interrelated and interdependent relationship between the self and the others, and attains a deeper understanding for life, the society and the world.

Here, woman in *Yige ren de shengjing* plays a vitally important role in two aspects.



Firstly, it mirrors a multi-faceted irrational existence in the human's inner world. Secondly, it symbolizes a moderate but powerful spiritual force to counterbalance social rationality. To make it further, it may be said that woman, either at family or in the society, represents another aspect that man or the society lacks, an indispensable force of heart to nourish human personality and balance the conscience of the society.

*Yige ren de shengjing* presents to us a series of woman characters that stick to free dream and resist against patriarchal oppression. Each of them represents a social taboo. Lin indulges herself in the corporal pleasure, which may be seen as her challenge to the patriarchal authority. Margaret tortured by personal and ethnic trauma takes a challenging stance against national oppression and patriarchal dominance. Xuqian tries to fight against the repression of the social political struggle by her hysterically "going mad." Qianerwei fully enjoys man at will to fight with her sadness caused by excessive personal freedom.

The stream of desire out of a natural life washes away the rigidness and indifference in human's rationality and integrates these conflicting qualities into a condensed personality. This means the cementation of fragility and resilience, means the condensation of intelligent thinking and unrestrained passion, means the fusion of the perseverance of character and the sentimentality of heart, and means the integration of the spirit of resolutely rebelling against repression and the awareness of bravely shouldering responsibility. All this mutually contradictory qualities are condensed into a plural female psychological personality, thereby generating a multi-dimensional tension of the mind. In such an intense mental structure, there is an undercurrent of desire constantly flowing days and nights, which represents an irresistible force of human mind—an unfathomable primordial potentiality in the depths of life. Thus, as a confrontation to repression, oppression, and suppression, there are certain revolutionary and emancipating factors latent in the stream of female desire, which has profoundly influenced and reconstructed the personality of the protagonist.

Through this female perspective, *Yige ren de shengjing* reveals the progression of one man's mental world. This is a process of dynamically changing. With the changes of the times and the society, the protagonist's personality is also in constant composition, formation, replacement, fragmentation, dissolution, and reconstitution. In other terms, life itself shows a process of constantly developing, splitting, and recovering. It forms an autonomous cycle of integration, disintegration, reconstruction and recurrence. Life, as a physical existence, seemingly means a process of evolvment, or a repetition. In fact, life is more than a pure repetition. Then, at every moment of our growing, what is the difference between the previous moment and the next one?

Deleuze thinks that repetition is a question in relation to time. It means a habit if time is seen as a circle. It also means memory—the second synthesis of the pure past, if time is a straight line. If repetition itself is considered as a pure form of time, Deleuze claims that difference inhabits repetition.<sup>236</sup> Of the three, it could be seen that, the third model takes on a dynamically changing. Deleuze adopts Nietzsche's notion "eternal recurrence" to explain the third case: the "eternal recurrence" is only the repetition of that which "differs-from-itself."

As known, life is neither a simple habit nor a pure memory. Instead, life means a positive existence in constantly developing, accommodating the past, the present and the future in the forms of memory, reality and imagination. Thus, it would be better to discuss life on the levels of "cosmological time" and "phenomenological time," two modes of time proposed by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur.<sup>237</sup> According to Ricoeur, we experience time in two different ways. One is cosmological time, in which time is expressed as a linear succession in the river of time, in which our life streams through from birth to death; the other is phenomenological time, in which time is experienced in terms of past, present and future. Ricoeur thinks that "human time" means a complex experience both in cosmological time and phenomenological

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<sup>236</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Athlone Press; New York; Columbia University Press, 1994), 76..

<sup>237</sup> "Paul Ricoeur: Time and Narrative" in The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: [www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu).

time.

Accordingly, life may be understood as both a point of time and a period of time. If life is condensed into a point, then our life is no more than countless successive points of births and deaths in the endless river of time. If life is seen as a period of time, then our life may be measured in the past, present and future. Therefore, human has invented different patterns to describe the passing of time, such as habit, memory and repetition. The essential difference results from the angle that human looks at time: statically or dynamically? However, this life is ultimately limited, while time itself spontaneously goes towards its destination without considering human's modes of understanding time. In other words, time is a transcendental notion, so it can travel in the eternal river of time. But our life only means the passing of a moment in the human world, or alternatively the continuum of some moments in the time and space of the universe.

On such a transcendental level, Deleuze's "difference and repetition" may be understood as a dynamical dialectical relationship of three-dimension of time. If "habit" points to the time of this life, "memory" to the being of previous life, then, "repetition" is oriented to an "eternal recurrence" in the time of the future.

As an original conception of Nietzsche, "eternal recurrence" means that time runs its course and then repeats exactly and infinitely. In that case, the absurdities and pains of life seem to appear not only once but also repeatedly, perhaps forever. In this sense the meaning or purpose of life has become countless mechanical repetitions. One might see a light from his poetic thinking:

"What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must

return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust! ”<sup>238</sup>

It would be a torturous thought if life means an endless identical repetition, which is much the same as Deleuze’s first model on repetition: life repeats as a monotonous habit in the circle of time. Nietzsche tries to assume a possible truth of life: human is only a “speck of dust” in the “eternal hourglass of existence,” turning upside down over and over again. Nietzsche, almost at the cosmological basis, comes to a conclusion on the “pointlessness of human existence,” due to the “outcome of human’s repeated frustration” in the search for meaning.

This seems to be a problem that our protagonist in *Yige ren de shengjing* has to face. However, to the protagonist, even though he has completely emptied his faith in any belief or any ism, a bit of value of life that he can still perceive is this moment for the present. Life, the “speck of dust” in the human world, is thus given a meaning—a positive meaning on “moment,” so it seems not so much monotonous but is rather worth living. In this sense, it might be able to say that the protagonist, the wanderer in the western world, the bearer of the eastern philosophical spirit, despite a somewhat nihilist, but is a “positive nihilist.”

Repetition, for Deleuze, in the second model for time, is seen as a notion associated with the past, with memory, and with history. This may be exemplified by the narrating structure of *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust. In this novel, through the form of memory, the narrator enables past events to eternally return in the worldly present. It seems to us that our consciousness can travel freely in the scope of time and space. Therefore human can sense and perceive the passing and recurrence of time in virtue of psychological traveling in three-dimensional space. If the present is a

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<sup>238</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (2001), Book Four, sec. 341, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams. Cambridge University Press, 194.

habitual repetition, then only in traveling back to the past by memory, can life be given a certain meaning in monotonousness. In this sense it may be said that Marcel Proust has discovered and revealed an intrinsic nature of human's psychology: memory can widen the present life and condense those beautiful moments of life. Tracing back to the past, ruminating on old events, as if a habit that is hard to be abandoned, run through the stories of the protagonist in Gao Xingjian's novels, which has strengthened the depth and expanded the width of his current life.

Space to us is relatively unchangeable, but time is always in flux, thus human being has to fight with time all the lifetime to grasp and preserve something for the self. To their sadness, the self is destined towards the disintegration of existence with the passage of time. This is why we need both the past and the future. The present is transient and the future is unpredictable; only the participation of the past and the future, can the time and space of life be extended to be wider, farther and deeper. Thus, Marcel Proust prefers dwelling on the memory, Deleuze chooses to look forward to the future, and Nietzsche thinks about the present.

It may be seen that psychoanalysts, novelists, and philosophers are all deeply attached to time. As a thinker, Nietzsche poignantly observes that the spiritual world of humans gradually becomes rusty and desolate with the passing of time. Instead, as a faithful empiricist of human life, Marcel Proust deeply attaches his thoughts and sentiments to daily trivial things in the mundane world.

Compared with the profundity of Nietzsche and the sentimentality of Marcel Proust, Deleuze, however, gives more positive meaning to the "eternal recurrence" of time. In accordance with Deleuze, the subject of "eternal recurrence" is not the same but the different, not the similar but dissimilar, not the one but the many.<sup>239</sup> For Deleuze, this "recurrence" does not refer to the static return of the identical; but rather, it is a

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<sup>239</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (1968) (London: Athlone Press; New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 126.

repetition based on difference, a creative recurrence with something new added. Therefore, Deleuze dismisses the rigid ways of thinking but highlights the innovation of thoughts, which orients human hope to the lively present and the immeasurable future rather than the established past.

This discussion on life and time provides a structure to analyse the mentality of the protagonist in *Yige ren de shengjing*. It may be said that this is a book with a sense of time and space. The protagonist stands in the western country in the present, tracing back to his homeland in memory, in order to make an ultimate choice for his future, an eternal destination towards the place that he is traveling.

On a deeper level, this can be seen as a wanderer's choice for his spiritual home. As a wanderer in the western world, he has seen through the nature of various isms and refuses to be involved in any ism. On the one hand, a man who wants to maintain his own spiritual world needs to keep a distance from isms. On the other hand, as an overseas Chinese people, though he has experienced various vicissitudes of life, yet an unchangeable sound in his heart always reminds him of his aspiration, namely, leaving this heart of a new-born baby to a pure land, in which he was born. This voices a common heartfelt wish that all the overseas compatriots cherish in the depths of their hearts. That which wanders throughout the world is footsteps but that which has been rooted is this absolutely sincere heart of a new-born baby. The reason to maintain this heart is to expect one day, when it can be permanently condensed into her benevolence and become integral to her breadth of mind.

This can be seen as a positive interpretation for Gao's without-ism. For the protagonist, this is also a sensible interpretation for the development of his personality. His initial dream is to embrace a positive life, which can be proofed by his early novel *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*. When the innocent dream was defeated by socialized life, his mind went through a philosophical examination and a spiritual awakening, which can be evidenced by *Lingshan*. When his life had to start in the western world, for a man

who chooses to insist on something, without-ism becomes the most reasonable choice in life. This “something” that he must insist on is his deep nostalgia for his root. However, the fact is that the protagonist resides in another land so is far away from his root. In the world flooded with various isms, in order to insist on his choice for his root, he needs to give up those isms that puzzle him. For such a return at a certain day, the protagonist chooses to abandon isms. This may be seen as a man’s examination for his identity and an ultimate choice to his spiritual shelter.

Therefore, this progression for human personality in fact suggests a return and a development after the return. This is a positive return after he has gone through the vicissitudes of human affairs. In the process of life, this return is seen to be the third stage of the development of human mind. It marks the protagonist’s thorough understanding and realization for life. However, this gain at the same time means a loss in life. For the protagonist, he has regained a life when he learned how to face up to the self. This is an objective self-reflection, targeting on the self’s ultimate emancipation from gains and losses, rises and falls, and births and deaths. This is indicative of a man’s spiritual rebirth after going beyond various dilemmas in life.

The protagonist’s spiritual progression witnesses the development of a man’s personality. Humanity is fundamentally a supreme factor in the progress of human’s civilization. So it is extremely significant to strengthen human’s factor rather than impairing it. If looking on the destructive social problems as male, then the desirable way is to find a positive force to counterbalance with it. When human personality is gradually socialized and instrumentalized the potential force that can emancipate it comes from a natural stream of desire. In other words, the original faculty of life, as opposed to the rationality and order of the formalized society, acts as a powerfully comprehensive potentiality in human mind. It can evoke and awaken the sleeping human nature and ultimately reconstruct a natural and vigorous human personality.

## Chapter Four

### Towards Aesthetics of Desire

#### 17. Meditations on “Stream of Language”

As previous chapters have discussed, Gao Xingjian’s novels can be read as a man’s spiritual journey to the self. The path to the spirituality of life starts with a “meditative visualization” for the self and ends with the self’s comprehension for life. Through the long quest for the self, the author has gained a deeper insight into life and its relations to the society and the world. Here, life is no longer purely a physical existence; rather, it is a psychological progression after philosophical thinking, a spiritual condensation after the retrospection of the self.

Desire, however, serves as the background of this retrospection, exhibiting to life a process of constantly conceiving, constituting, disintegrating, dissolving, reconstructing and renewing. To an individual, this process emphasizes the interaction between the self and others. For the destination of the development of human beings, it orients towards an endless repetition in difference and a spiral return after births and deaths. Artistically, the interaction of births and deaths streams through a web of language, forming a special aesthetics of desire. It is dynamic rather than static, meditative rather than descriptive, and analytic rather than deductive. As a result, this study views it as an art of meditations on “stream of language.”

Gao Xingjian holds his own viewpoint in terms of language. In the postscript to *Yige ren de shengjing*, he writes the following:

I view the art of language of novel as an ultimate realization of language rather than the



imitation of reality. The reason that novel is interesting is that its language is obviously capable of evoking the real senses and feelings of readers.<sup>240</sup>

For him, the art of language of novels is to make readers truly sense and feel the truth of reality instead of imitating the reality. What he emphasizes is the sensibility of language of novel rather than its reality in content. Gao's viewpoint reflects his tendency towards the technique of literary language rather than literary realism. Again, he claims his view on the language of literature in "The Case for Literature:"

Language is the ultimate crystallization of human civilization. It is so profound and subtle, so uncontrollable, so penetrating and so pervasive that it can penetrate human's perceptions, linking the perceiving subject with his understanding of the world. Those written words are so marvelous that it allows the communication between individuals, even if they are from different nations and different times. In this way, the creativity of literature and the reality of reading underlie its eternal spiritual value.<sup>241</sup>

Here, Gao Xingjian emphasizes again the penetrating "sensibility" of language, and again refers to the "reality" of reading and writing, as well as the eternity of their spiritual values. It may be seen that he is deeply attached to the spiritual value of language instead of its descriptive function on the reality. This point shows that his language has experienced a process of transformation: from objective description through spiritual perception to psychological analysis. In this sense, reading Gao Xingjian's novels means to perceive the inner world of his characters more than simply read the plot of the stories.

