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Artistry and authenticity: Zhao Shuli and his fictional world

Matthews, Josephine Alzbeta, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1991
ARTISTRY AND AUTHENTICITY: ZHAO SHULI AND HIS FICTIONAL WORLD

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Josephine A. Matthews, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University

1991

Dissertation Committee:

Tien-yi Li
Frank F. S. Hsueh
Yen-shuan Lao
Timothy C. Wong

Approved by

Adviser
Department of East Asian Languages
and Literatures
To Yuan

Without whose love, support, and help
this project could not have been completed

and

Ginny

Who grew up in the process
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VITA

July 28, 1947 ....................................................... Born - Somerset, Pennsylvania

1975 ............................................................... B. A., The Ohio State University

1977 ............................................................... M. A., The Ohio State University

1976-1979 ....................................................... Teaching associate, Dept. of East Asian Languages and Literatures, The Ohio State University

1979-1980 ........................................................... English teacher, Beijing University and Qinghua University, Beijing, China

1980-1981 ........................................................... Teaching associate, Dept. of East Asian Languages and Literatures, The Ohio State University


1988-1989 ........................................................... Dissertation research and writing

1988-1989 ........................................................... Lecturer, Chinese Language and Literature, Modern Languages Department, Denison University, Granville, Ohio
PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: East Asian Languages and Literatures

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CHAPTER I

Popular Narrative and the Making of Zhao Shuli

To mid-Twentieth Century Chinese intellectuals preoccupied with defining the pragmatic and moral foundations of fiction (a genre only lately elevated to the ranks of serious literature), the special attraction of Zhao Shuli resided in his signature of authenticity. The praise and analysis lavished upon his works over the decades have all ultimately turned upon what is regarded as the most salient characteristic of his writing: its intrinsic power to convey an impression of physical transport to the environs of the Taihang Mountains of Shanxi province and of direct sensory stimulus by the sights and sounds that reign there. The native reader, sensibilities attuned to the nuances of linguistic rhythm and meaning, continues to discover in Zhao an "ineffable aesthetic" that projects images and sensations into the long-term memory as if they were the remnants of a vivid personal experience.¹

In an intellectual climate infused with the import of literary realism, this perceived attribute of Zhao Shuli's fiction propelled him onto a pedestal as a master of mimesis. For those generations of Americans and Europeans who embraced that concept of aesthetic primacy which made mimesis "the very touchstone of the Western literary enterprise,"² such an accomplishment might have in itself been sufficient to ensure his immortality. But in the context of Chinese literary pragmatism, the import of his mimetic virtuosity rested not exclusively in its intrinsic aesthetic value, but also in the sanction it provided for his affirmation as a writer of profound moral significance. Thus, while the foundation of Zhao's elevation to the level of a virtual cultural icon lay

1

2
In a widespread conviction that his fictional world authentically replicated rural China, an equally important factor was the belief that in authentic replication—both as artistic act and artistic product—lay salutary lessons of moral excellence.

Zhao’s initial apotheosis in 1947 was intimately linked to the conscious attempt on the part of intellectuals to intervene artificially in the natural evolution of the nation’s literary legacy. In consideration of the era’s conceptual immersion in Marxism, the ideological impetus behind their initial evaluation of Zhao, as of other writers, was inevitable. Nonetheless, whether or not they were consciously aware of it, their endorsement had its real origin in popular mandate. Their focus upon him as the embodiment of a nascent literary renaissance signified nothing less than acknowledgment of his sizable readership’s attraction to his nativist rendition of the rural scene. It is, in fact, this very characteristic of his work which sustains to the present time the moral value placed upon his work and his position in the nation’s pantheon of conspicuous literary figures.

The ever greater concentration of attention that China’s writers since the May Fourth Movement had poured into renovating the concept and function of fiction contributed to the animation of the kind of literary presence that Zhao Shuli became. About the connection between Zhao Shuli and their massive literary experiment, we may draw one conclusion: that he merged into the ranks of the elite as a natural outcome of the elite’s deliberate tinkering with the theories of aesthetic principle and purpose. The literary debates of the 1920’s and 1930’s had come to adumbrate a notion of literary validity which centered upon the principle of other-directedness. This was the essence of the “proletarianism” and “popularization” that eventually came to dominate the discussions. Countless writers who conceived themselves obliged to transform the national psyche in the interest of national salvation embraced, at least on the intellectual level, the exigency of expanding the literary spectrum to include the masses as subject and, finally, as audience. One consequence of this unprecedented
theoretical aesthetic "democratization" was the emergence of a fictional genre whose distinguishing characteristic was its portrayal of rural life. Falling under the rubric of xiangtu wenxue throughout the greater portion of the 1920's, it is to be found tucked away under the wide-ranging classification of "proletarian literature" after 1928, the year when Guo Moruo, Cheng Fangwu, and other leftists captured the attention of the nation's writers with their promotion of literary radicalism as a weapon against the reactionary violence of the far right. From Western-style realism and romanticism through to socialist realism, the rise of this genre provided the fertile ground upon which Zhao Shuli built his niche in the literary world. For a sophisticated urban readership (the centripetal point of a culture's literary orbit) that had already learned to thirst after the "exotic" image of the peasant in the pages of fiction discovered in Zhao Shuli a new texture in the sounds and in the sights and in the very visualization itself of the rural fictional world. His stories continued to satisfy their taste for the exotic, but it was an exoticism that was more palpably indigenous.

The literature that arose in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement had flowed from the pens of writers who, in the manner of preceding generations of intellectuals, rejected traditional Chinese fiction for the "vulgarity" to which its popularity testified. Their mission to guide China into modernism translated into such undertakings as erasing fiction's bad reputation and transforming it into a vehicle for dignified intellectual transaction. Their additional ambition to raise the masses up out of benightedness seemed to coincide with this, since, it was thought, imbuing a popular form of entertainment with the substance of enlightenment would effortlessly contribute to universal edification. The inherently contradictory nature of this agenda - rooted in an apparently universal popular reluctance to imbibe of the intellectually difficult products of the cultural elite - was exacerbated by their desire to guard their overt identity as intellectuals. Though this was an unarticulated and perhaps even unconscious agenda, the resulting literary edifice, forged out of imported linguistic and
poetic structures, effectively served as the new marker of intellectualism; for their
Europeanized _baihua_, their Western manner of narration, and, eventually, the arrant
artificiality of socialist realism were incompatible with the common level of education
(or lack thereof) and/or the native sense of aesthetics.

Whatever the literary value accorded to this new literature - from the critical
acclaim conferred upon a Lu Hsun to the scorn heaped upon a Jiang Guangci - its ac­
cessibility was limited to an audience distinguished by a sophisticated level of educa­
tion. The attraction which the sub-category of "rural" literature held for this neces­
sarily mostly urban audience lay in the readers' curiosity about the unknown or their
search for an affirmation of the self: it either brought to them intriguing knowledge of
life in remote places or it harkened back to their own roots in the heart of the coun­
tryside. Particularly in the early _xiangtu wenxue_ period, the latter type of reader
undoubtedly felt an intimate kinship with the writers, who, as virtual exiles from
their homelands, were themselves engaged by the very act of their writing in an exer­
cise of nostalgia or of repudiation."

But educated and urbanized exiles inevitably evolve an outlook very different
from that of the people they left behind and even from that of their former selves. Lu
Hsun articulated this phenomenon in such stories as "My Old Home" and "The New
Year's Sacrifice," in which he expressed his pain at finding a wall of mutual non-un­
derstanding inserted between himself and those of his native village. The ever
diverging experiences of himself as exile and the inhabitants of his memory produced
an alienation that finally became insurmountable: he knew the people of his hometown,
and yet he did not. He was reduced to contrasting his vision of their past selves with
what they had apparently become in his absence, this through the eyes of someone
profoundly saddened by his own estrangement. Whatever their origins, then, both
writers and readers of "rural literature" found themselves on the outside of a myste­
rious world looking in, and thus even nostalgia became exotic.
As is commonly pointed out, Chinese fiction prior to 1919 is almost completely destitute of peasant figures, even though "observation of the rural scene could be traced from Lao Ts' an y u ch'i." Grannie Liu in Hong Lou Meng is a conspicuous exception; and while a number of the heroes in Shuihu zhuan had their origins as peasants, by fleeing to the marsh and becoming infamous, admired bandits they relinquished their peasant identities. This quirk of traditional literature contributed as much to the interest in rural themes and characters in the May Fourth and post-May Fourth period as did the social and political agendas of the era. That is, to focus upon subjects and characters ignored in traditional fiction was to maximize one's distance from the "vulgarity" it represented, as well as to display ideological and social progressiveness and intellectual enlightenment.

Intense interest in non-Chinese literary strains and structures, visions and colorations, complemented this development. It intensified the stimulating newness of this unexplored and unexploited subject matter by presenting it through a wide range of presentational modes and effects. The rural landscape and its inhabitants projected the various hues of their portrayers' perspectives, taking on features assigned them by distant memory or unreferenced observation or intrigued imagination or exigency of agenda. For some, it was a place of underlying eeriness, a stronghold of silence occasionally interrupted by a hint of evil in human affairs, as in "A Stranger's Wife" (Shengren qi 生人妻) by Luo Shu (罗牧). Others were immersed in its ubiquitous barbaric practices, the callousness of its morality, the utter misery of its inhabitants, their spiritual loneliness, their impoverishment, their isolation. This was in contrast to a countryside flooded with the sunshine of childhood discovery and hero worship, as in Wang Luyan's (王鲁彦) poignant vignette of a beloved friend in his "Sorrows of Childhood" (Tongnian de beiai 童年的生活) (in spite of the sadness reflected in the title and the rage and bitterness of the author's framing remarks, an atmosphere of joy permeates the greater part of the work and dominates the impression
or the countryside was a remote place, interminably distant from the city, that harbored people untrammelled by the restrictions of overregulated urban civilization, as Shen Congwen (沈从文) showed in his sketches of noble primitivism among the Miao people as well as in his non-ethnic "Xiao Xiao" (萧萧 ), in which harsh Confucian morality fails to extend into village culture to punish a girl inappropriately pregnant (instead, she contendedly raises the child with her in-laws’ blessing even as she simultaneously cares for her own child-husband. Significantly, Xiao Xiao’s lover, when she suggests running away to town, warns her of the lack of freedom there: “There are rules even for beggars,” he says.) Or the countryside was a piece of unre­lieved suffering, where Nature and human arrogations conspired to force the inhabi­tants into a constant, losing struggle for life and dignity, as in Ye Zi’s (叶紫 ) quasi­naturalistic “Bumper Harvest” (丰收 ). Or it was a place that gave rise to people of extraordinary fortitude, who could overcome cultural terrorism and defeat physical debilitation to rise up and snatch their rights in the most daunting of circum­stances, as Ding Ling depicted in her novella Water (水 ) and Wu Zuxiang (吴组缃) in his short story “Eighteen Hundred Piculs” (一千八百担 ).

The attributes of rurality predicated in these works were often invigorated by visually arresting and emotionally evocative portraiture which rendered many of the works both compelling and fascinating (notwithstanding the dour countenances of Western critics in search of “literary novelty and brilliance”14 ). The very transcendent nature of these attributes heightened the contrast between these interpretations of rural culture and that which unfolds in the fictional world of Zhao Shuli. Indeed, in Zhao’s world, too, can be found these attributes or aspects of them – the atmosphere of immanent menace, the luminous optimism of great expectations, the ingenuous as­sumption of liberty from restraints, the wretchedness inflicted by conventional cru­elties, and even heroic triumph over oppression (though muted to realistic propor­tions) – yet none of these, whether alone or in multiples, comprises the defining
property of the rural scene he created. Zhao's countryside, rather, is a place where
the impulse of community engages the will of the individual.

Though the anthropocentric genre of fiction inevitably reflects the interrela-
tional impingements which characterize human existence, such impingement –
whether positive or negative, welcomed or resented – is a particularly pronounced el-
ement in Zhao's writing. It is the macrocosmic theme that unifies his separately them-
atic fictional pieces into the larger body that comprises his fictional world.

When Zhao first breached the walls of obscurity, his work stood out in conspic-
uous contrariety to recent narrative habits. Many in the literary community were
clearly unprepared for his approach to the art of fiction and initially received his
work with ambivalence or hostility. This Guo Moruo obliquely revealed in an exhorta-
tion to readers not to despise his unadorned simplicity. That readers and other devo-
tees flocked to bookstalls and theatrical adaptations to partake of Zhao's rendition of the
rural theme testifies to the superfluity of such an exhortation, at least in regard to the
non-elite audience. Zhao's audience was a broad-based one, ranging from illiterates in
provincial backreaches, where his works are said to have overturned the ascendancy of
the likes of *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* (七侠五义) and *A Whole Forest of
Jokes* (笑林广记), to sophisticates of burgeoning cosmopolitan environments. But only the devotees of modernist literary endeavours could know or appreciate the
*ostranenie* arising from the contrast between Zhao's vision and that of his predeces-
sors. For the unsophisticates living the real life of the real countryside, Zhao Shuli
was their first in-depth, or only, exposure to the literary legacy of the May Fourth
Movement, and thus this particular "defamiliarizing" effect of a new literary point of
view on top of an old one evaded their aesthetic experience.