Gao Xingjian names such a perceivable language as "stream of language." He makes a functional comparison between western "stream of consciousness" and his "stream

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<sup>240</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Postscript" to *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (1989), Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 260.

<sup>241</sup> Gao Xingjian, "The Case for Literature," appendix to *Lingshan* (2001), Taipei: Lianjing, 536. Please also refer to *The Case for Literature* (2006) translated by Mabel Lee. Yale University Press: New Heaven and London, (35-36).

of language”:

The ‘stream of consciousness’ in western modern literature starts with a subject, traces and captures a perceiving process of the subject, and what the writer gets is no more than a process of the stream of language. So, I prefer to call this kind of literary language as the stream of language. <sup>242</sup>

Functionally speaking, Gao Xingjian’s “stream of language” is somewhat similar to “stream of consciousness.” Both aim at tracing and capturing a process of the characters’ psychological activities, with “stream of consciousness” directly focusing on the characters’ mental consciousness by analysis, but “stream of language” indirectly on the markings of character’s mentality through comprehending its language. Moreover, “stream of consciousness” refers to one of techniques of literary expression, but “stream of language” only reflects a style of Gao Xingjian’s language of novels.

In order to prove the workability of “stream of language” in Chinese expression, Gao Xingjian makes a comparative analysis for Chinese and Western languages:

Chinese can more skillfully explain mental activities than Western languages. Western languages are more logical and more analytical. Chinese sometimes defines scientific terms less precisely. <sup>243</sup>

In some ways it may be said that Chinese is more subjective and Western language is more objective, and so the former is more suitable for philosophical analysis and the latter for scientific definitions. Gao makes a further explanation that Chinese has no distinction for tenses of past, present and future, without various variants of verbal

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<sup>242</sup> Gao Xingjian, “Literature and Metaphysics: about *Lingshan*,” *Without-ism* (2000), Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 173. Please also refer to “Literature and Metaphysics: about Soul Mountain”, collected in *The Case for Literature* (2006) translated by Mabel Lee. Yale University Press: New Heaven and London, (82-103).

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

forms, and so it is able to unify the reality and the imagined, the memory and the fabricated into a process of narration of language. Through such a psychological process of language, it is possible for the narrator, the listener, the reader or the interpreter to reach a compatible understanding of characters. Therefore, Chinese as a language reflects a way of thinking that eastern people usually adopt: they generally have no rigid distinction between the self and the others, so they always try to comprehend human, society, and world on the cosmological level, and so they are good at generality rather than particularity, at perceptive thinking rather than logical analysis, and at philosophical speculations rather than scientific definitions within certain frameworks.

Through “stream of language,” what Gao seeks to attain is to “avoid any static psychoanalysis, only resort to meditations, roam and think in language, but pursue a lingering charm between the lines.”<sup>244</sup> It may be seen that there are something more profound implied in the “roaming meditations.” If the “roaming in language” is to trace characters’ “markings of thinking”, then, how is such a language able to “roam” and “meditate” demonstrated?

It is generally thought that Gao Xingjian’s style of language tends to be of prose. The critic Ma Sen thinks that Gao’s novel is “indeed on a path to prose.”<sup>245</sup> However, he further points out that whichever style the writer adopts, the poem with prose style, the prose with poem style, or the novel with prose style, all of which only serves as diverse methods that the author chooses to command language and express his thoughts. Therefore, this may be seen as a choice of method, but does not necessarily mean one is superior to the other. For Gao, this may be said to be a matter about which can more effectively “precisely portray sense perceptions” and “evoke readers’ real senses and feelings.”<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>245</sup> Ma Sen, “The Decline and Restoration of Art: Preface to *Lingshan* (2001),” Taipei: Lianjing, 8.

<sup>246</sup> Gao Xingjian, “Postscript” to *Yizhi gezi jiao hongchuner* (A Pigeon Named Red Lip) (1984), Beijing: Shiyue wenyi, 337-338.

Similarly, Ma Sen views that the reason that Zhu Ziqing's novel *Beiyong* deeply strikes a chord in the readers' hearts lies in his successful use of the language with prose style, which effectively expresses the author's affection for his father and simultaneously evokes the true feelings of readers. For Ma Sen, the language that can "evoke the true feelings of readers" must be built on a certain real experience of life, though it does not necessarily mean an 'imitation for the reality.'<sup>247</sup> Ma Sen agrees with Gao's point that language is expected to evoke the readers' true senses and feelings but also points out that such a language must be based on a certain real life experience. In other words, those senses and feelings that can deeply touch and stir the readers' heart represent human's common experiences of life, which are rooted in our inner heart but need the exterior imitation for the reality to inspire and awaken.

Gao Xingjian has claimed that the style of language that he is after is "clear and pure, without impurity." As such, to extract a "clear and pure" language in "stream of language" has turned into an art of language of novel. With regard to this question, some critics have reached an agreement by discussing the language of *Lingshan*. In Ma Sen's description, "it is as crystalline as a stream of a snowy mountain, directly presenting the narrator's mind."<sup>248</sup> This comment is consistent with Gao's view that the language of novel is expected to be able to touch upon "senses and intuition," "not merely to convey meanings but also to attentively listen to and identify with the self."<sup>249</sup> Alternatively, the "clear and pure," "crystalline," and "perceivable" language is able to penetrate the soul of readers, arouse the sensibility of the unconscious, and realize the synthesis of feelings, senses, intuition, and imagination.

In *Lingshan* there are quite some passages with either the flavor of prose or the function of sense perception. They create a dynamic "stream of language," leading readers to sensuous meditations on life. As if one is in the mood for Chinese ancient

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<sup>247</sup> Ma Sen, "The Decline and Restoration of Art: Preface to *Lingshan*," 7-8.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>249</sup> Gao Xingjian, "The Case for Literature," appendix to *Lingshan* (2001), Taipei: Lianjing, 544.

poems, a free and natural sense of infinitude permeates in the body and mind. In this respect, Zhao Yiheng comments that *Lingshan* is “nearly the only poetry novel in modern Chinese novels.”<sup>250</sup> Compared with the conciseness and meaningfulness of Chinese ancient poem, *Lingshan*, however, appears to be lengthy and ambiguous. Thus the beauty of the “modern poetry novel” refers to its “poetic mood” flowing in the “stream of language” rather than poetical language itself.

What’s more, the “stream of language” in *Lingshan* presents literary expression with a language with quality of music—it can be both listened and analyzed and appreciated. This is because there is something that belongs to human’s spirituality streaming in the language. Through reading and listening, one can gain a comprehension for human spirit. As for the readability and audibility of literary language, Gao Xingjian holds a point of view of his own:

...Literary language should be readable, that is to say, resorting to characters and hearing. Sound is the soul of language, which distinguishes the art of language from lexicology. Even whispering, soliloquizing or murmuring is also not separate from this kind of intuition. Those words and sentences that fail to express an instinctive perception for language and intuition by virtue of sound are totally not in my use. <sup>251</sup>

For Gao Xingjian, “soul of language” comes from an “instinctive perception for language and intuition” generated by audible and readable language. Thus, a deeper function of language should be indicative of its spirituality rather than grammars. Only such a language may be seen as “art of language” rather than “rules and regulations of language.” This may account for some quite different comments on his language. If what one concerns is only his grammar, what one can gain is only some lengthy and obscure words and characters and even a violation of grammatical order;

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<sup>250</sup> Zhao Yiheng, “Introduction—The Song of Traveller: Preface to Collected Novels of Gao Xingjian,” *2000 Library—Intensive Readings on Contemporary Chinese Books: Gao Xingjian* (1999), Hong Kong: Mingbao, 1.

<sup>251</sup> Gao Xingjian, “Literature and Metaphysics: about *Lingshan*,” *Without-ism* (2000), Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 171-172. Please also refer to “Literature and Metaphysics: about Soul Mountain”, collected in *The Case for Literature* (2006) translated by Mabel Lee. Yale University Press: New Heaven and London, (82-103).

if one roams in his language without any restriction of rules and regulations, one can obtain a flowing language, for one can sense a free and natural aura streaming between the lines.

Music, however, helps Gao realize such an ideal of language. Some chapters in *Lingshan* are said to be finished while listening to music. Thus the music as a literary element not only shows Gao's style of language but also bears his own disposition as a novelist.

In the language with musical elements, what readers experience is actually "a polyphony" performed by mutual collision and resonance between characters' internally psychological world and externally natural environment as well as social reality. The audible language allows readers to experience a multidimensional perception of senses. In such a mood of language, what interests them is no longer the plot of story; rather, led by the unique rhythm of language, readers enter into the inner world of characters and listen to this world. The feelings and senses stimulated by perceptible language can lead readers to a soul-penetrating contemplation on the self and the society and the world. Perhaps this is the magical power of the language that can "shake the mind and body of people," which is the plane that Gao Xingjian seeks to achieve.

Accordingly, it may be said that Gao's language has broken the limits of syntax and grammar, fusing into musical elements, poetic mood, and philosophical meditations, thus creating a symphony for the protagonist's chaotic inner world. For Chinese with musical quality, Gao's analysis sounds sensible:

I attach importance to the musical quality of language, paying attention to animate language rather than the crafted, hoping to bring Chinese characteristics into play. Chinese has a quality of music and is able to immediately evoke readers' hearing, due to not only

its four tones but also its tempo, rhythm, and mood...<sup>252</sup>

This language with musical quality is not alienated. Instead, it is an all-dimensionally perceiving synthesis of the characters' mental awareness. Therefore, it is readable, audible, perceivable, analytical, and meditative. Reader's senses for sight and vision, driven by the author's thinkable and imaginable language, mix with each other and condense into numerous sounds and images. These overlapped sights and sounds create an extended sense of time and space, not only enriching the content that the author tries to express, but also fully displaying the author's constantly drifting psychological consciousness. A passage from *Lingshan* can serve as a good example for the contemplative "stream of language."

The moss on the trunks, the branches overhead, the hair-like pine lichen hanging between the branches, as well as in the air, everywhere is dripping. Big drop of water, glittering and translucent, drops after drops, leisurely drip onto my face, down my neck, as cold as ice. I tread on thick, soft, downy moss, layers upon layers. It grows parasitically on the dead trunks of huge sprawling fallen trees, deaths after births and births after deaths. With every step my wet shoes squelch. My hat, hair, jacket and trousers are all wet through, and my singlet is soaked in sweat and clings to me. Only my belly can feel warm slightly.<sup>253</sup>

The beautifully described natural beings in Nature can be sensed, felt, perceived, and analyzed from three perspectives. First of all, Nature shows itself in original beauty. Overhead is the coldness of drops of water from everywhere. The intertwined moss grows over the trunks. Branches stretch towards the sky, with flowing pine lichen hanging quietly. Secondly, the traveler senses these lives in Nature. My shoes tread on the thick and soft moss, just like treading on still endlessly reproducing beings, though they have gone through countless deaths and births. Thirdly, the traveler

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<sup>252</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Return to Human Nature, Return to Oneself: Gao Xingjian's Talks on Literature," originally in *Shock Wave on Nobel Prize for Literature* (2000), Hong Kong: China Culture Press, 149. Also, see notes in Zhao Xianzhang's article "On the Style of Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*", which originally published in *Remwen zazhi* (Malaysia: 2001, 6.)

<sup>253</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 57-58.

meditates on these beings. At this very moment to bend and lift his head, the traveler's mood has already become wet through, physically and psychologically. It shows a thorough harmony after integrating the self into the cycle of Nature.

Here, what the language with prose style shows to readers is a multi-dimensional perceptual cognition for life in Nature. Life at this moment means a spiritual being with many sensory nerves, with the richness of vision and imagination, the trueness of sense of touch, and the leaping and overlapping sense of time and space. Thus, it is in the twinkling of eyes that the traveller has thoroughly perceived and realized the interaction between the "deaths and births" of all the beings.

The interactive perception between human and Nature conveys a mood of the writer, and demonstrates the harmony of beauty and the beauty of harmony while a human is fully fused into Nature. Thus, the reason that *Lingshan* could perfectly portray the beauty of Nature lies in the author's unique ability of commanding language, which effectively realizes the interactive union of subjective narrator and objective natural beings. The unified entity embodies a harmonious spirit between naturally integrated subject and object, and is full of a flavor of humanism and the natural spirit of Heaven and Earth.

Through the "stream of language," the subject's conscious constantly shifts between eyes and ears, time and space, moods and feelings, the reality and the imagination. This forms a psychological resonance of multi-layered senses perception, creating a "stream of music." In Gao Xingjian's works, this may be seen as a streaming aesthetics. Particularly in *Lingshan*, it shows a unique art of language—meditations in "stream of language." Zhao Xianzhang comments it as follows:

To fuse "stream of music" into "stream of language" and render the art of light and shade in language are two successful attempts in *Lingshan*, which have succeeded in activating the expressive potentiality of Chinese. The former is like gossamer, stringing fragmented



mirrored images together into an interesting serenade. The latter however composes these mirrored images into pieces of multicolored paintings overlapped with light and shade. Both serve as the theme of *Lingshan*—search for the natural sensuousness of the mountain of “Lingshan.”<sup>254</sup>

This art of language fused with music and painting leads readers to a boundless imaginative world, in which countless images of light and shade and sound are evocative of multitudinous mental thoughts and emotions. As if life is fused into the flowing music and misty painting, the physical self does not exist any longer, all has been condensed into a moment of spirit: time and space is long and deep, life is only a speck, drifting towards the distant and the remote of the endless.

However, what the streaming language presents to readers is not only the pleasure of senses it also enables readers to observe the streaming of images in the consciousness. In *Lingshan*, the character’s streaming mental activities are often wholly fused into a large number of descriptions for natural scenery. Paragraph one in chapter 19 provides a good example for such a view:

On the chilly late autumn night, dense and heavy darkness encloses a totality of primitive chaos; there is no distinction between sky and earth, trees and rocks, not to mention the road. You can only stay where you are, leaning forward, stretching out both arms, groping the dense dark night. You hear it in fluidity, what is streaming is the darkness rather than wind. In the darkness you cannot make a distinction between top and bottom, right and left, distance and sequence. Then you are totally fused with the chaos.<sup>255</sup>

Night, in the protagonist’s consciousness, takes on a totality of “darkness” and “chaos.” At this moment, the sky, the trees, the rocks and the road are all invisible. He

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<sup>254</sup> Zhao Xianzhang, “On the Style of Gao Xingjian’s *Soul Mountain*”. Please refer to the academic forum at <http://chin.nju.edu.cn/smf/index.php?action=search2> This article is originally published in *Renwen zazhi* (Malaysia: 2001, 6.)

<sup>255</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 114.

listens to the chaotic darkness, “groping” in the boundlessly thick and deep chaos of night, as if losing the sense of space and order. This in fact is not the real darkness of night, but a temporary absence of his conscious objects. It arises when the protagonist concentrates his conscious totally on his mental phenomena. While he shifts his sight on sound, his visual consciousness immediately becomes a totality of blankness or emptiness, as if he is able to hear the flowing darkness. What is presented in his heart at this moment is his mental image rather than the physical world. The phenomenal beings in the reality are intertwined with psychological images, presenting the explorer in the dark night with a totality of original chaos.

In this respect, just as the critic Zhao Xianzhang has pointed out, the world of *Lingshan* is from a reassembled chaotic world after being dismantled, and so it is a mental demonstration of the protagonist fighting in various social dilemmas. In other words, the repression caused by the real society piles together, overlaps, lingers in the protagonist’s consciousness, and eventually constitutes his psychological chaos when it fails to be freely released.

In actuality, when life is totally fused with Nature, why must we distinguish his social identity from spiritual selfhood? Perhaps the totality of chaos is the realest original state of life itself. In some senses, “chaos” can be seen as a plane of life attained when life is placed in the boundless time and space. One would come to understand it if comprehending Cheng Ziang’s poem *A Song of Ascending on Youzhou Terrace*:

The ancients have been beyond my vision,  
The generations to come haven’t arrived yet.  
Thinking of the everlastingness of Heaven and Earth,  
I lament the transience of life.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Cheng Ziang was one of famous poets in Early Tang Dynasty. Despite that, he did not achieve his ambition in officialdom. This poem is titled as “A Song for Ascending Youzhou Tai,” selected from *Three Hundreds Tang Poems* (1999), Beijing: Xueyuan, 34. It is edited by Li Peng, and was originally edited by Hermit Qutang, an official of Qing Dynasty. Please refer to 吴钧陶’s translation: “I can’t see them who died before my birth; I can’t see them who will come to the earth. Thinking of the endless Universe, I weep, and I alone with Nature converse!”

This poem was composed when the poet went on an expedition. He ascends on Youzhou Tai, looking back to the past, thinking of the present, forefathers and offspring are all out of sight, only leaving the endless Heaven and Earth there, how insignificant human beings are! Here, the poet's personal frustration in officialdom forms a sharp contrast with the vast expanses of time and space, which deepens the self's sense of finitude in the infinity, and so he sighs deep sorrows. The poet's sorrow shows his complicated feelings and emotions, not only because of his failure in official circles but also of his sudden awakening to the insignificance of the self's ambition in relation to the endless time and space. In other terms, only truly fusing into the totality of chaos between Heaven and Earth can one truly become aware of what life is, what the self is, and how to comprehend this life. This is the very beauty of language: it may realize a philosophy at cosmological level, and attain a plane of meditative life.

For such a realization of language, Gao Xingjian has his own philosophical understanding and explanation:

It is a rough philosophy to simply divide everything into Yes and No. It is wiser to divide it into either three or innumerable and even returns to chaos again. The meaning of language serves as a process of realization of languages instead of confirmation of semantics. Thus meaning is actually given by others.<sup>257</sup>

In Gao's view, the realization of language may attain a plane of "philosophy of chaos," but the confirmation of semantics may only lead to a "rough philosophy: Yes or No." Therefore, the meanings are obtainable in cooperation with others, yet the comprehension for chaos is always from the self's inner awakening to the external worlds. It is true that the philosophy on ambiguity might unavoidably cause the

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<sup>257</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Literature and Metaphysics: about *Lingshan*," *Without-ism* (2000), Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 174.

ambiguity of understanding. However, Gao Xingjian believes, “the ambiguity of meaning underlies the beauty of literature, if not in a total mess.”<sup>258</sup>

To sum up, the state of chaos reflects a mentality that human is true to life itself. The reality around us is rough, not as orderly and systematic as the one about which philosophers have deeply thought and well organized, so it unavoidably leads us to a state of disorder. Nevertheless, an ideal that the author seeks to achieve is to discover a reasonable string of thinking in “chaos” and extract a valid meaning in “ambiguity.” In terms of the ideal of language, it may be understood as an aesthetic manifestation of human mental existence. In terms of human mentality, it may be interpreted as a state of being of life. In contrast to the real world organized by language, the soundless human inner world is changeable, abundant, and unfathomable. Unifying both would possibly realize a mutual interpretation of the two: one may acquire a meditative philosophy in Gao’s streaming language. In other terms, if one comprehends the “stream of language,” one would be able to grasp the meaning of life.

Furthermore, the view that Gao Xingjian opposes the dual division of philosophy may be dialectically understood at two levels. On the one hand, Gao tends towards, as some western modern philosophers have done, a rejection for traditional dualism or dichotomy. On the other hand, he sees “chaos” as one level of language, which in essence points to a synchronized destination of all the beings: an ultimate return to the state of “chaos.” Thus, Gao Xingjian’s ideal of philosophy is to realize the fusion of the East and the West. What he seeks is to integrate eastern cultural and philosophical elements with western literary post-modernism. This may be said to be a literary ambition to combine classics with modernity, due to their totally different qualities. Classic means to be quaint and refined, but post-modernity implies to be crude and radical. Theoretically, this is tantamount to the incompatibility of water and fire. Aesthetically, this may be said to be a tentative aesthetical construction, owing to a

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 174-175.

workable principle of aesthetics—conflicting or opposite emotions engender a source of aesthetics. For Gao's novels, this will conceive an immanent beauty of life: the aesthetics of chaos streaming in desire.

## 18. Aesthetics of “Chaos” in Desire

This theme symbolized by desire provides a psychological perspective for us to observe and examine the self at different stages of life. In actuality, the protagonist's obsessive pursuit for life reveals human's untiring exploration for the self. *Lingshan* records a man's “pilgrimage” towards Lingshan, a symbolized place, where humans can find spiritual shelter. *Yige ren de shengjing*, however, describes the “feelings and emotions of a lone man.” Compared with the modernity of the two novels' probe into the inner world of characters, Gao's earlier novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* tends to observe characters in real society, thus it may be seen as an attempt for literary realism. The whole works record the three changes of the protagonist's life, which witnesses a progression of his personality. This is a constantly diverged but eventually converged process. From an idealist to a man without isms, his understanding for the self has undergone a huge psychological transmutation. From an obsessive pursuer for the self to a free man without “self,” he has emancipated himself. This may be seen as an exploration for our inner life, a return to a true self, and an ultimate emancipation of human nature.

However, psychoanalysts have their own approaches to understanding the self. Traditional “Oedipus Complex” is employed to analyse how the son's personality is restrained under the “Name-of-the-Father”, which is constructed by Lacan, signifying the authority of social laws and orders, and has an ultimate privilege to administrate and manipulate human's subjectivity. For Jung, the cooperation between Anima and Animus intends to realize a balance between mind and spirit. By establishing “poetics of reverie,” the philosopher Bachelard gives Anima a positive psychological power to

influence Animus's personality, which can liberate Animus from power grabbing in the real world and attain tranquility without worries, ambitions and schemes.

In Deleuze and Guattari's view, however, human's desire is natural and autonomous. Hence excessively conceptualized desire will fetter the original connotation of life. For them, it is not necessary to define desire by "complex," to enhance desire by "name-of-father," to interpret desire by "archetype," and to demonstrate desire by "poetics." Rather, desire originates from a restless wellspring of vitality, streams restlessly within us, like the "rhizome" of plants, endlessly penetrating through the mud. The beautiful life symbolized by desire limitlessly releases the energy of life, and boundlessly expands through various contacts and communications, without taboo.

The theoretical construction for "rhizome" takes on an overwhelming momentum of life. In doing so, Deleuze and Guattari intend to emancipate the vitality of life and develop the creativity of life. This exploration for the profundity of life not only shows an ideal that western modern philosopher and psychoanalyst hold for life, but also suggests the purport to which Chinese Taoist thought adheres over thousands of years. Taoists maintains that all the beings take the course of their own, for the "Way" refers to the principle that things can naturally put their movements and development in operation, so there is no need to impose external forces to restrain it. Therefore, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi object to social laws and institutions, which result in the restriction on human nature, hence being the root of evilness. Lao Zi exhorts people to "banish wisdom and discard knowledge" in order to diminish their desires. Zhuang Zi emphasizes individual freedom but condemns social orders and norms, which, for him, aim to establish uniformity, thus is likely to lead to the suppression of difference, and so he thinks that a better way is to let people and things follow their own nature.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Guo Shangxing, *A History of Chinese Culture* (1993), co-compiled by Sheng Xingqing, revised by Qiu Ke'an, Zhang Jin, Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 24-27.

In pursuit of natural human nature, Deleuze's view has something in common with the thoughts of Taoists. On the level of human's development, both respect the natural development of human personality and oppose the excessively socialized human nature, because of its negligence for the development of individuality. Certainly, their obvious difference lies in their attitude towards the prospect of life. Deleuze highly emphasizes the optimistic aspect of life using the analogy of "rhizome," so life to him is positive and active. Taoists holds a relatively pessimistic attitude towards individual effort. For them, all the things are "in a state of perpetual self-transformation," so external forces only engender oppression and distortion. In this sense, both are an unconventional philosophy, with Taoists as a more detached attitude towards life but Deleuze the overwhelmingly revolutionary posture.

Therefore, in respect of constructing human personality, Zhuang Zi's ideal is to become a "perfect man" or "true man." According to him, a "true man" should maintain his mind in peace and tranquility, and pursue a plane of "sitting in forgetfulness (zuowang/坐忘)." This is to externally forget the society constructed by various desires, and internally forget the physical being and the thinking self.<sup>260</sup> In this sense, Zhuang Zi looks on the self as an insignificant existence in the vast cosmos. This bears some similarities to Deleuze's rejection for the uniform subjectivity. Fundamentally, the "thinking self" or the "subjectivity of the self" is a falsified being rather than our original life. Therefore, Zhuang Zi and Deleuze both intend to deconstruct the falsified being and return to its natural state. By doing so, Zhuang Zi attempts to attain a plane of harmonious union between the interior and exterior, and of a perfect fusion between the finitude and infinitude. Now that such a "perfect man" has gone beyond the gains and losses in the human world, beyond the fortune and misfortune of human affairs, and beyond the births and deaths of life, so his life is always in freedom and happiness.

It is true that to be such a perfect man is highly desirable but incredibly hard. In this

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 28.

sense, both Deleuze and Zhuang Zi may be said to be idealistic philosophers. Deleuze's deconstruction aims to construct a postmodern personality with the spirit of innovation and revolution, and so it is a positive exploration for the relationship between human and the society. However, Zhuang Zi intends to attain a perfect plane of self-cultivation between Heaven and Earth. Although it has reached the width at cosmological level, for most individuals in real society, this is a pursuit beyond practical social life. Nonetheless, both have criticized the oppressive nature of the social mechanism and seek the freedom and liberation of individual spirit, which provides a workable train of thought for constructing a positive personality in modern society.

Desire, to psychoanalysts, is a source of instinctive but vigorous life. To philosophers, it shows a potential of life, so is pregnant with the goodness and evilness of human nature. To aesthetes, it is indicative of a special language of human mind, with a creative beauty and profundity. In Gao's novels, it is not hard for us to feel a stream of desire between the lines. In particular in his later works, by describing dreams, imaginings, conjecture, illusions, hallucinations etc, Gao Xingjian tries to reveal the turmoil of the characters' inner world. The invisible desire in the tangible physical existence, the surge in silence, constitutes a mental drop in elevation, hence engendering "aesthetics of chaos in desire."