Whether or not particular readers found in this kind of defamiliarization
a large measure of his allure, the essential premise of his fictional world – the
individual inevitably engaged for better or worse by the dynamic of the group — was only one element of many which coalesced into an integrated, holistic evocation of the rural cultural milieu. This premise — the macrocosmic theme — could not alone, nor even in tandem with individual themes or motifs (for instance, the stranglehold of superstition upon the peasantry, the institution of arranged marriage, the incompetence of Party cadres, etc.) completely define the fictional world or even account for the significant part of any defamiliarizing effect discerned by readers. The fictional world, rather, was first and foremost one that was sensually discerned, one that, initially, arrested the attention of the reader and then, finally, became fully fleshed out by its means of articulation.

Conspicuously absent in the “Zhao Shuli style” was the grandiloquence of May Fourth — the alien grammar, foreign expressions, convoluted sentences, pretentious references to Western classicism — all replaced by a transparent clarity that flirtatiously approached the edge of audacity in its simplicity. The aura of textuality — the overt ‘writtenness’ that marked the modern narrative — had been supplanted by a congenial chattiness that proclaimed primary affinity to “natural” oral correspondence. Meticulous scenic replication — word-painting that sought an end in itself or strived to generate mood or atmosphere — was replaced by the minimalist sketch. The graphic psychological study that aimed to ventilate socially forbidden emotions was supplanted by the “character,” the Dickensian, Chaplinesque individual who derived local fame from his eccentricities. Indeed, both environmental description and interpretive characterization (as well as the soporific verbosity they courted) had yielded to terse situational imagery — concisely realized visual fragments that insinuated individual or collective character by revealing what captured a person’s attention or the notice of those who viewed him. The belletristic impulse to obliterate fiction’s identity with traditional entertainment — or, as E.M. Forster (p. 26) so colorfully put it, the “audience of shock-heads” — that effected its strategy in such methods as extensive
descriptive layering, sustained self-contemplation, philosophical rumination, internal monologue, plotless profiles, static slice-of-life accounts, unrelieved tragic portrayals, enigmatic revelation of character and setting, etc., at once found itself repudiated by a gleeful and thorough immersion in that much maligned narrative element: the story, replete with the requisite twists and turns of plot and a happy ending.

Long obscured by the elaborate devices of the intellectual repast, story now emerged unrepentant and undisguised, yanked out of belletristic camouflage and displayed as the narrative’s architectonic centerpiece—like pillars and beams left boldly exposed as the architect’s statement of his building’s elemental tie to the earth from which it arose. Earthy, indeed, this writing was, though its earthiness sprang from stylistic irreverence towards “literariness” rather than from things profane. Even in countervailing current tastes in literary refinement, it yet also stood aloof from the pulp entertainment fiction of those such as Zhang Henshui, pushing disdain for gentility to the brink with its unabashed vocal projection of that literary pariah, the itinerant storyteller facing his public with feet firmly planted in the dust of the marketplace.

Conspicuous in its lack of pretention, even overarching in its homeliness, this manner of writing might be conceived of as a deliberate if oblique message of contempt for the literary elite. But whether or not Zhao Shull intended such a critical statement, the physical characteristics of his writing have much greater value as an informing device. In other words, they comprise not merely a style, but a stylistic construct which contributes as much to the fictional world as does his constellation of themes and characterizations.

The most compelling and pronounced manifestation of the role this stylistic construct plays here abides in that which impels (native) readers to portray their reading experience as one of sensory apprehension of locale (i.e., being transported to the Taihang Mountains, etc.). This phenomenon is necessarily divorced from the device
of descriptive detailing, as Zhao is, as a rule, very austere in this regard. His narrative never presses down upon the consciousness with weighty imagistic density such as is found in, for instance, Charles Dickens' evocation of a London fog (Our Mutual Friend, chap. 34). Dickens' description is one capable of universally striking those who partake with a visceral, even oppressive, sensation of material reality. By contrast, Zhao's descriptions, when they occur, are rarefied sketches (the topographical spectacles of Spirit Spring Caves [Lingquandong 灵泉洞] and a lumbering account of the physical aspects of the collective in Sanliwan Village being notable exceptions) or simple suggestions evoked by colorful place names such as Flagpole Courtyard and Sword Hill Field. However vividly impressionistic they are, in fact their effectiveness often stems from a reader's prior access to something which might be characterized as a cultural awareness of regional imagery. Nevertheless, even with a reader's requisite cultural competence fully intact, they necessarily congeal into a descriptive paradigm whose degree of diaphanousness is incompatible with the provocation of a impact as concrete as that attributed to Zhao Shuli.

This concrete impact, then, necessarily originates, and/or consolidates itself, elsewhere, and the place where it must be sought is in a presentational mode that reflects the assumptions composing the regional mindscape. From the outset, the presence of the storyteller mentioned above engenders an imprint of naïveté (in the sense of the kind of "primitivism" reflected in early American art, or in the work of Grandma Moses). Though this inscribed narrator is only occasionally self-assertive, his voice throughout is unmistakable, while the naïveté he projects is not that of himself (at least not necessarily) but rather that of his audience. His presence signals no less than an unexpected kind of exclusivity: given the precincts, physical limitations, and aesthetic demands of oral rendition, his audience clearly is not one ensconsed in chairs in private studies in distant enclaves of metropolitan civilization. Indeed, the fact that his words found their way into print and ended up in a bookshop in Shanghai
did not expand that audience - it only made, and continues to make, the reader a voyeur. It is, in short, an audience comprised of story listeners who congregate in the gathering places of that very backreach about which urban readers sought to inform themselves. That storyteller, even if he chooses not to cater to any hypothetical vulgarity in taste, is nonetheless compelled to relate to the world view of those he presumes to entertain. His audience, in short, imposes the conceptual foundation which informs the fictional world he tells about and which determines the nature of its infrastructure.\textsuperscript{24, 25}

The presence of this inscribed audience and its storyteller bears a number of implications for the text and how it is received. For one thing, it enriches the function of the descriptive sparseness noted above. Instead of being merely a technique employed to accommodate a description-phobic public,\textsuperscript{26} sketchy or virtually non-existent environmental representation is in addition, and far more importantly, a phenomenon integral to the meaning and impact of the narrative: the storyteller rightfully understands the superfluousness of dwelling upon the appearance of topographical and man-made features already intimately known to those whom he addresses. His policy of eliminating material made extraneous by the narratee's life experiences establishes immediately and without contrivance the most elemental aspect of the fictional world: a deeply native point of view. It is a point of view which, from the standpoint of the reader-voyeur, is unamellediated by an intermediary's oratory interpretation. The reader-voyeur receives no coddling through revelatory ruminations by a writer attuned to his sensitivities and body of knowledge. Confronted with a recitation by one who originates from within the universe of the proffered discourse and outside his own, the reader-voyeur becomes like a traveller to a strange land - he must either accept the fact of inherent differences in the practices he witnesses and attempt to relate to them in their context, or he must reject them in all their preposterousness and go home.
Though a traveller may leave in a huff, the world he rejects lives on. In like manner, Zhao Shuli’s fictional world exerted itself upon the national consciousness and thrived within its amorphous ramparts oblivious of those who castigated it as artistically preposterous. The colorful addresses of C.T. Hsia, who characterized “Xiao Erhei Gets Married” and “The Rhymes of Li Youci” as “frauds” and Zhao’s style as “clumsy and clownish” and “utterly incompetent to serve the purposes of narration” (p. 482); and Ding Ling, who once sarcastically remarked that Zhao’s dialogue all originated in the mouth of his “country-bumpkin wife” (see note 15) suggest a basic misapprehension of the narrator’s contribution, by his very presence alone, to the substance of the world he is telling about. For in that language and style that they disparaged are refracted a multiplicity of expectations and preconceptions endowed by the boundaries of cultural experience. In favoring his audience with a language and style appropriate to their sensibilities and sensitivities, comprehension and interest, the storyteller inadvertently amplifies for the reader-voyeur a microcosm of that audience’s pattern of perceptions, their cultural vantage-point, the very universe of their consciousness.

Ding Ling’s remark, especially, is poignantly complimentary in contrast to the insult intended, as it reflects the success with which Zhao rendered the language of the hour in that place where he lived and listened. “There never was an age without a voice—however lacking in eloquence the previous age accuses it of being.” In using this language with all its vivid forms of colloquial speech, Zhao’s storyteller-narrator expresses the social structure which surrounds him and those who have momentarily suspended their daily work to lend him their aesthetic attention. To the reader-voyeur, thrust into a simulacrum of personal attendance upon his words, the role of alien infiltrator upon the scene affords a unique perspective that includes the audience and the evidence of their psychological and cognitive habits. While he remains irretrievably an outsider, it is precisely for this reason that he partakes of a more complicated world than do those to whom the storyteller speaks: the audience gets stories,
but the reader gets the world of the audience besides.\textsuperscript{34}

That people whose level of education placed the world’s literature at their fin­
gertips should bestow their attention upon the man who wrote stories for peasants was
initially grounded in curiosity about rural life on the one hand and, on the other,
a general predilection at the time for novel approaches to the human condition.\textsuperscript{35}
Merely by focussing upon life in a time and place where monumental social and politi­
cal changes were occurring, a work or body of works could be subject to immediate and
intense scrutiny from the reading public. But in further tailoring his narrative to an
implied peasant audience and thereby revealing peasant psychology – the peasant
\textit{Weltanschauung} – Zhao Shuli, from the point of view of the urban reader, went beyond
trafficking in alternative ontologies: he provided a new direction for the pursuit of
aesthetic identification, one that reverted back to the foundation of the social order.\textsuperscript{36}
At a time of national upheaval and self-doubt, such an approach served at once to com­
fort and inspire by bestowing the sanction of the old upon the pursuit of the new.

But at the base of Zhao’s sustained reputation is the density of his fictional
world brought about by the intersection or melding of the world of the inscribed audi­
ence with the world of the stories told to them. That is, Zhao’s portrait of the Chinese
peasantry owes as much to the nuances of his presentational technique as it does to the
singular lineaments of his individual characters. For instance, through this language
and style there emerges a profile of a people who are, among other things, confined to a
horizon unextended by humanistic education (lack of literary references, foreign and
classical terms), unimpressed by the elements and operations of Nature outside of
their intrusion upon human intentions or interests (dearth of attention to the natural
environment), and unconcerned with mitigating personal rationales for individual be­
haviour (little internal monologue). That these traits also permeate the mindscape of
the story world may be extrapolated from the portrayal of language and behaviour
which are consistent with them, for instance dialogue which reflects the wit of native
intelligence as opposed to learned pretensions; unsentimental undertakings to bend Nature to the will of Man (especially in Sanliwan, “Pan Yongfu,” and “Old Quota”); and unsympathetic demands for compliance with the wishes of society or authority.

But that which most overtly illustrates the intimate link between the audience and the characters of the story world—such that it would not be far-fetched to imagine those characters from time to time joining the ranks of the storyteller’s listeners (i.e., when he is telling stories in which they do not appear)—is the deflection of description into a specifically refractive mode. That is, whenever the text acquiesces to the need for descriptive clarification (environmental or otherwise), it most frequently emanates out of the surprised or intrigued or beset consciousness of those characters or of their observers.

For instance, in Changes in Li Village, the opium den in Taiyuan and those who patronize it are described because benighted Tie suo is seeing them for the first time. The landscape in “The Tax Collector” is described because the protagonist, Cui Jiuhai, sees it in an unusual way—through distorting glasses. The landscape of the collective in Sanliwan Village is described because it is different from what it once had been, and a guest who has never seen it before is being treated to a tour. The caves in Spirit Spring Caves receive extensive attention because the protagonists are faced with negotiating them for the first time—living all their lives in the vicinity had not spared them from ignorance of their existence.

In each of these cases, the storyteller undoubtedly calculates that what he describes is as fascinating to his audience as it is to the characters who have taken note, since the members of the audience are as limited in their experience as the characters. More significantly, however, is the fact that part of portraying those characters consists of revealing what they notice. Equally revealing is that which is noticed—or not noticed—about them. “The Marriage of Xiao Erhei” offers an example of this kind of contextual relevance in description: Third Fairy receives very vivid treatment
because her outlandish appearance strikes a chord of cognitive dissonance among those around her. By contrast, her necromantic counterpart, Er Zhuge, a man every bit as interesting in his eccentricities, receives no such visual representation: presumably from the point of view of his fellow villagers, he presents an exterior aspect too common to provoke notice. Here, just as description of familiar things is eschewed in deference to audience nativism, so it submits to the sense of banality possessed by the characters of the story world.

However, although a startling appearance commands shock or awe in the onlooker, such descriptions, unlike those of the picaresque heroes in *The Water Margin*, for instance, transcend self-reflexive sensationalism to visually intimate attitudinal and behavioural traits. Thus, Third Fairy's sartorial and cosmetic excess, while merely a source of laughter to the villagers and probably to the audience as well, reveals to the reader her stunted psychological development. Meng Xiangying's large feet ("The Emancipation of Meng Xiangying") do not merely seize the villagers with their freakish aspect relative to the tradition of femininity, but also indicate by their existence Meng's rebelliousness and spirit of non-conformity. Chen Bingzheng's roughened, battered hands ("The Unglovable Hands") serve not to simply strike the rusticated students with their repulsiveness, but also to represent their owner's unflinching dedication to the ethic of hard physical labor.

The subordination of description to characterization encompasses as well the visualization of material objects and manmade structures. For instance, the detailed description of Ma Duoshou's barricaded living quarters (*Sanliwan*) illustrates his tight-fistedness and desperate fear of social contamination. The minute rendition of the contents of Li Cheng Niang's old black trunk ("The Heirloom") brings to the surface her pathetic attempt to gain and maintain control over her life, at first in the face of persistent poverty, and later in her confrontation with "future shock."
This fastidious channeling of description into the enhancement of character carries the imagination into an illusory realm of magnified bucolic simplicity by beguiling readers into an exaggerated sense of descriptive scarcity.

That is, even when they weave detailed images of inanimate surroundings and objects and proceed directly from the lips of the storyteller to the ears of the inscribed audience (i.e., not emanating from the consciousness of characters, as in the last two examples above), descriptive passages tend to be forgotten as description through their execution of character vivification. This effect may contribute to the notion of “deceptive simplicity” that critics use to characterize Zhao’s works (see note 25).

Thus, description not only defers to a native sense of banality by submitting to suppression or vigorous restraint, but also, in its refractive nature when not suppressed or restrained, points to a deeply abiding interest in the animate human aspect of the environment to the virtual exclusion of its material component – whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, and whether natural or manmade. Furthermore, a marked general lack of attention to the physical attributes of the characters – for even those famed as models of pulchritude fail to incite inventories of their allurements – places the epicenter of interest within the spectrum of human comportment – the activities and outcomes of human enterprise and aspiration.

This apparently inveterate interest in people and their doings determines the nature and shape of the narrative in a number of other ways. One of these is that in spite of the storyteller’s dedication to the recounting of story, his narrative is remarkably devoid of intransitive story elements, that is, actions important in themselves “and not as an indication of this or that character trait.” Intransitive actions, like self-reflexive accounts of physical appearance, appeal through the device of “mechanical thrill,” which emerges out of such operatives as shocking violence, psychological heroic adventures, the intrigue of mystery and detection, the “strangeness for the sake of strangeness and cleverness for the sake of cleverness” that is the
frequent staple of the chuanqi 传奇 tale, dangerous ordeals featuring disasters, fierce animals, ghosts, etc., etc. The whole of Zhao Shuli's fiction yields up two notable instances of dominance of action over character: one is the gruesome mob dismemberment of Li Ruzhen in Changes in Li Village; the other is the entire novel Spirit Spring Caves. In the realm of "redeeming value," however, the former of these can be said to implicate the nature of collective anger and the difficulty of controlling an incensed mob. While the caves of Spirit Spring Caves appear vividly before the reader (even one undeveloped in Chinese cultural competence) because of the fortuitous previous ignorance of the characters involved, even the fact that the treacherous topography unfolds through their eyes is insufficient to overcome the ascendancy of adventure over character depiction. Here, the characters fail to impress the imagination, while the adventures and ordeals they experience etch themselves aggressively in the mind. For this reason, Spirit Spring Caves for the most part contributes little to the substance of Zhao's fictional world.

Although intransitive story elements certainly involve people and their doings, the actions overwhelm and efface personalities, making the actors mere surrogates, plasticized or replaceable. Instead of satisfying the impulse to hear about people, they simply serve to frustrate it. In Zhao's fictional world, actions, like descriptions, become vitally interesting only because they contribute to the portrayal of people. With the conventional intransitive progenitors of story excised, that which fuels the onset and continuation of story and generates suspense and curiosity are the actions of people responding to the demands and conventions of daily existence. Even when the forces of war and vastly sweeping political change intrude, people retain their ascendancy over event through the depiction of their attempt to maintain a semblance of ordinary life.

This focus upon people and their doings within the context of ordinary life - a focus that bespeaks the imbricate relationship of the inscribed audience and the inhabitants of the story world - echoes that basic human obsession with one's neighbor which
expresses itself commonly in the institution of gossip. The impact of such compulsive curiosity about others extends even to the shape of narrative, affecting it structurally in major and minor ways. For instance, besides the excision of intransitive event, the "storyish" concrete ending becomes essential to the narrative's integrity. It is integral not because the conventions of storytelling make it so, but because the primary interest in people that dominates the mindscape of the fictional world demands it. Just as the consumer of gossip goads his informant until he yields up the last ounce of information, so the inscribed audience here—which is as much a component of the fictional world as are the characters, who may occasionally join it—retains the storyteller until he tells all. Thus, rather than the author having "sacrificed some artistry for the sake of satisfying the masses' ingrained expectation for complete story," the concrete ending reflects the temperament of those inhabiting the fictional world in their craving to know concretely the final fate of people in whom they have invested much interest. Here, the implementation of the inferential ending (one which merely implies the outcome) would be the true representative of artistic sacrifice through its violation of the fictional world's psychological foundation.

The gossip factor insinuates itself down into even the smallest structural component, transforming banality, which frequently falls to cutting-room ruthlessness when it comes to the depiction of pure tangible materiality, into a fountainhead of arresting configurations (i.e., interesting in terms of the fictional world's internal concept): the act of carrying a steaming rice bowl over to the neighbor's for an idle chat; cowherds driving their charges to pasture; the practice of lurking in the fields to guard the crops; winnowing grain by hand and grinding flour with donkey-powered grindstone; sloshing bucketed, hand-carried water in the tedious prosaic process of cooking and cleaning; carting manure to the fields..... These daily or seasonal activities arrest the eye with their movement, claiming the attention of those who have seen them thousands of times with the same mesmerizing power that a pedestrian walking down a
neighborhood street commands the attention of residents who happen to cast their glance out the window at the moment of his passing. The usual, the familiar, the commonly repetitive, retains its ability to fascinate because of its foundation in human behaviour. It also serves as a foil to the unusual, heightening the effect of extraordinariness in contrast to normal life, for the narrative core of story is, of course, the unusual. For this reason, attention paid to common repetitive movement is never wasted attention, never formulaic or poetically mechanical, and always in accordance with the disposition of the fictional world.

A salient example of this arises in a passage in Sanliwen which depicts events after the young village schoolteacher, Fan Lingzhī, realizes in the middle of the night her attraction to the divorced inventor, Yang Yusheng: "At this point in her ruminations, she fortified her sense of courage and went to see Yusheng [whom she knew would still be seated at the accounting desk in the east chamber of the Flagpole Office Compound working over his drawings]. As usual, she checked in with the sentry before entering the compound; Yusheng, as usual, naturally asked, 'Who goes there?' and as usual picked up his gun; she, as usual, identified herself, and, as usual, walked in." (Chap. 27)

It has been suggested that since incessant regularity characterizes the actions involved in entering the office compound, they merely clutter the text, which would benefit from their elimination. The explanation for the existence of this prodigious selection of "as usuals" centers upon the author's acclaimed respect for the masses' affinity for traditional storytelling techniques. The technique here is identified as "When there is something to say, elaborate; when there is nothing to say, truncate" (有话则长,无话则短). It is juxtaposed for contrast with a supposed Western narrative dictum that states, "When there is something to say, incorporate; when there is nothing to say, eliminate" (有话则有,无话则无). In other words, the traditional Chinese narrative concept requires the inclusion of all consequent actions, even those
that do not contribute particularly to the plot, in the interest of maintaining the narrative thread. The unstated but clearly implied assumption is that the Western dictum fosters aesthetic superiority but that Zhao had adhered to the traditional norm in spite of it because the “addition of just a few extra words would cater to the aesthetic sensibilities of his intended audience, so why not go ahead and do it?”

Such an explanation, while rightfully crediting the substantial contribution of “national form” to the “Zhao Shuli style,” also ignores the internal integrity of the narrative. The depiction of Lingzhi’s entry into the office compound does indeed resemble the brief interludes of undialogic linking action that characterize traditional story and drama, but its role is far more elegant than that of a gratuitous device tossed in arbitrarily to conjure up or reinforce a storytelling atmosphere. The justification of its existence—indeed of the structural options offered by the poetics of storytelling—lies in the gossip factor: they of the prying eyes spying upon Lingzhi’s private contemplations are reluctant to relinquish the object of their curiosity when she rises to act upon her decision. The storytelling technique merely provides a means of expressing the impulse to follow the movements—however banal—of someone who has become an object of sustained attention.

Furthermore, the parade of “as usuals,” far from being expendable, is vital to the conveyance of Lingzhi’s boldness within the context of the status quo. During her night of contemplation, nothing has changed in the community; only Lingzhi has changed. The “as usuals” serve both to emphasize her acute awareness of, and to fine-focus audience attention upon, the fact that she is embarking upon something quite unusual: she is about to propose to a man, the irregularity of which act is further heightened by the breach of social class the match will entail (i.e., she is educated, Yusheng is not).

The infusion of this traditional linking device with immanent meaning suggests yet another source of the quiescent density said to mark Zhao’s work. The sentence
incorporating the device (the one overtly stressing routine) expends less than two lines of original text and yet fortifies the existence of the inscribed audience, validates its opinion of the purpose of narrative (to satisfy its curiosity about people), illustrates the strength of the young lady's resolve, and expands upon the premises and conditions of the society being portrayed.

It also exemplifies Zhao's readiness to mold and adapt the conventions, techniques, and structural elements of storytelling into substantive contributors to the basic thematic framework, that is, the pre-thematic conditions which are requisite to the expression of the macrocosmic theme and which lie in the evocation of the central truth about the fictional world, that people are what people think about and notice.

Even the trademark "kai men jianshan" beginning (see notes 32, 33) is consistent with this subordination of form to the central truth. For in spite of its potential to initially divert expectations to other directions because of ancient formulaic associations, such a beginning by definition immediately identifies the narrative's human subject(s) and his or their situation. This in turn denotes an audience whose interest can be captured only by satisfying its desire "to know right away who the story is about and what he is involved in," and which will "lose its patience and withdraw its attention" if this information is delayed by such things as "irrelevant and unrefere
tial scenic description." 47

The way in which Zhao manipulates this type of beginning reflects a paradox in his storytelling style. In starting out with the kai men jianshan beginning - or, alternatively, with the overt injection of the storyteller's persona making chatty preliminary remarks, as in "Registration" - he announces his intention to tell a story in the traditional manner. He then proceeds to bend or break the conventions of the genre he has tacitly announced: he discards introductory couplets, he ignores poetic interludes, he jettisons the formulaically proclaimed "kouye" (口子; re - "If you want to know what happened, read the next chapter" or "come back tomorrow"), he eshews
baroque efflorescence of singular action (e.g., the oral storyteller's consuming of a week of storytelling sessions describing, for instance, how Ying Ying enters a series of doors)," he removes the meatiest constituent of story, that of the "mechanical thrill," he releases numerous characters from the confines of moral polarization, and he imbues his happy endings with doubt. More than being merely the result of a judicious updating of a "worn-out" literary genre, this flouting of convention reflects the interest of the inscribed audience: extravagant showmanship no longer draws them; their motivation in patronizing the storyteller's performance no longer lies in his tacit promise to tell of adventures, larger than life personages, and other amazing things; what they seek is the substance of real life.

Furthermore, it is not merely that the elimination of these traditional storytelling elements - whether through excision or through modification - means the elimination of distraction from that substance: it is that their absence bespeaks the salience of that substance which has pushed them from the stage. In other words, the storyteller offers a substance so dominating in its urgency that it has the power to induce a tradition-bound audience to relinquish its attachment to ingrained entertainment habits. That this substance lies in the objectified depiction of village people like themselves who are inexorably bound to the social context of their tiny communities reflects an audience which has a basic interest in the affairs of others; and that this interest is enough to displace time-honored fundamentals of storytelling shows that they are not merely idly interested, but intensively so.

This audience characteristic in turn provides insight into or even mirrors the thinking of the inhabitants of the story world. As the pattern of the conscious perceptions of the latter shows, they too harbor a concern with the behaviour of others that overshadows other concerns outside of themselves. Not coincidentally, this tendency on their part coincides with the dramatization of a constant tension between the interests of individuals with those of the people around them. The intense interest in people is
one that works in two directions: the observers and the objectifiers of the people in
their environment are themselves equally subject to observation and objectification.
In other words, the people of the fictional world are all infected with an impulse to
mind other people's business, and this is an impulse that intertwines with or develops
into or actually generates that possessive society which embraces them and demands
from them voluntary subordination of their individuality to its collective will.

In spite of the significant departures from the indigenous recipe for narrative,
the similarity between Zhao's style and that of traditional storytelling remains strik-
ing and is a constant source of comment and praise. But this similarity, as much as the
differences, must be seen in the light of a social framework calling up a literary one,
as a logical result of a subject interlocking with a form rather than as the product of
dogmatic devotion to established conventions. Everything the storyteller says - that is,
in addition to his straightforward content - from the idiosyncracy of his language and
reported dialogue to his way of introducing and portraying characters to the structure
of his narrative, even what he doesn't say (the "empty domains"), and in fact his very
presence as well as his very modification of traditional form - all of these contribute
crucially, though often inferentially, to the essence and meaning of the fictional world.
Herein lies the source of the impression of physical transport to the narrative scene:
the reader not merely absorbing a vision through the artful configurations of words,
but feeling a world through its palpable structural components. This effect provides a
particularly salient example of that which the theory of text identity presumes: the
unity of "the peculiar fictional world of a text with the characteristic features of its
literary style." In contradistinction to previous portrayals of the Chinese country-
side, Zhao Shuli's narrational design was in all of its rhetorical parts an artifact of the
world he was telling about.