"Chaos" in Gao's novels shows the protagonist's ambivalent state of mind and the author's unique literary aesthetics. As for the notion of "chaos," different disciplines have different definitions of their own. Scientifically, chaos is understood as a potential state of being, not purely disorderly but able to "set limit" to "end infinitude" by mathematical functions. However, philosophy tries to "maintain the infinity of chaos" by virtue of concepts and notions. How, then, does chaos work on art? In virtue of chaos, what art seeks to achieve is to create all kinds of "assemblage of senses," or synthesize a diversity of perceptions, and extend the "finite" personified



work to a vast subject on the “infinity of the universe.”<sup>261</sup> In Gao’s view, however, “contradiction and chaos and ambiguity are the very origin of thought,” and the philosophy purely on “yes” and “no” shows the “roughness” of dualism. For him, a “wiser” understanding for philosophy should not be limited by quantity: from “one” to “innumeracy,” up to “chaos,” all is possible and workable.

Accordingly, Gao’s understanding of chaos may fall into the category of philosophy and art, so his novels can be read as a combination of philosophical thinking and language practice. However, the meditations on life in nature form an endless cycle of causality. It plays a logical trick—a catch-22: as long as one enters there might be no possibility of exiting. In chapter 58 of *Lingshan*, the author writes in the following: “Don’t feel about the soul, don’t look for cause-and-effect, and don’t search for meaning, as all is in chaos.”<sup>262</sup> In his view, all the exploration and quest for the soul, the causality, and the meaning would unavoidably result in the thinking in chaos or lead to the chaos in thinking. If thinking only brings the mind into chaos, then language might be a workable way to well arrange the train of thought. For Lacan, chaos indicates a disorderly state of personal experience; only resorting to language, can the chaotic inner world be organized and explained. Therefore, he employs the structure of language to categorize and analyze human mind. Likewise, by virtue of language, Gao Xingjian enables the expression of his views and thoughts on society, life, and world.

Chaos in Gao Xingjian’s novels is often showed as the protagonist’s complicated and confused state of mind, because of his multi-angled observation over the same objects. Similarly, the simultaneous emergence of manifold images in a sentence group also often confuses readers. In chapter 72 of *Lingshan*, a critic remarks that what the protagonist pieced together is not a novel but rather a book of “odds and ends.” As a response against the critic’s comment, the author successively employs fourteen

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<sup>261</sup> 篠原資明, *Deleuze*, translated by Xu Jinfeng, proofread by Liu Wenzhu. Hebei: Jiaoyu, 2001, 160-162.

<sup>262</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 356.

question sentences structured by “is...or is...?” and a sentence as long as fourteen lines without punctuation to express his perplexity for what novel really is. Such confusion finds its same effect in chapter 31 of *Yige ren de shengjing*, where the author uses thirteen parallel sentences structured in “you need...” and six in “you hope...” as well as one extremely long paragraph structured with “you want...” to demonstrate his ambivalence on the contradiction between ideal and reality: what “you need,” what “you hope,” and what “you want” must be those which the reality fails to give “you,” thus “you” feels at a loss. Certainly, in addition to the external manifestation for the protagonist’s complicated inner mind, such a way of commanding language may also be seen as the author’s attempt in writing techniques for modern novels.

Besides using complicated grammar structures, the complexities of the protagonist’s inner world can also be revealed by means of multi-pronominal narrative, of multi-angled observation on multi-faceted characters, as well as of multi-dimensional trains of thought and ways of thinking. In this respect *Lingshan* provides a good example. In terms of content, it shows the myriad manifestations of human life in virtue of sound, sight, and senses. With the constant shifting of pronouns, various interesting characters come to emergence in an alternate way. In order to keep pace with the dramatically changing human life, readers have to try to follow the streaming unconscious of characters and leaping way of thinking, otherwise it is quite likely to lead them to an utter confusion. However, for the author, it will lose the basis to think without “contradiction,” without “ambiguity,” and without “confusion.” Accordingly, seeking simplicity in multiplicity and achieving tranquility in chaos should be one of the intentions that the author writes such a novel, or, a plane that the author tries to attain.

Through his works *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*, *Lingshan* and *Yige ren de shengjing*, Gao Xingjian presents to readers a character who has gone through the vicissitudes of life, seen through the impermanence of life, and eventually returns back to the simplicity

of life. The prism of his life reflects the plurality of his contradictory personality, revealing his observing, pondering and comprehending for life. Such a literary character also mirrors Gao Xingjian's observation and understanding for life and his examination for the self.

Gao Xingjian gains an insight into human mind in a perceptive manner. He observes humans by sense perceptions, he captures sounds in Nature by listening and conjecturing, he displays the sumptuousness of colors to highlight atmosphere by free associations, and he describes dreams in virtue of sensuous imagination. In short, through various ways of expression associated with senses and feelings, thoughts and emotions, the author exhibits a man's spiritual world as an extravagant feast with multitudinous images and colors and sights and sounds. This is a rich combination of memory and imagination, and of realistic depiction and imaginative reverie.

In this sense, Gao Xingjian builds up a chaotic picture for a place in which the soul dwells. Only those who had ever explored the chaos of soul could sense and discover the layers of the mind in chaos and feel its texture. By virtue of his special language, the author intends to sense and comprehend the texture of life and death in the chaotic state of mind, seeking to capture the shadow of death while fighting for life. The strong desire for life is shown as life's instinctually tenacious struggle against the pains of death, which has been seen more or less in his earlier novels:

...In the pitch-black doorway stands a man. A pair of eyes is shining, scaring male eyes. She dare not look at the pair of eyes. But she is aware they are fixing on her all the time. That is a wild stare with mock. She saw it somewhere but didn't remember where it was. She feels that the pair of eyes has penetrated through her body, with a sense of extreme humiliation. She is too fatigued to evade it. Tortured by such a stare, she is suffering, struggling but in vain. She will rebel!<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Gao Xingjian, "Wuru," collected in the novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* (1989), Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 176.

This passage comes from Gao's short story *Wuru* (Humiliation). The mental activity shows the horror and pain that the humiliated girl is suffering. It mixes a horrible dream with chaotic consciousness. The scaring "male stare" is symbolic of an anguishing mock and ruthless humiliation imposed by other people. She tries to fight out of the deadly suffering but in vain. In contrast to the deeply rooted social prejudice, her personal rebellion seems desperately weak and futile. However, she tries to resist against the unbearable anguish, which reveals a human's instinct to escape from the horror and pain of death:

No consciousness but the mind is sober. She knows that she should not die like this. She just starts a life, she wants to be alive, she wants to be loved, she wants to listen to kind words, and she wants to warm the body. She sees herself, being high up and floating in the air. She sees the dying her with only the mind. She sees the dying her having lost consciousness. Thereupon, the high up and floating another self with only the mind covers her face with her hands and starts weeping, towards the contaminated self that has lost consciousness. Tears burst out like a long river, so comfortable, pouring, pouring...<sup>264</sup>

Here, the author gives a detailed description of the process of how she feels her death in the consciousness. Firstly, she tries to struggle out of the shadow of death, because she is still deeply attached to the human life; then, she sees her mind floating out of her body, overlooking the physical body that has lost consciousness; finally, the spiritual self looks at the physical self on the ground, the one that has been contaminated and persecuted by the cruelty of the human world. She couldn't help weeping bitterly. She needs a loud cry to mourn her dying life and the self who has lost her pureness. In *Lingshan*, the way to feel death in mental conflict has been used more skillfully, and the author can handle it in a more effective way:

...A dark blue sun circles in the even darker moon. You hold your breath in concentration,

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid. 176.

stop breath, and reach the end of life. The pulsating of sounds however become more and more strong, surge you up, and push you to a high tide, a purely high tide to spirit. In front of your eyes, in your heart, in your body that you do not know where it dwells, the sun's image within the dark moon continually expands in the surging sustained thunder, expanding—expanding—expanding—expanding—expanding—expand—expand—expand—expand—ding—ding—ding—ding—then followed by a blast—absolutely soundless. You fall into a deep and quiet darkness, again feel the pulsation of the heart and a clear pain of the physical body. The fear of the body to death is so concrete that your body that cannot be abandoned comes to its consciousness.<sup>265</sup>

The passage elaborates the consciousness of life and death. It exhibits a dynamic texture of life and an intense tension between life and death. “The dark blue sun” symbolizes the desire of life, and “the darker moon” analogizes the sign of death. The death tries to pull the final consciousness of life into the silent darkness, while the increasingly strong pulsation of heart pushes life up to a rebirth. The surging desire of life rapidly expands within the gloom of death towards an extremity—to blast, which both means annihilation and declares a new life. Then, in the fighting of life and death, in the rebirth after exploding, the physical body regains its consciousness. In Gao Xingjian's novels, such an intensity of life not only demonstrates the tenacity and resilience of life but also reflects the author's extraordinary ability to command sensory language. His language seems not to be composed by words or characters but it is rather like a message being continuously transmitted by a series of sensory nerves, which can be interpreted as the palpitating desire of life and the gloomy darkness of death. Thus, it may be said that the perfect combination of mental intensity and linguistic tension forms an unusual aesthetics of language in desire.

Accordingly, the existence of life, in Gao's writings, conveys certain deeper messages in virtue of diverse ways from different perspectives. Life and death, here, can be analogized as the fighting between the sun and the moon, and it can also be compared

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<sup>265</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 525.

to the overlapping and composition of shade, light and sound. In *Yige ren de shengjing*, this kind of language rich in the texture of life is again shown as the flashing moments of illusory light and shade and flowing music:

The world has so much light and shadow. But they would also vanish. You ruminate the light and shadow at this moment. You should also see him as light and shadow to ruminate, and then you could find a little surprise. Ah! What a fleeting light and shade!<sup>266</sup>

How beautiful music it is! At this moment you are listening to his *Cello Concerto Grosso No.6*. In the flowing sound of music, the accumulated anxiety of life is gracefully sublimated into higher notes. The long note on the chords of the cello is just like the flashing light and shadow. Then life has gained a certain release.<sup>267</sup>

At this moment, life to “you” is presented as a certain meaning of sound and sight. The transient light and shade flickers in your eyes, exactly like the impermanence of kaleidoscopically changing of human life, both baffling and surprising. The self feels a resonance in the elegantly floating sound of music, forgetting the anxiety and depression of existence in the reality. Here, the overlapping moments of light and shade and sound are symbolic of the spirituality and illusion of existence of life itself. To a mortal being, life is unbearably heavy; but in spirit it is as light as the transience of light and shade and sound. The protagonist “you” ruminates on the pleasure of life in sound and sight and shade, simultaneously using words and characters to convey his insight into the unconscious of life:

Your feelings, experiences, dreams, memories, fantasies, thoughts, conjectures, presentiments, intuitions etc. are all given sound and tempo by use of language. By linking these with the state of being of real people, reality and history, time and space, concepts and consciousness can be fused into a process of realization of language, leaving an

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<sup>266</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Yige ren de shengjing*, 443-444.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.* 444.

illusion made by language.<sup>268</sup>

Your language is rich in a quality of music and rhythm. It is a language associated with intuition, fantasy, memory, imagination, and presentiment, so it can be sensed, felt, experienced, dreamed, and thought like a concrete object. “You” wanders and meditates in such a language, fully sensing and perceiving every strand of consciousness of life, and then, weaves them into the social reality that is constructed by multitudinous concepts and notions. In doing so, “you” creates a game of language with aesthetics of chaos, an “illusion” of language, a synthesized aesthetics that is composed by words and characters, rhythm of music, and gradation of painting. As a result, it has an open and natural characteristic of impressionism painting, bears a distorted emotional angst in expressionism, and streams out a texture of flowing music. Such a “realization of language” beyond time and space, beyond reality and history, by combining concepts with senses, serves as not only a need to express the self, but also a reflection of the author’s meditations on the self’s relation to the society, the world, and the universe.

The critic Zhao Xianzhang thinks that “chaos” is the highest plane that Gao Xingjian has attained in his worldview and his language.<sup>269</sup> This seems to be a reasonable and sensible viewpoint. For Gao Xingjian, “chaos” not simply means a philosophical topic, providing a many-dimensional method to think and examine the self, the society and the world, it also serves as a particular way that he adopts to command language in multitudinous trains of thought. In this sense, the thought of chaos is by no means a free and easy philosophy, for it is always intended to abstract a workable thought from multitudes of distorted social realities. Thus, this is a philosophical thinking that makes human both painful and pleasurable:

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid. 202.

<sup>269</sup> Zhao Xianzhang, “On the Style of Gao Xingjian’s *Soul Mountain*”, *School of Liberal Arts, Nanjing University*: the academic forum at [http://chin.nju.edu.cn/smf/index.php?topic=5631.0;prev\\_next=next](http://chin.nju.edu.cn/smf/index.php?topic=5631.0;prev_next=next)

Dragging heavy thoughts, you crawl along in language, trying to grasp a thread to pull yourself up, becoming more and more tired. Being entangled in the gossamer of language, as if a spitting silkworm, you have woven a web for yourself, wrapped the self in the thicker and thicker darkness. With the dim glimmer of light in your heart becoming weaker and weaker, it is eventually woven into a totality of chaos.<sup>270</sup>

It is indeed not an easy thing to realize an agreement of language with thought. It is more difficult to properly express a philosophical thinking on chaos using a language with aesthetic chaos. Nevertheless, it should be a valuable surprise for the chaotic thinking if one is able to finally grasp the “glimmer of light” in the darkness. Here, it is told that the protagonist seeks to extract a philosophy on “chaos” by chaotically thinking and weaving it into the chaos of language. This however leads to a total fusion between chaotic thinking and the self. In some ways, this also reveals the abstractness, interactivity, and complexity of human mind. What’s more, it is precisely because the self in utter chaos can evoke human’s strong desire to explore the boundless world, hence generating an aesthetic need for the “chaos” of spiritual world:

You are neither the Buddha nor the Bodhisattva with three bodies and six faces and seventy-two incarnations. Music, mathematics, and Buddha are all purely fictitious concepts abstracted from indescribable all manifestations of nature. These abstract figures, scale, tone, compositions and transformations of rhythm, Buddha or God, and beauty, are all impossibly captured in the natural state of being.<sup>271</sup>

The Buddha, music, mathematics and God are all abstract notions with a certain sense of aesthetics rather than the concrete myriads of manifestations of nature. According to the author, these concepts have extracted their “being” from “what is indescribable.” The process from what is indescribable to an extracted being exactly

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<sup>270</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 358.

<sup>271</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Yige ren de shengjing*, 437.



reveals the existing nature of “chaos”: human being is originally from a totality of chaos in the universe, and so chaos means a certain origin but is beyond description.

In this sense, human being is no more than one of multitudinous extracted existence in the boundless universe. Each of them represents a uniquely autonomous method that human beings interpret the world, at the same time taking on an individual uniquely aesthetic experience. When diverse personal aesthetics merge together and develop into one man’s aesthetic experience, what is constituted is just a thing termed as “aesthetics of chaos.” Just as life means a process of constantly being disintegrated and reassembled, the aesthetics of chaos has likewise undergone a transmutation from separation to condensation, from divergence to convergence.

The critic Yang Maodong explicates Gao’s *Lingshan* as “an aesthetic outlook based on de-centralism.” He maintains that the aesthetics of life that *Lingshan* shows is to deconstruct all meanings, to break through all fetters, and to liberate the self from all bondage. As a result, what the self gains is not nihilism but rather an obsession with the quest for the meaning of life beyond “totalitarianism” and “essentialism.”<sup>272</sup> Here, Yang Maodong’s view suggests that what the author seeks goes beyond diverse isms invented by philosophers and politicians; instead, what he points to is a personal attachment for an aesthetic outlook: it is an attitude of life towards a full fusion of the self and Nature and the world.

Thus, upon survival from various notions and isms, the protagonist turns to concern what is concrete. So, mountains and rivers in Nature all manifest their freeness and naturalness, and flowers and woods are all attached with the witticism of Chan or Zen Buddhism. For instance, the swaying corrugated grass in the wind, the upturned eaves in the dusk, a long calling for YaYa—the childhood pal, a gust of souging wind in the wood, as if all of these indistinct images and ideas are flowing from the memories

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<sup>272</sup> Yang Maodong, “The Symposium on Gao Xingjian’s Awarded Works”, Guangzhou: 20 December 2000. It is collected in *Gao Xingjian’s Selected Works*: <http://www.shuku.net/novels/mingjwx/gxjzpxw/gxj.html>.

in the real life, or from some remote voices at the bottom of heart; that is something unknowable but indeed existing, it occurs to us and gives a certain hint, expecting an understanding and realization from us. The multitudinous fragments in real life, countless images from Nature, and some personal impressions even hallucination twist together, reflect each other, separate from each other, gather together again, scatter around again, and again assemble. Such a repeated interaction between divergence and convergence condenses into a beautiful but ineffable feeling—what is known as “life.” Yet, the referred life is usually beyond description.

The inspiration from Nature and the meditations on the self jointly enlighten the protagonist as to the truth of life. This is one of the characteristics of *Lingshan*. It suggests one way that eastern people contemplate life and the self in virtue of Chan or Zen Buddhism, and so it is traditional, classical, and autonomous. *Lingshan* hence bears resemblance to novels in form but to dramas in spirit, with the characteristics of all-embracing novels and the condensed disposition of dramas.

In contrast with the traditional cultural spirit in *Lingshan*, Gao’s short novel *Shun Jian* (A Moment) (1999) serves as a postmodern interpretation for the universal life. Here, life is no longer seen as a specific being in a particular cultural background, but rather as a general state of being in the boundless universal time and space. Thus, life can be interpreted as a process of a multitude of assembled “moments.” A moment comes and goes, with nothing left but a process of momentary perception of life.

Postmodern philosophy deconstructs life as numerous fragmentations of the consciousness of life. Resorting to the games of language, these fragmented moments are collected together into a certain framework, mirroring a certain miniature of real life, revealing the nature of human life. This mode of constructing post-modern life can be compared to cubism in painting: objects are disintegrated and reassembled in an abstract form instead of traditional observation and depiction from a single fixed angle. Therefore, it generates multiple planes and facets of observed objects, and their

interpenetrating one another creates an ambiguity of interpretation and a sense of the passage of time, as if trying to show each perspective of life and capture every fleeting moment in the long river of time.

*Shunjian* portrays a moment of life assembled by a series of fragments of image. The observer through the window happens to see a man sitting on a chair on the beach. The moment he captures and frames this picture, a multitude of fragments of consciousness, such as the flowing sea wind, the surging sea tide, and the far end linking the sea and the sky, come together into his mind, and are reassembled as a momentary experience of life and death in the physical and psychological time and space.

Here, the postmodern technique of expression is employed to assemble a plot and give it many gradations of imagination. First of all, the observer outside the “frame” clips and pastes the framed character at the novel’s beginning and end, which constitutes an echo structure for the start and the finish:

He is sitting alone on the beach, with his back towards the sea. The wind is quite strong. The sky is very bright, without a trace of cloud.<sup>273</sup>

In the distance, on the desolate beach, against the sunlight from the window, there seems to be a man with a towel draped over him, sitting in the chair, with his back towards the sea. With one hand he pushes away the hat over his face, and with the other he picks up a book on the sandy ground. He starts reading.<sup>274</sup>

The two different frames at the same place introduce the character and scene, suggesting that the main plot would be developed around such a structure. Everything here happens at random rather than well-organized in advance, for the man with his back towards the sea only happens to be framed in the observer’s line of vision. At

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<sup>273</sup> Gao Xingjian, “*Shunjian* (A Moment),” in *Today* in Stockholm Sweden, No.1, 1999, 20. Please also refer to *In an Instant* (2004) translated by Mabel Lee. Flamingo: 119-158.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

this moment, the observer's consciousness, as if waves are rising and rolling layers after layers, imagines, creates, assembles, and conceives numerous moments of life. The following frame shows the gradually drowned chair with the rising of the seawater. This reminds readers of the impending fate of the man:

He knows that the sea is rising, to the foot of the chair.<sup>275</sup>

The four feet of the chair have been buried into the undulating seawater. He knows that the sea is still on the rise, but he does not want to move.<sup>276</sup>

The seawater has risen to the bottom of the chair. The chair swings.<sup>277</sup>

The empty chair is floating on the surface of the sea. The light of water is rippling.<sup>278</sup>

On the surface of water, there is no chair, leaving only bubbles.<sup>279</sup>

These different frames clipped from different moments have assembled a new frame of scene, demonstrating the whole process of the rising seawater. Through the rising of the seawater and the sinking of the chair, a theme on life and death has been illustrated in a symbolic way. Here, the process of a man's life and death shows life as a momentary illusion, which implies that life may be seen through in an instant. As if the momentary being of the seawater bubbles, life means no more than the rises and falls in the human sea. However, the metaphor for this moment goes far beyond this moment itself. This may be understood as an allusive way that modernists interpret life and the world and also as human's profound understanding and realization for the phenomenological world. In brief, the transience of all the things refers to trillions of simultaneous processes of all the beings. It follows a common principle: arises, develops, flourishes, declines, dissipates, and returns.

Moreover, the aura of death permeates through the novel by presenting many images about death, such as a boy's "wailing," a "white sheet" fluttering in the wind, the

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 22.

“coffin” covered with “white funeral streamer,” and the “white curtains”, all remind people of thinking of death. For the observer, the shadow of death is shown as the dark sea in his imagination. The sea surges and rises up to drown the man on the chair:

The sea like black satin is spreading down from breakwater. A dead fish is lying on the stretching seawater.<sup>280</sup>

The sea stretches over the stone steps beyond the door, grandiosely, turbulently. It is still on the rise, and will overflow over the threshold.<sup>281</sup>

The sea overflows over the roof, bubbling constantly. Like a drowned dying people, he can't help swallowing water and giving off bubbles like a blocked pipe.<sup>282</sup>

A gray-black object is floating on the undulating waves. As the tide rises and falls, a naked man can be seen lying on a wet mattress that is about to sink.<sup>283</sup>

This pasted scene shows a process of how the seawater spreads, extends, overflows, and finally swallows everything around it. In the objective presentation of literary post-modernity, the character is nearly absent, but the fate of human being is usually implied in certain concrete objects, or in a series of illusory images developed around visible objects. Just as what is implied here, the dark seawater is a symbol of death. It continually rises, surges, rolls, changes, expands, and falls, dominating the world of the sea, manifesting the mood of the sea. Here, the man, an “object” lying on the sinking mattress, alludes to human's fate of the ebb and flow. Man aimlessly drifts in the huge waves in the human sea, but is unable to change the doom of sinking.

In postmodern novels, a clear and coherent storyline running through a complete story is nearly unavailable. Instead, the author only presents events and characters in an objective manner. In *Shunjian*, Gao Xingjian dismantles the real and the imagined into

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 27.

some moments in life and some fragmentations in consciousness, and then reassembles them in a way beyond time and space. In fact, the moments in life and the markings of consciousness represent respectively the aspects of the physical and spiritual life, demonstrating the impermanent nature of human existence. In contrast to the reverence that tradition holds for life, the postmodern fragmentary presentation appears indifferent and cynical. There is however somewhat poignant sadness concealed in the cynicism, just as a sad mood that *Shunjian* conveys to us:

This is an ancient melody, elegant and sorrowful, making people want to cry.<sup>284</sup>

It is still the sad melody, not knowing where it is from.<sup>285</sup>

Wandering—all over the world! Wander—ing—all over the world!<sup>286</sup>

The three different pasted frames play up the same sad mood. It is increasingly heightened, from the classic elegance to the blue mood of wandering around the world. Here, the ancient melody is symbolized as human original desire for passion and finer feelings, but there is nearly nothing whole left in the fragmented postmodern life. What remains is merely a touch of sentiment, a hopeless sorrow. As if the inescapably impending of the ending of the world, humans are full of perplexities with the world but fail to extricate from it. Such a mood alludes to the fate of human's wandering throughout the world, both physically and spiritually. This is rooted in the loss of classic and tradition but has eternally lost the way to return back.

Nevertheless, such a post-modern pessimistic mood can be optimized by a positive outlook. For the same moment in life, one will gain a lively moment if one sees it as a lively being; rather, one will gain a spiritless moment if one sees it as a lifeless being. Though life is flooded with various fragmentations, though life has been away from its motherland, though life is filled with perplexities and sorrows, it still has a hope. This is because life is a permanently changeable being. To condense every bit of

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid. 24.

positive strength in life, the decaying life will be changed and reshaped.

This positive outlook is much similar to the plane that Buddha observes the human world: despite the boundless universe, a moment means an eternity. That is to say, eternity is a relative conception, so it can be deconstructed and can also be condensed, and so it can be a single point and can also be a converged point condensed by numerous points. This reminds me of William Blake's poem *Auguries of Innocence*:

“To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.”<sup>287</sup>

This poem reveals an insight into a relative relationship between all phenomena in the universe: everything is transient in time but interrelated in space. William Blake adopts paradoxical conceptions to reveal a mutually accommodating relationship between the vast and the tiny, the limited and limitless, the impermanent and the eternal. In other words, space can be boundlessly expanded and time can be endlessly calculated, both may be seen as no more than a condensed moment in the restless cosmological space and time. This suggests that life is a dynamically changing process. On the endless and beginningless chain of life, every moment means a condensed point. This point is constantly activated and balanced by the interaction between opposite forces.

In this sense, life should be the condensation of a series of inseparable points rather than the simple assemblance of some isolated static signifiers. This essentially reveals the spiritual problems that modern people have to face at the post-modern stage: what is the meaning of life? What is the self? Postmodernists view the self as a “discursively constructed” identity. This is an excessively twisted “identity” rather

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<sup>287</sup> William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence,” collected in *English Romantic Verse*, introduced and edited by David Wright. Penguin Classics: 1968.

than an autonomous “being.” So this self is “static” rather than “dynamical,” and is “fragmented” rather than “unified.” When the self is deconstructed in this way, what one gains is not to search for the completeness of the self, but to grasp every moment and enjoy this moment.

In this sense, *Shunjian* may be said to be a perfect example to interpret Gao Xingjian’s “without-ism.” In the view of this research, however, Gao’s “without-ism” should be interpreted in a positive manner. In a general sense, without-ism is not an academic theory but a personal attitude towards life. After walking out of various shadows of social life, the author wants a simple but real life so refused to be bound by any ism. For Gao, this is a realization of his personified life so it should be respected.