It was this characteristic of his writing that was the ultimate progenitor of all
the homage paid Zhao Shuli, from the time of his initial apotheosis to the present day,
and, in a perverse way, of the indignities he suffered under the recurring outbreaks of ideological fundamentalism that eventually exacted his life. What he had created was a fictional world so convincing in its reality that its author could not be praised enough for his portrait of the truth—nor could he be condemned enough for the very same attribute. The language and style in which he wrote asseverated the reality of the people and events he wrote about, for through them he invoked an impression of an indigenous narrative whose very nativeness recommended it as an unimpeachable source of truth about the culture from which it proceeded. Though it was a *fictional* indigenousness connected to the fundamental nature of the fictional world, its manifest tie to the character of actual traditional narrative, and its dependence for its effectiveness upon the reflected light therefrom, imparted to his works an aura of legitimacy vis-a-vis the truth about the grassroots foundation of the nation (where narrative was primarily indigenous and originated as a national form).

For readers who sought this truth in an age which unabashedly connected imaginative literature with real life, this "nativistic" approach signified privileged knowledge of an area ordinarily inaccessible because of geographic distance, topographic inhospitality, political upheaval, linguistic idiosyncracy, and sociological introversion (not excluding the caste snobbery of the literary elite). Zhao's stories, resonating with the rhythms of local conceptual and expressive constructs, reflected back upon him as their creator and invested him with the reputation of an insider, intimately informed and implicitly reliable. Especially in his juxtaposition against the obvious outsider quality that marked the voices of his literary confreres, the implication for his personal singularity of character was a palpable one that clamored for attention and thrust him early on into the alembic of his own narrative fabulation. In this way, Zhao Shuli became himself a character of compelling stature as friends, critics, and commentators publicly delineated personal qualities that happily coincided with his tacit insider identity, and those personal qualities became inseparably
tied to the nature of his fictional world and its impact upon the national literary consciousness.
Jia Mingsheng 贾明生，"Zhao Shuli duiyu meiganlu de renshi yuyunyong" 赵树理对于美甘露的认识与运用，Shanxi shiyuan xuebao, 1982, no. 4, pp. 35-40. Jia goes on to say, "Zhao's numerous characters stand vividly before us, their physical forms and vocal emanations striking our senses inevitably with their animate existence. The author did not tell us how beautiful or ugly they are, or how pigheaded or kindhearted, yet as we absorb his words, it is as if we are surveying their features, and we seem to know instinctively the nature of their behaviour. He did not say what kind of a mountain it is, nor did he specify the conformation taken by the waters of Nature, yet upon reading his words, it is as if we have personally arrived in the Taihang Mountain District and can feel how the mountains and waters differ from those of other places and how uniquely beautiful they are." (p. 35) Numerous other critics also subscribe to this notion. See, for instance, Ma Liangchun 马良春，"Shilun Zhao Shuli chuangzuo de minzu fengge" 谈论赵树理创作的民族风格, Huohua, 1963, no. 1. Reprinted in Huang Xiuli 黄学礼, ed., Zhao Shuli yanjiu 赵树理研究资料, Taiyuan, Betyue wenyl chubanshe (北岳文艺出版社), 1985, pp. 240-252 (see p. 243). Yao Yuan 遥远 and Fan Qiuqiu 范秋秋, "Yangelbuzu de guanghui - geju 'Xiao Erhei jiehun' guan hou" 阳谷嘴的光辉 - 歌剧《小二黑结婚》观后, Shannxi ribao, July 9, 1978. Reprinted in Zhao Shuli zhuanji 赵树理专集, ed. by the Fudan University Department of Chinese, Zhao Shuli Research Group, Fujian, Renmin chubanshe, 1981, pp. 355-358 (see p. 357). Wang Xianzhong 王先中, "Zhao Shuli de yuyan fengge" 赵树理的语言风格, Tianjin shiyuan xuebao 天津师院学报, 1982, no. 1, pp. 67-73 (see p. 72).


There is evidence that Zhao's early supporters were initially unconvinced of his literary merit and that his popularity contributed to their unfavorable opinion. Ironically, because of the "popularization" campaign, his popularity forced a reevaluation.

For instance, Mao Dun referred to Zhao's having achieved in his work "a milestone on the way to national form," and Zhou Yang 周扬 cited his work as evidence that Mao Zedong's concept of a people's literature was well on its way to realization. See Mao Dun, "Lun Zhao Shuli de xiaoshuo," in Guo Moruo, et. al., p. 43; and Zhou Yang, "Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo," in Guo Moruo, et. al., p. 15.
This development calls to mind Goethe's observation “that only in decadent ages do artists and poets become self-centered, while in ages of progress the creative mind is always concerned with the outer world.” Noted by Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society*, Palo Alto, Pacific Books, 1961, p. 24. The moral coloration conveyed by the terminology here (i.e., decadance vs progressiveness) obscures the possibility that cycles in which other-directedness in literature comes to the forefront are the outcome of increased numbers and growing sophistication in a society’s population, occurrences in which the social strata below the elite inevitably capture the attention of at least some of the literati. In this regard, we may consider Pu Songling, who by virtue of his having written his *Tales of Liao Zhai* in a highly erudite classical mode reveals his own affinity with the elite (recognition by none other than the eminence poet and critic Wang Shih-chen 王士禛 (1634-1711) confirms Pu’s rightful place among the elite). Yet he did not consider it beneath him to associate his name with the popular genre of fiction, to populate his stories with characters drawn from the lower classes, and even to translate his stories into the vernacular for the benefit of those unable to enjoy them in the classical language. (See Jaroslav Prusek, *Chinese History and Literature: Collection of Studies*, Dordrecht, Holland, D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1970, p. 128)

The 1930’s in particular saw an efflorescence of literature steeped in the prolificacy of rural themes and peasant images. The intensity of interest during that era in the rustic way of life is reflected in the fact that even writers like Mao Dun, Ba Jin, and Zhang Tianyi, bastions of the literary interpretation of urban intellectualism, dipped their fingers into the pool of rural subject matter. See Chen Jihui 陈继来, *Lixing de xiao-zhang: Zhongguo xiangtu xiaoshuo zonglun 理性的消长——中国乡土小说综论 (The Ebb and Flow of Reason: A Comprehensive Discussion of China’s Rural Fiction)*, Henan, Zhongyuan nongmin chubanshe 中原农民出版社, 1989, p. 34.

* Xiangtu wenxue 乡土文学 has referred to the literature of the native place rather than “rural literature,” which is a term too narrow to encompass the full range of its meaning. Coined in 1935 by Lu Hsun to characterize a number of fictional works he had selected for inclusion in the *Zhongguo xin wenxue de xi 中国新文学大系 (a literary anthology covering the years 1917-1926)*, it refers to the depiction of life outside large urban areas and includes works set in villages of varying remoteness as well as in small towns. For the most part the authors of these works are native to the areas they depict, having departed their hometowns during childhood or young adulthood to escape hardship or to seek an education. See Zhao Xiaqiu 赵遐秋 and Zeng Qingrui 曾庆瑞, *Zhongguo xianbei xiaoshuo shi 中国现代小说史 (History of Modern Chinese Fiction)*, Beijing, Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe 中原农民出版社, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 531-534. The term “regional” literature, or “regionalism,” may come closest to the customary meaning of *xiangtu wenxue, except for its greater distance from the connotation of the author’s nativeness.*
Early in 1928, members of the Creation and Sun Societies began vigorously promoting proletarian and revolutionary literature in such articles as Cheng Fangwu’s “Cong wenxue geming dao geming wenxue” (从文学革命到革命文学), Li Chuli’s “Zen yang de jianshe geming wenxue” (怎样地建设革命文学), Jiang Guangci’s “Guanyu geming wenxue” (关于革命文学), Qian Xingcun’s “Siqule de Ah Q shictei” (歧路的阿Q传), etc., thereby igniting the debates that eventually culminated in the formation of the League of Left Wing Writers in 1930. Guo Moruo kicked off this campaign in the lead article of the Jan. 1, 1928 issue of the Creation Monthly, entitled “Yingxiung shu” (英雄树), in which he reveals the movement's origin in righteous vengeance. In it he bitterly decries the bloody put-down of student demonstrators in 1927 by the KMT White Terror and articulates the folly of pursuing passive non-violence in the face of such brutality: “To justify their actions, they say that non-resistance is the way of anarchists and then use the full force of arms to thoroughly eradicate the offenders. Not only do they seek revenge for the smallest provocation, but they add insult to injury by tipping their arrows with poison and reinforcing their tanks with toxic gas.” “Up to now we have been gentlemanly, taking their slings and arrows without so much as lifting a finger in reprisal.... Let us now also take up poison! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is insufficient payback; only a tenfold retaliation will do!” “The literary world can deal with this only by producing a few ruffians itself.” Guo then goes on to stress the element of proletarianism as essential to a successful combative literature. Thus it was that an act of authoritarian violence propelled the literary world into the very arena of aesthetic pragmatism that helped to bring about the perpetrator's demise. (See Huang Xiujing (黄修己), Zhongguo xiaodai wenxue jian shi (中国现代文学简史), Beijing, Zhongguo qing-nian chubanshe, 1984, pp. 173-174; Mei Keang (毛克刚) (Guo Moruo), “Yingxiung shu,” in Chen Shouli (陈寿立), ed., Zhongguo xiaodai wenxue yundang shiliao zhai bian (中国现代文学运动史料摘编), Beijing chubanshe, 1985, vol. 1, pp. 171-172 (excerpts); Ma Liangchun (马良春), et. al., eds., Sanshi xiaodai zuoyi wenyi ziliao xuan bian (三十年代左翼文艺资料选编), Chengdu, Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1983, p. 224.


Zhao Xiaqiu, et. al., p. 533; Chen Jihui, p. 28.


See discussion by Chen Jihui, Lixing de xiao-zheng, pp. 28-32.

Guo Moruo, “Dule Lijiazhuang de bianqian” 读 “李家庄的变迁”, in Zhao Shuli, Li Youcai brehua 赵树理插话, Hong Kong, Hoiyang shuwu, 1947, pp. 77-79. Series: Beifang wencong, ed. by Zhou Erfu. There is other evidence pointing to a less than enchanted attitude on the part of the literary elite towards the writing of Zhao Shuli, for instance, a little-known remark by Ding Ling in which she sarcastically characterized his fictional dialogue as having all originated in the mouth of his “country-bumpkin wife” (see Yang Chun 楊春, “Zhao Shuli neng guoguan 同刘 能国观”, Ming Bao, Aug. 15, 1966). His “first” story and the one for which he continues to be most famous, “Xiao Erhei Gets Married,” met with passive resistance from publishing circles once it arrived for their consideration on the recommendation of General Peng Dehuai. “The Xinhua shudian took the manuscript but let it sit around for a long time without publishing it. Some leaders in the cultural world thought it was a vulgar little story not worth printing” (Gao Jie 高捷, et al., Zhao Shuli zhuan 赵树理传, Taiyuan, Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1982, p. 77). In 1947, one commentator wrote that “Xiao Erhei Gets Married” and “The Rhymes of Li Youcai” had still not elicited the esteem they deserved (Shi Jiyan 史纪言, “Wenyi suibi 文艺随笔”, Wenyi zazhi 文艺杂志, 1947, vol. 3, no. 5. Reprinted in Shanxi Literary and Art Workers’ Federation, ed., Shanxi wenyi shiliao 山西文艺史料, Vol. 3, Taiyuan, Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1961, pp. 174-175). A peculiar silence from the corps of literary critics in regards to his prize-winning 1946 novel, Changes in Li Village, is also particularly striking. It may not be far off mark to speculate a systematic suppression of unfavorable evaluations. Whatever the opinion of the literati, the fact remained that Zhao was extremely popular on the one hand, and his work possessed all the elements appropriate to socialist literature as set forth in Mao Zedong’s 1942 Yanan “Talks” on the other, and public criticism could therefore only serve to contradict the rhetoric on popularization.

Dong Dazhong 董大中, “Zhao Shuli fenqie 赵树理分歧”, Qinshui 秦水, 1981, no. 1, pp. 31-35. Mr. Dong here was undoubtedly inspired in his description of the impact Zhao’s stories had upon the tastes of the local reading populace by Zhao’s own statement of his early ambition. By 1932, he had formulated his conclusions about the efficacy of creative writing for “snatching away the position of feudal culture.” This he felt could be accomplished only by tearing down China’s “literary altar” (文坛), which was “too high for the masses to clamber up to,” and replacing it with the small mat that market vendors spread out on the ground to display their wares, thus, “literary mat” (文摊). That is, the dominance of feudal culture could be weakened and even brought down if progressive works—ones he proposed to write—were to be “crammed into A Whole Forest of Jokes and The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants,” the traditional titles that appeared most frequently upon vendor’s mats (Chen Huangmei, “Xiang Zhao Shuli fengqieang majin” 詩黃梅 “想趙樹理風格和市販”). Lu Hsun discusses A Whole Forest of Jokes in his A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, Foreign Languages Press, p. 384.
Since Zhao's rise to public notice originated in the remote reaches of the Taihang Mountains in the midst of war and revolution, exact readership statistics are notoriously unavailable. Zhou Yang noted in 1946 that "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" sold thirty to forty thousand copies "in the revolutionary base in the Taihang Mountains alone," a statement that has been copiously cited over the decades (Zhou Yang, "Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo," Jiefang ribao, Yenan, Aug. 26, 1946; reprinted in Zhao Shuli zhuanti, pp. 179-191). This represented a phenomenal number for the region. The North China New China Book Store habitually printed only about two thousand copies of the literary works it offered to a population that numbered ten million or so, for the vast majority of the peasantry very seldom bought books. That 20,000 copies of "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" should have been printed up in the first run was very unusual. Yet a month later the publisher found it necessary to put out a second printing, which, as it turned out, was followed by still other printings. The popular demand for the story spread as well to other Liberated (Communist occupied) Areas, and Shandong, Huabei (淮北), Jinsul (晋绥), Jizhong (冀中), among others, published their own editions (Miao Peishi, "'Xiao Erhei jiehun' zai Taihang shan," in Beijing ribao, May 23, 1957). A Xiao Erhei mania had set in: "Especially among the young, it became all the rage to read "Xiao Erhei Gets Married," and fields, homes, and mess halls became the scenes of avid discussion, while young people carried around frayed and dilapidated copies of the story in their pockets" (Gao Jie, et al., p. 77). That the "vulgar little story" should have incited all this activity still does not reflect the true scope of his popularity even in that limited area, for it "was dramatized and put on the stage by the people themselves" (Zhou Yang, "Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo"). That is, at the time larger villages all had little amateur drama troupes that the peasants themselves had organized, and nearly all of them staged their own adaptations of the story (Miao Peishi, "'Xiao Erhei jiehun' zai Taihang shan"); see also Huang Huilin, "Shan hua nongyu yong bu diao - du 'Xiao Erhei jiehun'" in Niandu mingju zhihusheng, 1982, no. 6, pp. 15-17, 27). Thus through the copious musical and operatic varieties that characterize the cultural milieu of rural Shanxi and environs, the virtual ubiquity of Zhao's name was ensured. "As soon as people heard that "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" was going to be staged, they would flock from miles around, and even old ladies came from as far away as ten or twenty li" (Dong Dazhong, Zhao Shuli nianpu, Taiyuan, Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1982, p. 62). From there his fame spread: as Zhang Enhe notes: "It was not only in the Taihang Mountain Base Areas that everyone knew Xiao Erhei and old and young alike discussed and debated Li Youcai; even in the progressive literary world of the KMT areas they attracted wide attention and had great influence." (Zhang Enhe, "Lun Zhao Shuli xiaoshuo chuangzuo de minzu hua de xingzuo", in Beijing shifan daxue xuebao, 1982, no. 3, pp. 35-43. See also Gao Jie, et al., p. 82, which notes the various publishing houses that published "Rhymes of Li Youcai" and its adaptation into a multiple act play. The Zhao Shuli nianpu, pp. 60-62, gives detailed information for both "Xiao Erhei" and "Rhymes.") [Cont. in note 18]
10 [Continuation of note 17]: In Hong Kong his “Xiao Erhei Gets Married” attracted particular attention when the students of the Nanfang xueyuan Department of Theatre presented it as a three-act play; the originally planned three-night run played to sell-out crowds (Huashangbao 华南报, Nov. 7, 1948, p. 4), apparently a surprise, for two weeks later it reopened for another four nights in a second location (Wenhui bao 文汇报, Nov. 16, 1948, p. 1). One report in the Wenhui bao (Nov. 2, 1948) noted that students had taken responsibility for selling more than 1700 tickets for the first run, a number apparently in addition to those sold at advertised commercial outlets. (See also Wenhui bao, Nov. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 1948; Huashangbao, Nov. 4, 1948; Huaguo ribao 華國報, Oct. 31, 1948.) (Hong Kong material provided by Lo Wai-luen 樂為論, at the Second Conference on Zhao Shuli, Taiyuan, Sept. 20–23, 1986.


20 Wu Zuxiang, for instance, in his “Fan Village” (Fanjia pu 樊家鋪), uses the detailing of an inhospitable environment to foreshadow a case of familial hostility that culminates in matricide. It is through the device of detailed descriptive precision reminiscent of the recordings of a diarist confronted for the first time with a striking scene and loathe to omit any detail, that he evokes at the outset an aura of the latent menace of unfamiliarity. Paralleling this menacing unfamiliarity is the relationship of the mother and daughter, which, contrary to expectations, is characterized by hate and consequently intrigues by its unknown ramifications.

21 In 1950, the Hong Kong Daguangming Film Studio (大光明影片公司) made “Xiao Erhei Gets Married” into a movie that, according to critics, failed to present an accurate, authentic picture of the “liberated” countryside. This failure was attributed to the moviemakers’ lack of familiarity with the story’s regional setting and the life of the Chinese peasantry. However, we might well point out that the lack of detailed description in the work was likely equally responsible. See Ji Sheng 季笙, “Xiao Erhei jiehun,” Jinhui ribao 進步報, October 8, 1950.


23 Zhao himself conceded at the beginning of Spirit Spring Caves the difficulty of visualizing the local topography without having had seen it in person. His dedication to greater detailing in description in this particular work has implications for his intended audience.
This audience functions exactly as does the "inscribed reader," a textually embedded entity which, as one of the hallmarks of audience-oriented criticism, is also known as the "encoded reader" or "first-level narratee." S.R. Suleiman (pp. 13-14) notes: "A narratee is defined as the necessary counterpart of a given narrator, that is, the person or figure who receives a narrative. ... An interpretation of the work necessarily takes account of the inscribed reader, as well as of narratees that may be present in the work on other levels, but it treats the inscribed reader as simply one element among other meaning-producing elements in the text (e.g., temporal organization, variations in point of view, system of characters, thematic structures)." (See "Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism," in Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., The Reader in the Text, Princeton, Princeton U. Press, 1980, pp. 3-45.) Of course, since Zhao's implied narrator is an oral storyteller, his texts do not embody an inscribed reader but an inscribed audience.

This is different from the intended reader, which is the reader that an author has in mind as the "consumer" of his work. Zhao Shuli's intended readers were the literate citizens of the countryside, whom he hoped would retell the stories or adapt them for the stage for the benefit of the illiterate masses. (See Zhao Shuli, "Sanliwan xiezuo qianhou" 三里湾写作前后 , in Zhao Shuli wenji 趙樹理文集 , 4 Vols., Beijing, Gongren chubanshe, 1980, Vol. 4, pp. 1481-1492.) Thus Zhao, in addition to an intended reader, projected as well an intended audience, in the literal sense of the word. Even though his intended audience was illiterate, it was qualitatively different from the inscribed audience in that it would not receive the stories first-hand from a professional storyteller but second-hand from a re-teller, who may or may not be professional, or who may simply read the story aloud, or who may rewrite it entirely for dramatic presentation by a troupe of actors. The actual audience who would be the recipients of these second-hand efforts undoubtedly would not receive the effect of the inscribed audience upon the meaning in the original form of the work, since the voice of the original storyteller would be eliminated.

W. Iser, in dilating upon the theory of Erwin Wolff, seems to meld the concepts of inscribed and intended readers. Identifying the intended reader as "the reader which the author had in mind," he goes on to describe it "as a sort of fictional inhabitant of the text," and then freely interchanges the terms "intended reader" and "fictitious reader." In saying that "although the [fictitious reader] is present in the text by way of a large variety of different signals, he is not independent of the other textual perspectives, such as narrator, characters, and plot-line, as far as his function is concerned," Iser is describing the role of what has been identified as the inscribed reader (audience) above. (See Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1978, p. 33.) [Cont. in note 25]
Whatever the term applied to the phenomenon - perhaps the most effective and least confusing is "narratee" - the point is that audience-oriented criticism's notion of a text-internal recipient of the narrative suggests a way of explaining, at least partially, the feeling among native readers of Zhao Shuli that his texts generate a density of meaning far greater than their surface simplicity would seem to allow. See for instance Fang Yuxiao, "Zhao Shuli chuangzuo de xianshi zhuyi tizheng" (Changzhou Shuli zhu yiyi tizheng), gobal xueyao, 1981, no. 4, pp. 79-84 (see p. 81); Huang Xiuji, "Zuo juzhong ren - huiyi Zhao Shuli de yici jianghua" (Zuo juzhong ren - huiyi Zhao Shuli de yici jianghua), Liaoning xueyao, 1981, no. 4, pp. 79-84 (see p. 81).

The inscribed reader is also different from Wayne Booth's "Implied reader," an imaginary ideal reader who shares the author's values and beliefs and would be totally in agreement with the author's "stance" or ideological point of view.

Zhao avowedly wrote for peasant reactors and strove to observe the principles of their aesthetic sense. Not wishing to rely upon sales and distribution figures as a gauge of his success, he even solicited their opinions upon his literary offerings. (See Zhao Shuli, "Sui Xiaxiang ji jigei nongcun duzhe" (Sui Xiaxiang ji jigei nongcun duzhe), Wenxue jibao, June 2, 1963. Reprinted in Zhao Shuli wenji, Vol. 4, pp. 1760-1763.) Commentators and critics thus explain his style as one originating in the accommodation of peasant taste rather than in an impulse to deflate elitism or to retrieve the Chinese language and literature from the forces of foreign domination or to create a meaning-laden literary device. "Another trait of Zhao Shuli's work is its indigenous structural arrangement... The masses like to hear stories with a beginning and an ending. Some novels of "May Fourth" and its aftermath start out with long passages of background or scenery, and it's a long time before the characters appear on the scene. And then there are novels that start out with dialogue so that after reading for a long time one still can't figure out the thread of the story. This is something that just doesn't go over very well with the common folk. So Zhao Shuli deliberately strengthened the sense of story (gushi xing) in his works. He made the primary goal the relation of a story (without ignoring the portrayal of character), and he incorporated the description of setting and scene into the telling of story." (Liu Panxi, "Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo zai wenxueshi shang de yiyi" (Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo zai wenxueshi shang de yiyi), Shandong xueyao, Jan. 1963. Reprinted in Zhao Shuli zhuanyi, 1981, pp. 203-213.)

The critical validity of these statements has to be measured against the extent to which they are founded upon a presumption of the narrator's estrangement from the inscribed audience and, it will be seen, from the fictional world itself. That is, if the remarks were founded upon the recognition of the narrator's role within the world he was telling about, then further elucidation on the part of the critics is called for.
An issue of particular salience to Zhao Shuli were the detrimental effects of linguistic snobbery and insensitivity upon an unsophisticated peasantry disadvantaged by the lack of educational opportunities and varieties of experience. Such effects ranged from ludicrous misunderstandings to the promotion of ignorance and indifference to the virtual unavailability of quality literary representations. In his adventure novel, Spirit Spring Caves, he included a satirical sketch of a KMT officer standing before a gathering of local peasants blustering incomprehensibly in his own language about their “stupidity” in failing to understand him and then proceeding to deliver a speech without benefit of interpretation in spite of their total bewilderment and utter boredom (Lingquandong, ch. 2, in Zhao Shuli wenji, Vol. 2, pp. 657-658). Although this scene does not concern the contrast between intellectual and peasant expression, it serves to illustrate Zhao’s conviction that it was the duty of the communicator to speak (or write) in a fashion compatible with the linguistic competence of the audience and not the duty of the audience to expend extraordinary effort to understand the speaker (or writer).

That most of China’s important literature was inaccessible to the peasantry did not occur to him until his early twenties when he returned to his native village one year from school with the intention of introducing May Fourth literature to his family and friends. He endeavoured to read aloud to his father, and to encourage his father to read for himself, what he felt to be the most significant of literary works, Lu Hsun’s “The True Story of Ah Q.” But his father merely shook his head in bewilderment (Han Yufeng 韩玉峰, et. al., Zhao Shuli de shengping yu chuangzuo 赵树理的生平与创作, Taiyuan, Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1981, p. 13), in spite of the fact that he was an avid reader of novels and opera scripts (Gao Jie, et. al., Zhao Shuli zhuan 赵树理传, Taiyuan, Shanxi renmin chubanshe, p. 18). Here Zhao discovered that the efficacy of communication possessed by the literary language, which he had come to take for granted, was in effect a nightmare of incomprehensibility to those in the village. It was then that he began to reflect upon the question of intended audience and the differing interests and capabilities of varying audiences.