However, life is far more than this layer of meaning. It can be more positively interpreted and practiced sincerely. In this sense, without-ism suggests a transcendental life, which can go beyond the boundaries caused by various isms and then bring more people together to develop a vigorous and harmonious life.

Yet, for a decayed life, it is not easy at all to find a positive strength to restore its vitality. To our delight, Bachelard’s “poetics of reverie” presents us with a theory to trace a beautiful life. For him, dreaming of childhood in a brave and sincere way can make us feel the strength of innocence. This, to some extent, can be seen as a revolution of human mind, a positive revolution that can reshape our life. In this sense, returning to the origin of life—“the lively moment” is a positive attempt to save the decaying life.

All in all, in order to find a positive strength for life, this moment of life must be given a positive connotation. In other terms, in order to integrate the decaying life, these fragments of life should be condensed rather than be deconstructed, should be pour into vitality rather than be consumed willfully, and should take on a vigorous prosperity rather than a spiritless silence.



Through his novels at different stages, Gao Xingjian conveys his meditations on life, Nature, society and world. This kind of meditations is deep and poetical. Its deepness lies in its all-embracing theme on life, and its poetical disposition lies in its natural and free style in language. The earlier novel collection *Geiwo laoye mai yugan* can be compared to a lyrical poem imbued with the innocence and sincerity of the youth. *Lingshan* fully exhibits the natural sensuousness of mountains and rivers in Nature, composing a complicated poetic work, with both the sophistication of the phenomenal human world and the simplicity of personal detachment. *Yige ren de shengjing* however may be seen as a poetic practice to uncover the absurdness of life, the suffering of life, and the posture of life. This is a tragic poem that can awaken the numbing nerves in the human heart. Therefore, the poetic absurdity and pain preserves a tragically positive force on humane concern. Gao Xingjian holds a view of his own as to the lyrical suffering:

There are manifold levels of lyrical expression. To reach higher levels requires cold detachment. Poetry is concealed in distant gaze. ...A gaze as neutral as possible can endure scrutinizing disasters even trashes of the human world. It also awakens compassion, and treasures and concerns life while evoking pain, hatred, and abhorrence.<sup>288</sup>

For the author, the lyric in pain is a plane of understanding life. The sense of distance caused by a cold and detached observation produces a poetically aesthetic power, which is nearly able to turn bad into good, for it allows all the good and evil, the beautiful and ugly to be worthy of our observing and pondering, to awaken human's pity, concern and sympathy for all the beings. In the "lyrical suffering," one may sense a slight mock and self-mock, which reflects the author's concern for human and human mind. This is because his personal painful experience of life makes him deeply aware that life needs an equal compassion and solicitude, however noble or humble

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<sup>288</sup> Gao Xingjian, "The Case for Literature," collected in *Lingshan*, 537-538. Please also refer to *The Case for Literature* (2006) translated by Mabel Lee. Yale University Press: New Heaven and London, (37).

they are. In this sense, it may be said that only those who have thoroughly understood the suffering of life can selflessly give the deepest sympathy to those who are in difficulty.

To sum up, this research has interpreted Gao's novels in terms of its theme and style of language. Life gives his works a universal theme. The style of "stream of language" makes his language take on a free and natural disposition. His works as a whole present a rich texture of life and flowing gradations of language. This jointly forms a simple aesthetics in complexity and reflects one aspect of a beautiful life. However, life also has its unbearable aspect. The author does not evade its negative aspect. By truly exposing, ruthlessly mocking, bitterly self-mocking, he seeks a literary expression that is true to the truth. His real exposure to the self allows readers to enter the dark side of human mind, where is the root of all mental traumas of human beings. However, the only way to cure it is to uncover and eradicate it. In fact, this reveals a truth of human mind: only bravely exposing its ugliness can its obscured beauty be restored.

In Gao's novels, manifold opposite concepts, such as life and death, male and female, refined and vulgar, beautiful and ugly, poetic and narrative, memory and imagination, pain and pleasure, tranquillity and clamour, mortal and detached, real and illusory etc, constitute a sharp contrast of dual thinking, which forms a tension of psychological conflict and provides the prerequisite for the aesthetics in chaotic thinking. This kind of aesthetics can be seen as a mental plane that the author tries to achieve by language. The last paragraph of chapter 58 in *Lingshan* can serve as a proof:

How is it possible to find a clear and pure language with a ceaseless sound that is larger than a melody, that it transcends the limit of morphology and syntax, without the distinction of subject, predicate and object, that it transcends pronouns and discards logic, only invariably extending, without using images, metaphors, associations, and symbols? Would it be possible to give an entire expression to pain of life and fear of death, distress

and joy, loneliness and consolation, perplexity and expectation, hesitation and resolution, weakness and courage, jealousy and remorse, calmness and impatience and self-confidence, generosity and constraint, kindness and hatred, pity and depress, as well as lack of ambition and placidity, humility and evilness, nobility and viciousness, cruelty and benevolence, enthusiasm and indifference, and aloofness, and admiration, and promiscuousness, and vanity, and greed, as well as scorn and reverence, conceit and doubt, modesty and arrogance, obstinacy and indignation, resentment and shame, surprise and amazement, weariness, muddle-headedness, sudden enlightenment, never-comprehending, however failing to comprehend, as well as just allowing whatever will happen?<sup>289</sup>

This paragraph can be seen as a perfect summary for Gao Xingjian and his novel-writing. On the superficial level, the protagonist tries to find a “clear and pure language,” a kind of language that goes beyond the restrictions of various compulsory rules and regulations on morphemes, phrases and sentences, grammar, pronouns, and logic; but it is still able to realize the narrating function of language and achieve its logical meaning. On the deeper level, his attempt to realize the clear and pure language in the scarcely methodical stringing of words is much the same as his determined rejection for the spiritual shackles imposed by excessively socialized rules and regulations. In other words, what he seeks is to achieve a pure meditations in the chaotic “stream of language,” to attain a freedom and tranquillity in the changes of the human world.

Furthermore, it may be said that Gao Xingjian’s ideal of life is also implied in this paragraph. His evasion to standardized rules of language is just like his escape from stereotyped teachings. By practising a multidimensional way of thinking, he hopes to break through the dogma of life and lead a creative life. This is a state of mind that does not set limits on the heart, thus it is able to freely grow and extend towards all the reachable time and space of life. Accordingly, it may be said that this paragraph serves as a reflection and summary for Gao Xingjian’s literary vision, outlook and

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<sup>289</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Lingshan*, 358-359.

worldview. This is a symbolized posture of life, a condensed passion in this world, a challenge that natural human nature poses against spiritual fetters, and a tireless prospect that a man who has gone through all kinds of hardships and difficulties holds for this life in the human world.

## Conclusion

### 19. The Poetics of Life

Based on what have been discussed in previous chapters, it may be said that Gao Xingjian's works' theme on life and its characteristics of "stream of language" present his novels with the fluidity and perceptibility of desire. This makes his works have a dynamical esthetical affect, which streams through the protagonist's chaotic thinking and cognition on life, the self, the society, the world and the universe. However, such aesthetics means not only a superficial perception but also a deep inspiration. If life is compared to flowing water, then, the restless stream of desire not only shows the vitality of life but also renews the personality of humans. In this sense, life is given a poetical deepness and dynamical beauty. Life is beautiful because of its multidimension, resilience and restlessness. Life is deep because it is just like the immeasurable ocean, permanently presenting its vastness and mystique. Thus, the aesthetics of the chaos in desire forms a special perspective to look into our life.

Here, life symbolized by desire, as an all-embracing topic in the cosmos and an immanent state of being that all the beings are given, forms an assembly of different dimensions of personality. It accommodates all the positive and negative elements in life. However, our life is not static but a process of constantly cultivating its positivity and filtering its negativity. In this sense, those positive feelings and emotions in life should be encouraged and eulogized; instead, those negative moods and sentiments should be abandoned or amended. Such a self-cultivation of life reflects human's tendency towards goodness. It is true that our life is filled with problems and

challenges; however, the beauty of life is shown as its persevering courage in adversity to remove its negativity and nourish its positivity. This is the ultimate goal of this research: to construct a positive poetics for life.

Is such a proposition workable? The common pursuit for a beautiful life makes it not only possible but also feasible. In western culture, life is usually defined based on its natural property or its immanent quality. So the exploration and study on life is more often developed around the freedom and equality of life, which can be seen from its systems and civilization. In this research, life symbolized by “Desire”, on the one hand, embodies its natural endowments and its immanent potentials; on the other hand, the interpretation for such a life is made by fusing it with the myriads things between Heaven and Earth, and so it manifests a chaotic beauty of natural beings, which essentially reveals the plurality of life and the nature of thinking. On the scientific level, “chaos” as a theory shows a similar beauty. The chaos in science seeks to construct a theoretical system that aims at discovering an underlying order in apparently random data. The phenomenon of chaos can be easily found around us, such as the undercurrents of the ocean, the flow of blood through blood vessels, the spreading branches of trees, the expansion of trailing plants etc. All this shows a natural potential that all the beings offer us: life is a beautiful natural progression. Therefore, this research opposes the oppression and distortion for life and advocates a natural and positive development of personality. This in fact reflects western people’s pursuit for an idealistic personality, which shows the vitality and beauty of a natural life.

In Chinese culture, life is essentially constructed on its philosophical and aesthetic levels. The Chinese philosophy reflects a philosophical thought on the cognition and practice of life. Its aesthetic connotation lies in its positive affirmation for human’s existence, its concern for the development of human nature, and its emphasis for the cultivation of human personality. For example, “仁/ren/humanity/benevolence” can be seen as a core conception in Chinese culture:

“仁/ren” in nature means a respect and concern for humans, human nature and human’s life. ... “仁/ren” is to “love people” and is about how to make people achieve, how to cultivate a noble spirit of personality and attain an idealistic plane of life. In this sense, Confucius’s “ren” has a deep relation with artistic aesthetics.<sup>290</sup>

The aim of the “仁/ren” is to influence, to teach, and to cultivate people by exploring the inner world of humans, by developing the noble spirit of personality, and by pursuing an idealistic plane of life. In doing so, people can live a moral life on a very high spiritual level. In this sense, the beauty of “仁/ren” shows the beautiful value and deep connotation of life.

Another aesthetical conception in Chinese culture is “the vital force (气/qi),” which sees personality as an impelling strength that human’s inner disposition produces. This again highlights the immanence of life as a natural being in the Cosmos. Zhang Dainian thinks that “The theory on life is a core of Chinese philosophy...Chinese philosophy pays less attention to the distinction of terminology, so there is no distinction between cosmology and the theory on life in China’s philosophy...most thinkers in China think that the principle of life is the fundamental of the Universe, and the fundamental of the Universe is the criterion of morality.”<sup>291</sup>

In some senses, “the fundamental of the Universe” can be understood as the original Way of Heaven and Earth, which, in the human world, can be seen as the human’s pursuit for a noble personality. As for the origin of the Way and the Virtue, Lao Zi describes it as below in *Dao de jing (The Classics of the Way and Virtue)*:

There is a thing confusedly formed,

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<sup>290</sup> Mao Xuanguo, “Confucius’s Aesthetic Thoughts,” collected in the *The Study on Chinese Aesthetics and Poetics*. Changsha: Hunan shifan daxue, 112.

<sup>291</sup> Zhang Dainian, *Zhongguo zhexue dagang* (A General Survey for Chinese Philosophy). Zhongguo shehui kexue publishing house, 165.

Born before heaven and earth.

Silent and void,

It stands alone and does not change,

Goes round and does not weary.

It is capable of being the mother of Heaven and Earth.<sup>292</sup>

Such a primordial state of chaos can be seen as a chaotic vital force that hasn't separated yet. This is a limitlessly generated entity, the origin of the myriads things, exists in the myriads things, manifested by the transformations of all the myriads things. It may be seen that the Way is the origin of life but the life of all the beings means a process of the development of all the myriad things. This is different from the philosophy of dualism in Western culture, which is generally based on the division between the matter and the mind, and between the subject and the object. Yet, Chinese philosophy has no such a clear distinction between subject and object, and between the matter and the mind. Instead, it more often sees things and events as one integrated mass of the myriads things to understand and comprehend.

Then, how is the chaos understood? In brief, where there is life, there is the phenomenon of chaos. It reflects a natural state of being, embodying a significant mode of constitution in the Universe and a possible laws of cognition. Its unpredictability might lead to uncertainty, but at the same time stores immeasurable creativity. Its immeasurability manifests a natural property of life, namely, it can create human hope and cognition in constantly changing disorders. A human has a faculty of thinking, is able to organize a train of thought from multitudinous thinking, thus is capable of acquiring knowledge and understand and realize the truth of cognition. Thus, the infinite potential to perceive, think and realize is the most beautiful aptitude that life is given.

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<sup>292</sup> LAO TZU, *TAO TE CHING* (1963). Penguin Classics: 82. Translated with an introduction by D.C.LAU

However, the beauty of personality means more than an immanent attribute and a socialized cultivation. Our life is preessentially manifested as a natural progression of the biological workings of the brain. The pioneer of neuro-aesthetics, Semir Zeki, tries to explain the greatness of great art works as an embodiment of biological principles of the brain. The brain's working can be compared to a chain of interdependent sensory mechanism. The continuity of consciousness of life enables tracing the origin of every moment of thinking. Thus the successive nature of the consciousness brings about the perceptibility of momentary change of human mind, which can be ultimately traced back to the workings of human mind at the subtlest level. Thus life means a restless stream of consciousness. The fluidity of the desire suggests the continuum of consciousness and shows the dynamical changes of human mind and its potential beauty.

Looking at Gao Xingjian's novels on its entity, one can sense a stream of desire streaming through the protagonist's chaotic thinking, with an impelling force from a life in crises. Three aspects below would be undertaken to interpret this point of view. Seen from literary affects, lyric poetry, novel and drama respectively generate three types of aesthetic affects. Lyric poetry creates a sense of emptiness and timelessness known as "Kenosis." "Kairosis" is the affect that novel generates by integrating its characters with time. The climax of drama, however, marks the completion of the hero's dramatic action, and so the affect it produces is named as "catharsis."<sup>293</sup>

The aesthetic affects, here, present different ways to deal with characters' feelings and emotions in the forms of lyric poem, novel and drama. At aesthetic level this can be understood as the beauty of literature. At literary level this can be seen as an aesthetic gratification that literary works creates for readers. Thus, the beauty of literature embodies the condensation and sublimation of human's feelings and emotions, which

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<sup>293</sup> Catharsis (Katharsis) in Greek means purification. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, adopts this word to describe a peculiar tragic pleasure, the feeling of being purified in soul. Keith Russell in his PhD thesis ((University of Newcastle, 1990) proposes three literary affects for three genres. Russell states such a theory of literary affects: "As Katharsis is to the Dramatic, so Kenosis is to the Lyric, so Kairosis is to the Epic."



not only conduces to the purification of human mind but also spurs people to make a deep self-examination.

In this sense, literature and aesthetics are interrelated and interdependent in function. This can be evidenced by the three stages of literature proposed by the British novelist James Joyce. The first and simplest stage enunciates in lyrical form purely personal feelings and thoughts of the artist. At the second stage, the novelist seeks to show the reality in narrative form, so what is told is not merely about personal experience of life but also involves the voices of the others. In contrast to the simplicity and purity of the first stage, the second one is wider in form and more complicated in content. When literature progresses into its third stage, drama presents the audience with a highly perfect mode of expression. The artist no longer shows the personality of his own; instead, as the invisible creator behind events, he objectively creates characters, just like God, who only creates and designs the world, leaving his subjects alone to face their fate. Joyce thinks that the last stage requires the character's being exiled from the real society, for this is a world being governed by mean and selfish people.<sup>294</sup>

Based on Joyce's point on the development of literature as well as the aesthetic affects of literature, what follows would make a deeper comprehensive interpretation for Gao Xingjian's novels. In his earlier *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*, woman's desire takes on the innocence and simplicity of lyrical poetry. As the dreamers of life, these woman characters present readers with a sense of dreaminess beyond the reality, not only symbolizing the pure and innocent times in life but also showing the disposition of poetical literature at tender age. Thus, the interpretation for Gao's earlier novels is permeated with an aesthetic affect of "kenosis."

In Gao's novels at the second stage, represented by *Lingshan*, the protagonist fully experiences the spirit of Heaven and Earth by his questing for Lingshan and his

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<sup>294</sup> Gao Jihai, *The History of British Novel* (2000), Kaifeng, Henan University Press, 196. Also, the point was originally from *An Outline History of English Literature* by Elizabeth Booz.

roaming in Nature. The traveller's awaking to the self has been attained through the interactions between him and various others. Thus the constantly changing characters and time and space generates a sense of transcendence traveling in different time and space, hence it creates the "Kairosis" in our heart; at the same time, the author's flowing language reflects his floating mind and detached disposition.

Such a temperament has been replaced by a poetic indifference in *Yige ren de shengjing*. The protagonist at this stage, just as what Joyce points out, is an exiled character in the reality. Thereby, this book may be read as a review to a particular history and a sincere self-examination so it tends to be retrospective and objective. The tragedy caused by history left us a poignant sigh but simultaneously arouses us a deep concern for life. So this makes readers produce a sense of extrication, a sense of thoroughness, and a sense of the ultimate in everything. Of course, in this novel, there is no such a Creator God who can ultimately determine the fate of humans; rather, having walked out of the shadow of history, the protagonist is no longer perplexed by any empty conception and chooses to lead a personified life, though personal but still positive. So he is only the god of his own, and has written a "bible" for a man without isms. This is similar to the ultimate decision made by a tragic hero in drama, and so it has the affect of "catharsis."

The above interpretation tries to observe a man's mental progression on literary and aesthetic levels. By doing so, this study aims to establish a positive poetics for life: life is deep and beautiful despite its trials and tribulations. In other words, it is the ordeal of life that tempered life and raises it to a higher level. In this sense, life can transcend its normal state towards a leap. However, such a leap must go through an intense experience of life. Life without fully experiencing is not beautiful enough; life without deeply thinking is not profound enough. Thus this is a meditative life that rose in time of adversity, which shows the positive posture of a tenacious life. It is the positivity that gives life a connotation that is worth affirmation and praise. Thus life itself is a potential being so it is worth pursuing; or if we recognize this potential, we

have already affirmed its value. Where there is value, there is pursuit.

This sounds to be a self-contradictory conclusion. As we know, the protagonist eventually chose to lead a life without isms. How do we understand this without-ism? Is it meant that one sees the value of life after abandoning all the isms? Or is it meant that the meaning of life lies in an objective and sincere cognition for isms rather than blindly following?

These questions touch upon a topic about how to understand the values of life. First of all, the true value of life must be based on a positive outlook and worldview rather than a blind belief. Alternatively, a meaningful life originates from a discovery for a true life and from the abandonment for a false life. That is to say, life is a progression of constantly amending the cognition of life. So the true and the false are not absolute conceptions but mutually dependant, this is because all the beings are dynamically developing and transforming, so we don't have one thing that permanently stops at a certain moment; rather, it restlessly goes to the next moment.

Therefore this action that the protagonist rejected isms shows an attitude towards life rather than isms as pure conceptions. In other words, a right outlook can lead people to rightly practicing isms instead of being perplexed by isms. When isms become the fetter of human mind, it is hard to imagine that people can feel the meaning of life. On the contrary, when walking out of the shadow of obsessions with isms, one instead sees the light from the emancipated life. In this sense, life can obtain its value only when it enters into the pursuit for the correct path, which may be seen as a level of life or an ideal for personality rather than a blind following for any isms in life.

Then, what does this correct pursuit of life mean? How is such a state cultivated? One might see a light through Wang Guowei's interpretation for the three pursuits in

life in *Renjian ci hua* (Notes and Comments on Ci Poetry in the Human World),<sup>295</sup> a seminal critique of late Qing Dynasty on Chinese *ci* poetry.

Wang Guowei's "three pursuits" refers to the "three levels or planes" (*Three Jingjie/三境界*) in life. As to what is "plane" or "level," Ma Zhengping gives a sensible definition as follows: it is "a feeling, atmosphere, a sentiment, a space of heart, a sense perception, a height of art, a height of spirit, a free state of human life and experience."<sup>296</sup> Seen from this definition, life has transcended its physical existence and been given an extremely high spiritual connotation. When life is seen as the understanding and realization at psychological levels, it points to a deep subject relating to "the subtleties of life." In this sense, Gao Xingjian's three stages on life exactly correspond with Wang Guowei's three planes of life. Wang's notes and comments on *Ci* poems can be used as a psychological interpretation for human's universal pursuit of life.

Wang Guowei first makes a mental interpretation for young dreamers by the two verses of *ci* poetry from Yan Shu, a *ci* writer of Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127):

Last night the west wind withered the green trees,  
Alone I ascend the high mansion  
To watch to the end of the world. <sup>297</sup>

For Wang Guowei, throughout the ages all those who have accomplished great events

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<sup>295</sup> Wang Guowei (1877-1927), an outstanding Chinese scholar in terms of literature, aesthetics, historiography, philosophy, as well as archeology etc. His distinguished aesthetic thought is that he combines western aesthetics with Chinese classical aesthetics, and then forms his own unique system of aesthetic thought. His theory on "Jingjie" (境界/plane or level) may be said to be the core of his aesthetic thought.

<sup>296</sup> Ma Zhengping, *Shengming de kongjian/The Space of Life* (2000), Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 40-41. Also, Please refer to Jian Shenyu's "The analysis of the "Geist" connotation in Wang Guowei's comments on "Jingjie"—Interpretations from viewpoints of "Human studies" by Wilhelm Dilthey". <http://www.xslx.com/html/zlsh/mxll/2005-05-12-18733.htm>

<sup>297</sup> Yan Shu (晏殊) is an influential *ci* poetry writer in Northern Song Dynasty. The two lines are out of his *cipai* (names of the tunes to which *ci* poems are composed) "*Dielianhua/蝶恋花*," collected in *Three-hundred Song Ci Poems* (1999), compiled by Yin Wensheng, Zhao Naizeng, and Lu Zhu. Beijing: Xueyuan, 21. Please refer to 许渊冲/Xu Yuancong's translation in *300 Song Lyrics* (1996). Hunan chubanshe: 76-77.

and been in pursuit of great learning must have undergone three kinds of Jing-jie (planes/levels/states). The first state can be seen from above quoted *ci* lines: a person with aspiration in the heart is always farsighted and dauntless. Young people always aspire to stand high and see far. To young dreamers, life should have an ideal, for only ideal can make people not to fear the chill of the west wind and the loneliness of alone ascending high. For this explorer in the poem, there is no dream that is impossible to be realized, so that he is ambitious that his sight is able to reach the remotest end of the earth.

This aspiration for life reminds us of the young girls who dare bravely dream of life in Gao's earlier *Geiwo laoye mai yugan*. They pursue the true and the pure in the world rather than the false and the pretentious, they positively dream of life rather than blindly follow the trends, and they believe that the world is open and spacious, and that true love and friendship are available. It is such a sincere belief in life that gives them a sustainable courage to explore the ultimate meaning of life. In this sense, it may be said that humans are inborn to have a tendency towards the good and the beautiful and an impulse to transform the world. In brief, human personality is a potential being that can be developed.

On a deeper level, these lines suggest an ideal of personality in Chinese culture. "Personality" serves as a general term for right outlook, values, morality, knowledge and practice. The realization of personality may be seen as a condensation of exterior knowledge and interior self-examination. This is a process of self-cultivation that must be based on a lofty aspiration. So to have aspiration is only the first step in life.

A person who has aspiration has a tendency towards the pursuit for "trueness," "kindness," and "beauty." But this tendency is not equivalent to aspiration but a psychological impulse. So the real aspiration means to transform the impulse into a rational pursuit for knowledge

and establish the confidence and perseverance to seek the truth of all the things.<sup>298</sup>

It can be seen that the aspiration of life has three stages of development: it has a tendency towards goodness; it is from a psychological impulse; it can be transformed into a rational pursuit for “truness,” “kindness,” and “beauty”. However, before this impuse develops into a rational action, they remain to be a group of young people who indulge themselves in the discussions of life. This state of mind exactly serves as a good manifestation of Gao’s protagonist’s initial pursuit in life. Nonetheless, in the elderly’s view, the young people’s high goal is no more than a sentimental pose, as can be evidenced by the *ci* lines from Xin Qiji, a *ci* writer of Northern Song Dynasty:

The young do not know what is sorrowful,  
Only love ascending the tall mansion.  
Only love ascending the tall mansion,  
In order to compose new poems they pretend to be sorrowful.<sup>299</sup>

As interpreted previously, the young are innocent and dauntless so they dare ascend the high mansion, dare dream about the world, and dare eloquently discuss life. There are two totally opposite views for this point. In the poet’s view in this *Ci*, the young only know the magnificence of “standing high” and “watching far” but lack a real and deep experience of life. So life is not as beautiful as what they imagine but rather conceals many unexpected sorrows. In other words, a true life cannot be composed only by words because its complication is far beyond description.

The poet’s view sounds quite sensible but not absolute. In the view of this research, however, this spirit of youth represents the most brilliant attributes in human’s life so

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<sup>298</sup> Chen Jin, *Mao Zedong de Wenhua Xingge* (Mao Zedong’s Cultural Personality) (1991), Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian publishing house, 17.

<sup>299</sup> Xin Qiji is an outstanding patriotic *ci* composer in Southern Song Dynasty. Together with Su Shi, another distinguished composer in Northern Song Dynasty, they are jointly honored as the representative of the powerful and free school of *ci* writing as opposed to the traditional subtle and concise school. Here, the two verses are out of his *cipai* “Choumuer/丑奴儿: *Shu boshan dao zhong bi*” in *Three-hundred Song Ci Poems* (1999), 208.

should be encouraged but needs to be properly guided. On the one hand, without proper guidance this enthusiasm easily goes to extreme or goes astray; on the other hand, absolute restriction is not desirable because it easily results in the lack of vitality, the loss of initiative, and the absence of creativity.

This is one of the reasons that people easily get frustrated when life becomes spiritless. So a meaningful life must overflow with youthful spirit and unremitting efforts. In short, life is motivated by dream but fulfilled by action. This means a process loaded with difficulties and efforts. This is the second plane in life. Wang Guowei interpretes it as an indomitable spirit to face difficulty by means of Liu Yong's *ci*, another famous *ci* composer of Northern Song Dynasty.