The insidious nature of the language gap became further apparent to him in this early period through his conversations with his friends back home: “Sometimes I would go back home from school and there have conversations with my friends, both those older and those my own age. In these conversations any careless injection of student jargon would immediately elicit their comments, and after suffering their rebukes I became a little wiser. Afterwards, even though I was introducing to them ideas from the intellectual world, I had to think of ways to translate the intellectuals’ terminology into their own language. After some time I grew adept at it” (“Ye suan jingyan” 叶算经验, Renmin ribao, June 26, 1959; reprinted in Zhao Shuli wenji, Vol. 4, pp. 1397-1399).
The casual tone of Zhao's language obscures the meticulous engineering behind its design. His first priority was to create a linguistic vehicle accessible to an extensive, dialectically diverse peasant population without emasculating its power of local evocativeness and rendering it sterile and irrelevant to the intended audience. This entailed the excision of both narrowly local and narrowly elite usages and the judicious incorporation of non-obscure dialect features into a new kind of "literary" language based upon Northern Mandarin, which later became the foundation of present-day putonghua. This means that his dialogue cannot literally and precisely represent the speech of his wife, who, as a native of southeastern Shanxi (Jindongnan), speaks an idiosyncratic variety of Mandarin which is not immediately comprehensible to speakers of other Mandarin dialects unfamiliar with its features. Thus, because of its broad-based foundation, his language does not really represent the actual speech of any one particular area. Rather, it is a homogenized colloquial language subjected to artistic refinement (see Liu Panxi, p. 210; also Li Hejun 李行 林, Guanyu Zhongguo xiandai wenxue 关 于 中国 现代 文 学, Xin wenyi chubanshe, 1956, p. 92), to create a vivid impression of regional oral speech.


Ibid., p. 46.
Speech act theory suggests that characteristics of the narratee may be deduced from the narrative he listens to. This is related to the notion of "register," the speaking style chosen based upon the status of the interlocutor. That "one does not speak the same way in polite company and at a football rally" (Yuen Ren Chao, *Language and Symbolic Systems*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. Press, 1970, p. 127) is only one side of the coin. The other side is that access to only the voice of the speaker even in the absence of background information allows inference about the party spoken to. Utterance of language typical of a football rally would indicate, for instance, that the addressee is not the company president at a formal function; unless, of course, the speaker were deliberately insinuating an insult via the use of inappropriate language.

As Mary Louise Pratt (*Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, Bloomington, Indiana U. Press, 1977) has shown, appropriateness conditions apply to the delivery of narratives just as they apply to ordinary speech situations. In reference to natural narrative (orally delivered, unrehearsed, spontaneous) she says: "the appropriateness conditions for natural narrative require that the speaker tell a complete narrative...and that he orient it adequately with respect to his audience... In sum, speech act theory provides a way of talking about utterances...in terms of the context in which they are made, the intentions, attitudes, and expectations of the participants, the relationships existing between participants, and generally, the unspoken rules and conventions that are understood to be in play when an utterance is made and received" (pp. 85-86, italics added).

While Pratt goes on to discuss speech act theory in relation to whole literary works, it may be usefully applied to that construct within the work composed of the implied narrator and the inscribed audience. In the case of Zhao Shuli, the discourse that emerges out of his storyteller-audience relationship sits in closer proximity to the conditions and style of natural narrative than does the discourse which is usually associated with literary works, especially those of the 20th Century. Within the "teller-character--reflector-character" opposition (referring to the two basic perspectives from which narratives are related: see F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. Press, 1984), Zhao's discourse belongs to the former, while a mark of 20th century fiction is the dominance of the latter. But even within the teller-character category, in which the teller "guarantees that all the information required to understand the story will be made available to the reader as he needs it" (Stanzel, p. 160), it is distinguished by narrative beginnings which are even more "emic" than the average teller-character work. That is, while all works with "emic" beginnings are those "in which all necessary information is placed at the reader's disposal from the very first" (Stanzel, p. 165), one hallmark of the "Zhao Shuli style" is the conspicuously limited and immediate orientation with which each narrative begins (typically referred to *kei men jian shan* 入門覓山). [Cont. in note 33]
[Continuation of note 32]: In this way his beginnings mimic the onset of natural narrative, which, being subject to constraints of time and audience impatience, must be very specific and brief in its delineation of "time, place, persons, and their activity or situation." Even in beginning novels and novellas, the length of which allows and has generated a wide variation in the length and scope of the orientation (Pratt, p. 45, 53), Zhao maintains this particular stylistic trait, thereby emphasizing and enhancing the impression of orality. By pushing his discourse closer to the traits of natural narrative on the oral-literary scale, Zhao creates an inscribed audience which resembles that of a natural narrator, i.e., "defined" and "unexpandable" (see Pratt, p. 119). As such, unlike the actual audience, intended or otherwise, for the work (or body of works) as a whole, it is specific, homogenous, and identifiable.

Contrast this effect with the Persian traveler Rica’s intriguing mistake in thinking the audience of a play to be part of the play, in Montesquieu’s Lettres persanes (1721), noted by Pratt, pp. 189-190.


Hans Robert Jauss notes that “identification ‘upward’ [is not] the only possible direction the aesthetic experience can take, as has been shown by André Jolles’s example of the masked ball. The aesthetic experience of play that teaches us ‘to place next to our life another life, next to our world another world’ leads, in the case of the masked ball, to a preference being accorded to three categories of roles, those of the knight, the shepherd, and the jester. ‘Some of our guests look for what appears to stand above or below society, others for what lies outside it.’ Three important genres of the literary tradition are rooted in these three directions of aesthetic identification, the heroic, the bucolic, and the picaresque. They answer the deep need to be someone else and are therefore superior to the arbitrary disguise in roles that do not lead into a desirable world, a world into which one also cannot take any part of one’s old self.” See Jauss, Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics, Minneapolis, U. of Minnesota Press, 1982, pp. 6-9.

Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuan, p. 344. Huang notes that “The average person always feels that Zhao Shuli is long on narration, short on description.”


Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuo, p. 340. Italics added.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 341

It is apparently Zhao himself who made this contrast. See “Zhengqu xiaoshimin ceng de duzhe” 郑取小说底层的读者, in Wenyibao, vol. 1, no. 1, Sept. 1949. Cited in Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuo, p. 341, note.

Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuo, p. 340.

Ibid, p. 341. It is actually surprising that Huang should offer such an explanation, since he had earlier noted that Zhao “did not obliviously accommodate peasant habits of [aesthetic] appreciation” (p. 147).


Guo Moruo ("Dule Lijiazhuang de biangqian ") praised the absence of these devices as an insightful, improving departure from traditional narrative form. Arguing that they had long lost their popular legitimacy in terms of written fiction, he did not clarify whether or not the oral basis for them remained an integral part of oral storytelling.


Richly metaphoric encomiums represent Zhao’s efforts as not just a depiction or reflection of life, but an object intimately a part of and even sustaining that life it depicts: his “works and characters” are as if “dug up from the deep earth” (Kang Zhuo), his stories like “potatoes” that “give off the aroma of the soil”: though potatoes may be the embodiment of uncouth rusticity, “they are to the people of Shanxi what millet is to the people of Yanan and yams to the elders of eastern Shandong, that is, not dispensable even for a moment” (Niu Yunqing, “Zhao Shuli wenxue shengyasi ti” 赵树理文学生涯回题, Shandong daxue wenxue lunwen jikan 山东大学文学论文集刊, 1981, no. 2, pp. 25–31). Thus it is said that Zhao is the founder of the “Potato School” of literature. Kang Zhuo’s remarks above made at the Conference on Rural Themes for Short Stories, Dalian (Dairen), 1962.

Many references describe an estrangement between writers and those natives whom they presumed to write about. Zhao himself in an early article lamented an uncharitable, even cruel attitude of superiority harbored by intellectuals contemptuous of the local peasants’ poverty and ignorance. Those who, for instance, ridiculed people obliged to eat what others considered fit only for pigs were incapable of relating to them in their plight, let alone helping them to achieve “revolution.” See “Pingfan de canren” 平凡的残忍 (“Common Cruelty”), Huabei wenhua 华北文化, March 1943, vol. 2, no. 3. Written under the penname Wang Jiatu 王甲土. Reprinted in Zhao Shuli wenji 赵树理文集, vol. 4, pp. 1358–1359.

For instance, see Xie Qing 谢清, “Tan xue xi minjian yuyan” 谈学习民间语言, Jiefang ribao 《解放日报》, Yan’an, June 18, 1946. Xie says: “[These writers] essentially write a bookish language into which they frequently insert some popular colloquialisms: a lexical item, a truncated allegorical saying (xiehouyu 歌反语), or a folk rhyme (minyao 民谣). ... They take great pains to collect vocabulary items so that when it comes time to describe something they can use a nice long string of adjectives: hong den dan 红豆蛋, bei sheng sheng 白生生, or hui liu liu 灰溜溜. At first glance it seems as if the writer is extremely familiar with the language of the masses; but these words are often thrown together in a strained, unnatural way and do not represent true popular colloquial language in all of its fluency.” Quoted by Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuan 赵树理评传, p. 278.
CHAPTER II
The Man Who Made the Stories

The fusion of personal qualities with the rustic ambiance of the fictional universe was an enterprise which by accident or design enhanced exponentially Zhao's cachet of authenticity. The documentation of his origins and upbringing, habits and features, dress and comportment, forged a portrait of the writer as peasant, a man whose uncompromised congenital attachment to the culture of the countryside rendered him infinitely qualified to write of it. Here was a man whose appearance defied the expectations of genteel society and advertised a lifetime of estrangement from sophistication. His thin face bore the marks of harsh existence and long-term deprivation with its "mouthful of black teeth" and its sallow, lined complexion. His clothing announced ignorance - or disdain - of sartorial propriety, dressed as he was in rough, military khaki, or, alternatively, in a dilapidated homemade black cotton-padded jacket and tattered felt skull cap, with legs wrapped in puttees, and a large, rough-sewn, square satchel that he made himself draped across his shoulder. He relished unremorsefully the pleasures of the small-bowled, long-stemmed pipe commonly affected by peasants, or, when that failed to satisfy his nicotine craving, he smoked a more ungainly if efficient device which he himself fashioned by hollowing out a potato, stuffing it full of tobacco, and attaching a hollow reed as pipestem. His unconstrained posture of uncouth rusticity indeed once roused the suspicion of a gatekeeper, who, mistaking him for a bum, sought to bar his admission to a conference he was to report on. Yet to this ambulatory study in anti-elegance there regularly flocked the men, women, and children of the countryside, all attracted "as to a magnet" by his charismatic humour and
unexclusive garrulousness. This, after all, was a writer who penned his stories not staidly seated at a "regular" desk, but ingloriously wrapped up in a sleeping bag to stave off winter cold, or shaded under the branches of a tree in the summer, or bent over yoga-style on the kang of his "office" located in a crumbling rustic house, sunlit and wind-pierced where no openings were meant to be, indecorously crammed with agricultural implements and other artifacts of rural life. Here was a man who in the pre-"Yenan Talks" era attended a Taihang District conference on literature and art and stood unperturbed before derisive laughter to defend the aesthetic sensibilities of peasants; who, after becoming a national household word, called himself a "country bumpkin" and claimed no profound knowledge of the cunning of fictional composition; and who later, even as Deputy Chair of the Beijing Municipal Writers' Association, felt no compunction about abandoning a sumptuous Association banquet in mid-event to go sit with his rural compatriots on a long bench outside a tiny Moslem restaurant for a bowl of his favorite rustic food, lao doufu.

If metropolitan comforts and the privileges of officialdom failed to entice him away from simple tastes, it was no wonder, for a country boy, born and bred in the sympathetic embrace of a poor but exuberantly alive peasantry, and attached to a "natural" lifestyle brimming with the joy and happiness it naturally provided, could not lightly relinquish the ingrained habits of 40 years. The very fact that from his pen there flowed the most vivid and moving portrayals of characters from the lower echelons of old rural society, while his upper class characters lacked "depth," was a literary phenomenon that proved the authenticity of his personal experience with the real countryside. He had been a child of the tilled earth and a son of poverty, inured to the demands of the carrying pole and adept before the obstinacy of donkeys and bullocks. He had grown up imbued with the bittersweet experience that virtually defined peasant existence, on the one hand learning the denigrating if exigent art of evading debt collectors - and losing several sisters to a ruthless economy that generated child-selling;
but, on the other hand, spending countless joyous hours in fraternal commerce with the musicians and storytellers of the Yuchi Village Eight Sounds Society. The planting of the fields, the weaving of winnowing fans, the healing arts of folk medicine, the supplication of idols for rain, the practice of necromantic techniques and superstitious rituals, the obligatory extravagance of weddings and funerals, the backbreaking transport of charcoal or manure, the holiday rounds of visiting relatives, the herding of cows to pasture: such were components of Zhao's personal scene, the prime reference points of an inherited perspective, unshared by his literary peers but nonetheless unrepudiated by Zhao upon his ascent into their ranks.