I find my gown growing large,  
But regretful I never feel,  
For thee, it is worth while growing emaciated.<sup>300</sup>

The composer might originally intend to express his steadfast loyalty to a person. Because “thee” is my dream, so “I” is willing to strive for this dream, and never feels regretful though “I” is getting thinner and weaker day after day. This shows the poet's indomitable courage to fight for his beloved person, which is in essence entirely the same as an idealist's persevering pursuit for his dream. In the vicissitudes of life, how could we survive various difficult situations without this persevering spirit?

This survival means a self-awakening after spiritual ordeals. This, in *Lingshan*, is shown as the protagonist's quest for Lingshan, a symbol of the place that her spirit can seek a refuge. In order to search after and reach this destination, the traveler roams through ten thousand of miles, in spite of the hardship of the long journey.

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<sup>300</sup> Liu Yong (柳永) is a *ci* composer in Northern Song Dynasty. The two lines are out of his *cipai* “Fengqiwu/凤栖梧,” collected in *Three-hundred Song Ci Poems* (1999), 15. Please refer to 许渊冲/Xu Yuanchong's translation in *300 Song Lyrics* (1996). Hunan chubanshe: 28-31.

It may be said that this perseverance is an embodiment of the strength of will. According to Chinese culture, the strength of will originates from “a noble spirit in the mind” or “a moral courage from a humane person,” and forms a vigorous strength condensed by the will of life.

Will...is always a vivid, bright, and lively being. It originates from an impulse but raises the natural physical desire to a higher spontaneous rational tendency. This impulse, by going through the temperament and condensation of will, can be realized in more reasonable, more concentrated, and stronger ways.<sup>301</sup>

Nonetheless, such perseverance does not necessarily meet with an expected result. This is much like what one can sense from the lines of the woman *ci* poet Li Qingzhao:

I seek after and after,  
Alone and lonely,  
I am getting gloomy, desolate and dreary.<sup>302</sup>

This poem vividly depicts the poet's sentimental moods, which have been heightened by a lonely and disappointed state of mind after a long search. This is the consequence of the protagonist's long quest for Lingshan: Lingshan is pursuable but unattainable. It seems to us that the reality always runs counter to ideal, only leading to much sadness and puzzlement after the disillusionment of dream. Would it be the truth that life has no dream at all? Or did the explorer travel towards a wrong direction?

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<sup>301</sup> Chen Jin, *Mao Zedong de Wenhua Xingge* (Mao Zedong's Cultural Personality) (1991), Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian, 57.

<sup>302</sup> Li Qingzhao (李清照) is the most prominent woman *ci* poem composer in China's history, a representative of the traditional subtle and concise school in Song *ci* poetry. The lines quoted here are out of her *cipai* “Shengshengman/声声慢,” collected in *Three-hundred Song Ci Poems* (1999), 130. Please refer to 许渊冲/Xu Yuanchong's translation in *300 Song Lyrics* (1996). Hunan chubanshe: 330-331.



The questions suggest the protagonist's self-examination and self-retrospection after having fully experienced life, reflecting his perplexity for life and predicting his choice after awakening from his obsession with dreams. Gao Xingjian's answer to them has been indicated in *Lingshan* and *Yige ren de shengjing*. The awakening to the self means a deeper insight into the self. This doesn't mean that people shouldn't have dream or ideal; instead, it is meant that a desirable way is to bring the dream or ideal into a right direction. In other terms, properly handling the ideal in life can lead to a successful life. Then, what is the right way towards the right road?

In this research's view, the correct path is a right attitude towards life: to fulfill this ideal but not get obsessed with its result. For Wang Guowei, this is the third plane in life: a transcendence of life based on previous two planes:

In the throng I seek her thousands of times in vain,  
When the moment I turn my head,  
She is there where lantern light is dimly shed.<sup>303</sup>

Here, Xin Qiji's *ci* may be said to be incomparably appropriate for this situation. One word can be employed to articulate the last level in life: enlightenment. The dream in life is just like the beautiful "her" in the throng; although the pursuer has glanced back thousands of times to look for her, she is unavailable yet. Nevertheless, at the moment that he turns his head, he sees that she is right there, standing quietly under the light that is fading.

This reflects an utterly helpless paradox in life: it is often unobtainable if one sedulously strives for something. Instead, it has come to you all of a sudden while you nearly forget this obsessive pursuit. This is exactly how the witticism of sudden

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<sup>303</sup> Xin Qiji, the two verses quoted are out of his *cipai* "Qingyuan/青玉案: Yuanxi," in *Three-hundred Song Ci Poems* (1999), 195. Please refer to 许渊冲/Xu Yuanchong's translation in *300 Song Lyrics* (1996). Hunan chubanshe: 424-425.

enlightenment from Chan or Zen is attained. This power of enlightenment manifests the wisdom of thinking. Wang Guowei sees it as the highest plane that humans seek to attain. In other terms, one achieves while one has abandoned all that one strives to grasp, and a new life comes to us at the moment that all false and illusive ideas become disillusioned.

When all the obsessions have changed into fallen dusts, the dreamer fond of ascending high and watching far has gone through all kinds of ordeals of pursuing dream, so he is no longer in mood for discussing and justifying such notions as “dream,” “pursuit,” “the self”. In brief, when obsessions absent, his dreams come true. This is much the same as the protagonist’s final choice in *Yigeren de shengjing*: when he has no dream any longer, no longer pursuing isms, and has no more interest to argue and justify whatever, he attains a state of being that he is satisfied: a return to a simple but positive life: he fully enjoys the sunlight in autumn and values every moment in life.

Another two verses of *ci* from Xin Qiji can vividly and incisively demonstrate this state of mind: the disappointment and solitude of a man who has seen through rolling red dusts:

Now I thoroughly experienced what is sorrow,  
Just let it be the moment I want to say.  
Just let it be the moment I want to say,  
But say: “what a cool nice fall!”<sup>304</sup>

The poet’s lines reveal the truth of life. A true life must be a life that has been deeply experienced rather than a purely categorized or conceptualized life. A life without personal experience may be a well-designed dream but lack the rich content and deep

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<sup>304</sup> Xin Qiji, the two verses quoted are out of his *qipai* “Choumuer: *Shu boshan dao zhong bi*,” in *Three-hundred Song Ci Poems* (1999), 208.

texture of life. In other words, without thoroughly experiencing the joys and sorrows in life, one's life is a limited or biased life, because a full life is beyond description and utterance. Just like the poet here, when his life has no longer been perplexed by some empty conceptions, he has also lost the interest to eloquently argue life but would rather speak of the cool nice fall! This is the third subtle plane in life: it is perceivable but unutterable.

The above-interpreted three planes in life show human's different pursuits and comprehension on life at different stages: dreaming—awakening—enlightening. This progression, by reading Gao Xingjian's novels at three stages, can be interpreted as three tendencies for human personality: the distorted personality as a consequence of excessively rationalized constructions, the self-awakening under the positive influence of the culture with natural intelligence, as well as the re-construction of a vigorous and creative personality at contemporary society.

The three transmutation of human personality embodies at least the following points. Firstly, life is a whole dynamic being rather than an isolated pure conception. Secondly, life means a positive progression of mutual restriction and mutual promotion between its natural and social properties. Thirdly, life means a deeply psychological cognition after philosophical meditations over realistic life.

Seen from the previous interpretations at diverse levels, it may be said that life is a multi-dimensional lively being. On a general level, life is dynamic, positive, and profound, which gives life a potential strength that can overcome difficulties, break through fetters, and prevent human personality from being damaged or ruined. On a deeper level, life refers to the inner attributes that can promote life to a higher level, a spiritual level that transcends its physical being. On a wider level, life can be seen as a universal value, a value that can accommodate differences, that can condense strength, and that can nurture virtue.

Fundamentally, a true life must be worthy of observation and examination from different angles, so a complete life must be a condensed being with diverse qualities. Thus this must be a tempered plural personality, which can effectively filter out those negative feelings and emotions in life, preserve those positive attributes, and develop those potential characters.

To sum up, it may be said that life is an integrated whole being. Every dimension is an inseparable part of life and forms an interrelated and interdependent relation with others. As the theme of this study, life is symbolized by desire and embodied by Gao's woman characters. In the protagonist's life, woman is the mirror that he observes and examines himself. This reflected character has a multi-dimensional personality: such as the simplicity and pureness in childhood, a strong belief in love and friendship, a detached disposition of hermit, the tenacity and resilience in time of adversity, a rebellious spirit against oppression, a persevering pursuit for equality and justice, and an ability to make a deeper self-examination. She represents the condensation of human's various positive endowments. This is a kind of wisdom that transcends rationality, symbolic of sustained virtue and restless strength, therefore it has an ability to salvage the mind and lift up human's spirit.

Nevertheless, in the long history of human beings, such a wisdom that can counterbalance rationality was neglected and biased. Especially in the increasingly competitive modern world, some people more often hold a cynical attitude towards such words as "pureness," "love," "understanding," "selflessness," "giving," "justice" etc. For them, on the one hand, these are no more than some empty conceptions, devoid of rationality, evidences of vulnerability, and naïve ideas contrary to the reality. On the other hand, to them, the real society is rational, practical, grasping, grabbing, plotting, full of tricks, means, and schemes, dominated by male conquer and social manipulation.

This point of view reflects a biased attitude towards life. In other words, this is a topic

about how to effectively balance the relationship between rationality and irrationality, between theory and practice, between ideal and reality. For example, rationality originally reflects human's intelligence and social progress; however, excessive rationality must lead to the rigidity of thinking even stifle new things. Similarly, the theory that fails to be practiced unavoidably falls into empty talks, and the dream divorced from reality easily becomes bubbles.

In this sense, a feasible principle adopted to deal with disparities, conflicts, and contradictions should be based on a mutual understanding and mutual reconciliation. This can be demonstrated by the mutually constructed relationship between Gao's protagonist and his woman characters. In the interactive platform on life, they have commonly got through life and come to a realization of life: life is not isolated so needs other's participation to make it complete.

If rationality is compared to be male and irrationality female, their restless fighting will result in endless contradictions and debates; instead, their mutual communication and cooperation will lead to harmonious co-existence and co-flourishing. In this increasingly rationalized world, woman, as an irrational being, is and will always be a positive force to counterbalance the rationality of the society. Her indispensability is precisely like the permanent truth that Heaven needs Earth, the Sun needs the Moon, the breadth needs the depth, and justice needs brotherhood. Therefore their mutual resistance will break the balance between them but mutual accommodation will conduce to the construction of harmonious human nature.

Modern people live in an interrelated world although they are from different cultural backgrounds. How do people seek a common thing to enhance the mutual communication and preserve their own individuality? This common thing is a kind of common value. Of various values, the most worthy one must be that can link different people together and enable them to love each other and respect each other.

This is a positive attitude towards life. In this research's view, human's pursuit for all positive attributes in life, such as virtue or goodness, including love, friendliness, selflessness, understanding, justice, equality, etc. is of help to construct a positive outlook and a harmonious world.

First of all, virtue or goodness is immanent in our life. It shows the true nature of our existence as a human. When it is full of our life, we can feel and have a beautiful life; rather, when virtue has been overshadowed by the excessively socialized life, we easily get frustrated. However, very fortunately, humans have a tendency towards goodness so we can salvage us from difficult situation by taking many positive actions. More fortunately, humans have an ability to distinguish the true from the false, an ability to cherish honor and discard disgrace, and an ability to love the self and respect others.

However this "goodness" is named, the "mercy" of Buddhists, the "benevolence" of the Rujia, the "virtue" of Taoists, the "brotherhood" of Christianity, or the positive meaning of all isms in the world, if they can jointly lead people to a right path, this will be the ultimate goal for which human beings fight to realize throughout the ages. In other words, when the world suffers various problems, what is the fundamental of all the problems in life? How humans attain the right way to understand human nature should be the right answer.

In this sense, it may be said that the goodness of human, whichever it is termed, "love," "virtue," "brotherhood," or "benevolence," is and will always be seen as the Dao or Way of humans,<sup>305</sup> to maintain and nourish the precious soil of human heart and ensure its sustainable development in this nihilistic but still beautiful life. Thus, it may be said that the beauty and profundity of life exactly lies in its potential for the natural and good thoughts and actions in our life. This kind of quest for human's

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<sup>305</sup> Fu Peirong, "The Development of Human Nature," *Lunyu de zhihui* (The Wisdom of Lunyu) (1993), Taiwan: Huangguan, 90-132. Here, the author defines "the ren (benevolence) of the School of Confucian" as "Dao (Way) of human" or "the right path in life." For him, the "ren" refers to the truth of human. This truth is dynamical, can be developed, and then humans can spontaneously practice it.

natural endowments embodies human's need for the inner dignity of life, and expresses a moral ideal of human beings in the vast time and space of life. All in all, when human's goodness is seen as the origin of humans and the Dao of humans, it is meant that goodness is a supreme aptitude of human beings and it endows humans with the courage and wisdom to confront life and world.

Fundamentally, in the human world, the positive attributes full of humane concerns must be essential sources to construct the wholeness of human personality, for they may bring the fragile human mind out of nihilistic state and give to life a positive meaning. In other words, the activeness in passiveness, the optimism in nihilism, is the dawn of human nature. It would come to rise if we are no longer cynical about life, if we are willing to see it as a belief in life. Just let us believe that, in the universe, there must be some kind of ultimate goodness, which is a kind of power that is able to release our imprisoned self and return to us the splendor of our original human nature.

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