This distinctive profile not only proclaimed his uniqueness in the literary world, it stood out for its sheer audacity in a nation marked by a cultural impulse on the part of intellectuals to distance oneself from the peasantry and to reject association with the commonality. In an ironic twist, what would normally have been a liability became an object of enthusiastic exploitation: the further removed Zhao could be shown to be from the cultural background and formulae of comportment usually associated with literary men, the more authentic he became - and the greater became the cause for his celebrity. The premium placed upon this image, in fact, generated embellishment upon his identity. Throughout the 1940's, articles devoted to him in newspapers and periodicals identified him outright as a "peasant writer" or "rustic writer." The People's Daily published a wood-cut image depicting him in a felt skull cap and black old-style Chinese padded jacket, lips compressed, brows knitted together, a look of worry and woe in his eyes - the image of a peasant weathered by sun, wind, and tribulation. His rise to fame was accompanied by accounts that illustrated the truly marvelous nature of his achievement given his lowly origins as a "bugler" who had also "eked out a living as an extra in old-time operatic theatre." It was even thought that he was the living counterpart of his character, Li Youcai, the celebrated rhymster in the story that bears his name, a myth given...
credence even by the likes of C.T. Hsia. Such fabrications or misapprehensions, such as the case may be, though debunked in 1949, undoubtedly increased the public perception of a salutary distance from the lofty sophistication of the literati and contributed to an image of personal peasantness that has persisted, albeit in tempered form, to this day.

The edifice of proletarian ascendancy that rationalized the political and moral dominance of communist ideology naturally generated value in publicizing the humble origins of a writer whose work appeared to coincide philosophically and formally with the Mao Tsetung line on literature and art. Yet the politico-literary doyens - Zhou Yang and Guo Moruo - never claimed that Zhao Shuli's rise to literary prominence originated in a peasant's hut, although their commentary upon him exuded with the undercurrent of his ready-made rustic image. Zhou Yang in his seminal introduction of 1946, noted, "if there are people who suspect that Zhao Shuli is nothing but a peasant writer whose works and thought descend to the level of 'peasant mentality,' then of course I must say that such is not the case." Yet the very way in which he expressed this sentiment, combined with his failure to dilate upon Zhao's personal background, effectively drew attention to the issue of peasantness and seemed to suggest that if Zhao were such as people suspected, then his merit lay in his having transcended the petty concerns typical of peasants.

For his part, Guo Moruo, though never once identifying Zhao as a peasant, contributed vividly to the rustic imagery that had already accrued to Zhao by pronouncing encomiums upon his living in a "free environment" and remarking upon his figurative resemblance to "a large tree that has grown up in the open country." This tree, he said, "is not like a tall and sumptuous rare species, but like a common pine or juniper or even the qinggang tree (青杠树) used for firewood. It has grown up without restraint, puts on no airs, demands no attention, is natural and unaffected..." and indeed, might be "loathed" by someone "used to the flowers and trees of a courtyard." Guo,
In fact, waxed nearly apologetic in recommending to the reading public Zhao's novel *Changes in Li Village*, as if he were embarrassed to urge attention upon a work which his discussion showed to be lacking in the imprints of gentility.

Both the utilization of and the limitation to suggestive phraseology and rhetorical omission here illustrate that while Zhou Yang and Guo Moruo could not remain indifferent to the advantage of the rustic image Zhao projected, nor could they wisely ignore its precariousness. For whether or not they knew Zhao personally, their own education, experience, and perspicuity would indicate to them the impossibility of an uneducated man manipulating the narrative metaphysic to make an unsophisticated indigenous form (oral storytelling) serve narrative ends that were Western in concept (seen in the dominating influence of the element of character portrayal). Undoubtedly, they were also apprised of his background, which could only have reinforced the conclusions of logic, for Zhao, his outer appearance notwithstanding, was an educated man who in his academic career had demonstrated strength in both the classical and modern realms. Not unusual for the times, his education had been interrupted by the vicissitudes of revolutionary unrest and political machinations, yet the loss of his formal high school affiliation in mid-stream only formally limited his career possibilities (he theoretically would be disqualified to teach higher primary school), not his store of knowledge or capacity or desire for its further pursuit, nor his ingenuity and creativity. Indeed, at the time his "first" story, "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" was published, he had had a history of prolific contribution to various publications that spanned a time period of at least twelve years. Throughout the 1930's and into the 1940's, Zhao had produced a prodigious amount of writing in various forms: poetry, short stories, novellas, novels, plays, essays, criticism, and short sketches. His output for the era could well have been more than double the amount that comprises those works which have defined his public image, that is, those written and published between 1943 and 1964. Though his "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" was the
work that propelled him to national fame, in fact he was popularly recollected and per-
haps even publicly known at the local level long before he had ever conceived of it.33

Thus, insofar as a man who embarks upon the academic track from early child-
hood, pursues education into and beyond the onset of adulthood, enters the teach-
ing profession, and devotes his life to articulating ideas in published forums cannot be
classified among those who gain their living from tilling the soil (the vast majority at
the time being furthermore illiterate or only semi-literate), there are no grounds for
identifying Zhao Shuli as a peasant. Even his family heritage fails in numerous and
major ways to reflect the typical peasant condition.34 That the myth of Zhao Shuli as
peasant should have persisted well beyond his move in 1949 to Beijing to take up offi-
cial duties35 and even well beyond his death, could perhaps be explained in terms of a
well-orchestrated public-relations ploy — i.e., the manufactured image of a propogan-
da machine — except to explain it solely in this way would be to ignore Zhao’s concept of
himself and the very core of his existential philosophy.

As noted earlier, the effectiveness of Zhao’s image as peasant was dependent
upon the fact that it was rare — even unique — in the intellectual world. Those who left
their rural homes to enter the ranks of the intellectual elite were not typically re-
f erred to as peasants, even if they were the first in the history of their agriculture-
dependent families to succeed in the academic endeavour. Indeed, it would have been a
travesty to so refer to them, both in terms of accuracy of identity and in terms of their
own self-concept. That Zhao Shuli should have been treated differently originated in
the fact that in conducting his life he had forged a great chasm between himself and
other intellectuals who also were children of the countryside. That is, unlike them, he
disdained to distance himself from those of his native place who had not enjoyed his ed-
 ucational advantages.

Temperamentally, he was not a man to seek fame and accolades, nor could he
conceive of education as a tool by which to demonstrate superiority before other men.
It was the era of political and social sea-change and the pressure of family expectations which conspired to propel Zhao onto the stage as a national figure. For had he been born into stable, prosperous times, he assuredly would have embraced a simple village life filled with the business of agriculture and the cultural activities of the folk, rather than going the route of the buffeted intellectual. Evidence of his discontent with the intellectual life can be traced back at least to the age of 18, when he was dismissed from a teaching post in a lower primary school, either for refusing to toady to superiors or because he lacked connections among the local gentry. Significantly, this dismissal failed to generate in Zhao a corresponding despondency. Quite the contrary, he returned to Yuchi Village to recapture the peasant lifestyle he had experienced in his boyhood, to work the yielding earth with accustomed tools, and to rejoin his friends for music and conversation at the Eight Sounds Society. In his own words, "I was like a fish that had been returned to the water: my life was restored!"

This emotional attachment to the "peasant lifestyle" emanated, in fact, from the stuff of the childhood dream-web, the product of an idyllic recollection of a two-year period when he had been freed from the constraints of study and thrust into the rhythm and flow of village life. The critical impact that this period made upon his consciousness proceeded not merely from the exceptional observational capacity of youth freshly awakened to the existence of the world and its contents, but also from the fact that the experience comprised a sharp contrast to what he had previously known. During his first ten years of life he had been sheltered within the confines of the family courtyard by a strict, disciplinarian grandfather who, unimpressed with the quality of the local youth, believed that "nothing good would come of learning from those wild children." The grandfather's death in 1916, then, was a particularly significant event in Zhao's life, for it deprived the boy not only of a grandfather but also of a teacher and protector, and young Zhao was obliged to venture beyond the family courtyard to continue his education. His experience in the village private school to which his father sent him
proved to be a traumatic one, for Zhao suddenly found himself reduced from the position of grandfather's treasure to that of the recipient of classic schoolboy cruelty. With no Steerforth to rescue him from the deluge of humiliations his schoolmates heaped upon him, the child's anguish overwhelmed his motivation for learning, and he refused to return to school the following year. It was threats of suicide that ostensibly convinced his father not to press the child into another year at the school, but undoubtedly his acquiescence to this rupture in his son's education was more greatly influenced by a family financial crisis.

Two funerals (those of his grandfather and grandmother) had already made Zhao Shuli the poorest student in the school, no factor of inconsequence in his subjection to peer abuse, and now a drought-induced crop failure further strained the family welfare. If the boy could not study under the circumstances available to him, then, at age 11, he was old enough to help support the family. It was thus that Zhao suddenly "found himself in the company of the peasants. He not only learned of their agricultural chores and learned to weave winnowing fans, he also acquired the peasants' way of thinking, their system of feelings, their language, and their system of aesthetic appreciation, habits, literature and art.... Later, when Zhao Shuli reminisced on his life at home as a farmer between the years 1917-1919, he avidly called it 'the Golden Age.'"

It was with the heightened awareness of youth's freely emerging consciousness that young Zhao entered upon this "Golden Age." This combined with the naive world view generated by the youthful mind - the child's blissful ignorance of the intentions of the world for its inhabitants - to color his chores with the rosy illusions of childhood, just as his cowherds in "Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng" set out upon their daily task with minds full of adventure and games rather than a sense of awesome responsibility. He, like them, could not feel the oppressive burden of duty but rather relished the novelty of a physical labor certainly tempered by stolen hours of carefree play. He
gained, likely, an ingenuous sense of fulfilling manly obligations while simultaneously
delighting in a situation that released him from the tedium of study, separated him
from abusive peers, allowed him to be scholastically irresponsible, and offered him a
whole new colorful world of village culture which he could effortlessly absorb and
enjoy without restraint. From this paradisiacal experience he gained a sense of the
ideal life; and we may regard his entire adulthood as one in which he sought to recap­
ture that sense, to bring about that arcadian dream within the context of the reality
which eventually came to assault his adult perceptions. It was an ideal he felt to be the
birthright of all those who made the rural lands their home.

The very brevity of this agrarian period, in addition to its timing, doubtless
contributed to the tenacity with which its idealization occupied his mind. In 1919,
after only two years of this freedom to wield the tools of the farmer, Zhao set out for
school in Keshan, a scenic retreat ten miles from Yuchi Village, thereby
cementing his experience in memory where it could not be assailed and eroded by the
process of disillusion. From that time on, his presence in the village was limited to the
sojourns of a student on vacation, the returns of a young gentleman for family transi­
tions (marriage and funerals), the retreat of a temporarily jobless teacher ejected
from his post, the refuge of a reform-minded intellectual eluding the intolerance of the
politically powerful. Having embarked upon the intellectual life, he could never per­
manently return to the village nor exclusively embrace the life of the peasant, for as
an educated man, he now had “expectations” – i.e., the responsibility to exert an im­
pact upon the world so as to increase the comfort and status of his family.

These expectations were ones that he resisted and resented, and in the final
analysis must be implicated in the discontinuance of his education. His years of formal
schooling were marked by a striking adherence to the habits and friendships he had
formed in his village, particularly during his two years as apprentice peasant. At the
Fourth Normal School in Changzhi, for instance, he displayed a valiant disregard for
fashion, declining to pursue or covet the accoutrements and mannerisms of his sophis-
ticated counterparts. He seemed to actually cultivate a mien of rusticity as if he were
making a proclamation of stubborn individualism. His fellow students abetted this dis-
play of unconventionality by rewarding him with their sympathetic embrace. Perhaps
they romanticized his willfulness, or were attracted and intrigued by his witty speech
style and an unabashed penchant for singing operatic arias to self-accompaniment on
the sanxian (三弦, a traditional three-stringed plucked instrument). Certainly his
parlay of anti-elegance into social success at school confirmed a personal style which
harmonized with the ambiance of village camaraderie that he equally cherished.

Though intellectually absorbed in assigned and extracurricular study (he spent
long stretches of time on his kong reading piles of library books until, his friends say,
he took on a positively slovenly appearance41 ), such single-minded concentration left
unaltered his attachment to the “personality” of the village, and with each homecoming
he avidly plunged back into its homely sociability. The vibrancy and conviviality of its
stylized (aesthetic) expression imbibed in early youth continued to beckon him to the
amiable milieu of that musical fraternity, the Eight Sounds Society, where he honed his
participatory skills. His gregariousness and loquacity propelled him into frequent
conversational interludes, which inevitably now turned to the avant-garde social and
political ideas circulating on the nation’s campuses, for his affection for his village
confreres compelled him to effect their enlightenment. He later described these jam-
sessions in terms of their challenge to his powers of elucidation:

“Sometimes I would go back home from school and there have
conversations with my friends, both those older and those my own age.
In these conversations any careless injection of student jargon would
immediately elicit their comments, and after suffering their rebukes I
became a little wiser. Afterwards, whenever introducing to them Ideas
from the intellectual world, I had to think of ways to translate the ter-
minology into their own language. After some time I grew adept at it."
Zhao's quest for clarity among rustics in an era when intellectuals had not yet descended from their citadel of exclusivity and obscurantism (re: the traditional scholar with his ostentatious classical speech style [之乎者也] and his stylish descendant, the May Fourth intellectual with his Europeanized language) reveals not so much a precocious sense of progressiveness vis-à-vis the social position of peasants (it was 1927) as a deep-abiding attachment to the people of his native place. As the focal point of his fictional works shows, his beloved countryside was not a place defined or dominated by topography and natural environment or its man-induced alterations, but by the ontological essence of its human inhabitants. It was the people which attracted him, but by now he could discern the poverty of their lives in both the spiritual and material sense, a circumstance which clashed rudely with his arcanian dream. His vision of the ideal life, he could now see, demanded extensive rectification of their social ethos, a process he naively believed could be initiated through infusing their lives with the progeny of the literary revolution, particularly the works of Lu Hsun. The disappointment he felt at their inability to comprehend this literature was exceeded only by his utter disillusionment upon realizing the extent of his vision's remoteness from reality — measured in its finality by the bitter pill of his exclusion from his own dream.

It was the severance of his educational connections which brought him to the brink of this crisis: the very circumstance he had deemed prerequisite to obtaining his ideal served ironically as the grounds for his exclusion from it. He had come to regard formally pursued intellectualism as an evil which destroyed the lifeblood of human relationships, and thus, while he loved learning, he shrank away from its official accreditation. For such formal recognition would mandate his enshrouding in the identity of a social superior. However, in this self-abnegatory philosophy he stood in opposition to his father's and friends' expectations. Instead of welcoming him back into the mainstream of village life as a cherished equal, as he had apparently convinced himself they would do, they berated him for his aberrant appearance in the village at a
time when he was supposed to be in school (it was the autumn of 1928 - he had spent
the summer hiding out in the mountains from those who would pursue him for his po-
itical activism on campus) and censured him for shaming family and community by
losing his precious status as a student. For Zhao, by virtue of his academic accom-
plishments to that point was already a local celebrity, and everyone had locked up
to him as an expectant "xiuc'ai." They now regarded him as a "washout" and a
"failure" upon whom education had been wasted. In a later reminiscence, Zhao noted:

"When I heard all these words of mockery, I could but silently
wish that the speakers could understand the implications of what they
were saying. I thought: 'I was originally a child of the farm, and in the
interim I studied in school for a few years, and now I have returned to
the farm again. I haven't lost any status whatsoever, so why are you
calling me a "washout"? Could it be that you actually want me to join
the crowd of oppressors to come back here and oppress you, when
you as my elders have suffered the same adversities as I? Is that
the "way out" ('走出 ') you have envisioned for me?'"

Clearly, Zhao's exposure to a liberal education had drastically influenced his
interpretation of his society in addition to altering the course of his life. Even his in-
born penchant for fabulation reflected the depth of his politicization. While still in
school, though he had not yet considered writing as a career, his mind busily generated
plots for possible stories. The antithetical plot line figured prominently in his early
conceptualizations, as in the projected story, "The Twins," which would have featured
two brothers, one embracing individualism and rudely charging his way upward in so-
ciety, the other more socially oriented, "going the route of society." This contrast
of a grasping anti-hero with his social-minded brother further illuminates his equa-
tion of individual upward mobility with reprehensible motivations and behaviours.
It was not difficult to shift from this philosophical rejection of upward mobility to the
conviction that formal education had as its exclusive goal precisely that which he re-
jected:

"It was only after I had gone to normal school and learned a few
revolutionary principles that I understood that their [i.e., his parents'
and friends'] desire for me to 'go out' ('走出') was a desire for me to go
out from among the suffering and miserable working people. Their desire for me to 'rise up ('\(\uparrow\)') was a desire for me to join up with the oppressors who wreaked all this suffering and misery. Since I had come to understand this, I no longer wanted to continue on and complete the task they had assigned to me. Afterwards, the revolutionary organization was uncovered by the reactionary forces and I fled from that school.'''

Thus, Zhao plainly was already disenchanted with his academic career and its implications for his future long before he took his leave of Changzhi. His statement suggests that he was escaping an intolerable destiny as much as he was fleeing the police and that the removal of his name from the roll merely offered him a welcome excuse for not returning. The fact that his friend, Wang Chun, had been permitted to take a make-up examination suggests that Zhao, had he made the effort, could also have enjoyed such a privilege. Evidently, the iconoclastic ideas he had acquired at "that school" affected him more deeply than they had his academic friends, who, though also progressive-minded, did not go so far as to spurn their educations to demonstrate their affinity with the oppressed. Unfortunately, in his spirit of youthful romanticism, when all problems undoubtedly seemed soluble, he miscalculated the reaction of the folks back at home. For all his perceptiveness as a cultural insider, he had neglected to heed the dichotomy of his and their viewpoints and thus failed to predict the dissonance that would arise from it. He saw himself as a peasant ("I was originally a child of the farm"), while they regarded him as an intellectual. He wanted to join them as a genuine member of their ranks, but they would only go so far as to concede to him the status of a gentleman farmer. So long as he should pursue the route of intellectual glory (and the eventual economic advantages associated with it), they welcomed him as one of them, but once he threw over that ambition to merge his identity with theirs, the congeniality of their mutual relationship evaporated.

Oppressed by an atmosphere of community opprobrium further aggravated by importunate pressure from his father to justify his educational investment, Zhao soon
departed from Yuchi Village to personate the role imposed upon him. But though his
metier was teaching and his qualifications undisputed, political and economic insta-
bility punctuated and finally cancelled that career. It was replaced by a career in
writing, but before he was able to rely fully upon the products of his pen for a livi-
hood, he had turned many an odd job between teaching assignments, sat in prison for
over a year on suspicion of subversive activities (never proven), and had even at-
tempted suicide.

Though a dearth and confusion of facts taunts Zhao's biographers, the gleanings
from documents and reminiscences bespeak a life rich in incident, replete with the ex-
perience of humanity, and immersed in the turmoil and tragedy of history and personal
fortune entwined. Yet the shape of his own life and its emotional geometry barely
grazes the eyes of those who imbibe of his fictional world. Out of his pantheon of char-
acters and the parade of situations and events that fill out his fictional edifice, only a
very few can attribute their existence to the writer's fabulation of self. Six-year old
Xiao Erhei memorizing fortune-teller phrases and performing for the amusement of
guests, Liu Erhe leading his fellow cowherds in their playful adventures on the grass-
land, and Zhang Tiesuo (Changes in Li Village) struggling with unreliable odd jobs, in-
flation, and life in the "Manchurian Cemetery" in Taiyuan are the few exceptions to
Zhao's otherwise complete other-directedness in literary portrayal.

Nonetheless, this literary modesty yet provides a glimpse into his inner life in
the sense his fiction imparts of aversion toward the academic/intellectual endeavour.
This impression arises through the accumulative effect of a minor but recurring motif
that may be loosely identified as the distressed and/or obnoxious scholar. Chunxi 春喜
and his brother Xiaoji 小吉 in Changes in Li Village (1945) are identified respec-
tively as "the village schoolteacher" and "a high school graduate" before the text launches
upon a portrayal of their offensive behaviour, typified by such enterprises as swin-
dling people out of their property, drug dealing, and profiteering in the sale of women.
In “Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng” (1947), four boys who happily join the cowherds in their play are innocent first-generation students whose futures as oppressors are foreshadowed by the obnoxious behaviour of their illiterate but socially-climbing fathers. In Sanliwan (1954), Ma Youyi 马有翼, a middle-school student and teacher of a village anti-illiteracy class, rides an emotional roller-coaster and suffers a mental breakdown in sharp contrast to the staunch mental stability of his uneducated confederates. In “Mutual Validation” (Huzuojianding 置作鉴定, 1962), Liu Zheng 刘正 is a junior high school graduate with ambitions to be a writer who is desperately unhappy with his lack of opportunity in the village to which he is physically bound, and he expresses his frustration through hostility and maliciousness. In “The Tobacco Leaf Caper” (Mai yanye 烟叶, 1964), Jia Hongnian 贾鸿年, an exceptionally intelligent high school graduate trying to get his novel about a petty socialist hero published, is a young man who is prideful, arrogant, self-indulgent, employs deception to get what he wants, and harbors an obsessive vision of himself as revered and privileged literatus living in an elegant house with a beautiful wife. It is a vision that has rendered him incapable of dealing with reality. In the same story, Wang Lan 王兰, Jia’s intended, is a young woman whose obsession with communist ideology skirts the edge of insanity when she perceives she has become infected by Jia’s romantic Individualism: she not only breaks with him upon realizing this, but also quits school to protect herself from further contamination and plans to consolidate her renunciation of the educational endeavour by finding a peasant to marry in her village.

Though it was political turmoil that made “The Tobacco Leaf Caper” Zhao’s last fictional work and not his conscious intent that it should be so, it is nonetheless interesting that it, as his last work, should once again turn to the notion of educational rejection and bucolic refuge. In this way it echoes a parallel image found in one of his earliest works, a 1933 story, “There Was a Man” (有个人). In this story he wrote of a young scholar, Song Bingying 宋秉颖, who, having spent all his conscious years
studying the Classics under the torment of a severe xiucei father, gives up the pursuit at the age of 16 and becomes a farmer. With this transition, he also gradually jettisons the genteel habits of the scholar, such as daily bathing, and as his skin roughens and his house and its furnishings become progressively marred with the mud of his adopted profession, he thinks, “this is as it should be.”

Notwithstanding the trace recognition in Zhao’s fictional world of merit to be found in the scholastic landscape (for instance, Teacher Li in “The Tobacco Leaf Caper”), these portrayals yield up in their accretion an assumption that to embrace the academic pursuit is to consort with the revager of natural virtue and the thief of inner tranquility. That those concerns which preoccupied him in the period preceding his own divorce from the educational process should repeatedly cast their shadows in his fiction suggests the intensity with which he felt the disappointment of that modest aspiration of his to lead a pastoral life. His resentment against those expectations which virtually drove him from his rural home to take up the onus of the intellectual apparently remained vividly impressed upon his mind decades after the fact. And his character Wang Lan’s solution to her problems suggests that the impulse to take refuge among peasants to escape the process of an insidious metamorphosis or to stanch an intolerable flood of psychological torment evidently had continued to haunt Zhao’s imagination, even though he was well aware of its fallacy.

“There Was a Man” saliently illustrates this fallacy: Song Bingying was indeed accepted into the embrace of peasant society, but before long he bumped up into brutal forces embedded in the peasant ethos (from valuing the dead over the living to the banality of corruption) which brought him to bankruptcy and the necessity of fleeing his native place, alone. Thus, while the implications of Song’s continued education had been intolerable, his decision to quit and assume a peasant identity had doomed to destruction the life he chose.
In Zhao's later works we see that even the "new society" forged by the communists was incapable of guaranteeing the coveted bucolic refuge, as characters like Ma Youyi and Liu Zheng show.

However, long before Ma Youyi and the other educated but disturbed children of the new society popped up in Zhao's fictional world, he had, consciously or unconsciously, conceived of the viability of his arcadian dream: the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1930's presented a tangible prospect of change—as opposed to obdurate stagnancy—and it was under these circumstances that he came to devote his writing career to the liberation of China's peasantry from poverty, ignorance, superstition, and corruption.

The difference between Zhao Shuli's dedication to extra-literary goals and that of the other socially and politically conscious writers of the revolutionary age who portrayed the rural scene was that the others had a national vision of China's overall transformation and the place that it in its transformed state would take in the world. Zhao had a grassroots, internal, agrarian vision in which he saw himself as an unassuming inhabitant. His literary colleagues in the rural scene were either outsiders (like Ding Ling) or one-time insiders whose national or global concerns and career experiences alienated them from their origins (like Lu Hsun). Zhao, by contrast, perceived of, clung to, even cultivated a sense of his limited geographic destiny. His literary colleagues roved in their choice of subject matter, reflecting their cosmopolitan experience and outlook. Zhao, consumed by his single-minded pursuit, bound himself to the particularity of place (rural Shanxi) and its inhabitants, focussed intensively upon them, and carried them in their imagined essence even into the urban sophistication of the nation's capital. The vigor with which the rural panorama occupied his mind blocked his absorption of the new environment of the city—it would, for him, always be an alien environment, one that he could not evoke in his writing, and one that he would frequently leave for lengthy sojourns in the Shanxi countryside. Though
circumstances had originally pushed him away from his rural home, and his own con­ception of a social agenda to fulfill had kept him busy in distant places, he continued to identify himself with the peasantry of his native place. It was a dedication that sum­moned up an aura: even as he clothed himself in garments alien to the rural tradition,® he projected an aura of the peasant mystique,® and all things good to be found in the peasant ethos (or its myth) became a part of his public persona.

To think of Zhao Shuli today is to think of many images. Third Fairy, for in­stance, prancing around in her red veil, or decked-out in girlish embroideries incon­gruently juxtaposed against her powdered wrinkles; Er Zhuge bent over his coins desper­ately consulting the oracle; the comedic Li Youcai entertaining friends in his clut­tered cave dwelling under the old locust tree; the irrepressible Leg Pains indignantly stomping away from a lost argument, forgetting to feign her limp; the melancholy Lovely Moth seeking to dispel loneliness through intimate communion with her Luohan coin; septuagenarian Chen Bingzheng wielding his hoe with efficient, dynamic strokes or handily lifting cumbersome logs in celebration of his undiminished vigor; young cowherds cavorting on the pasture instead of watching the cows; highland peasants slipping in and out of mysterious, treacherous caves eluding war-time stalkers...®

However, these and other such characters and scenes, though they comprise the functional foundation and justification of Zhao’s fame, have long accounted for only a portion of the images his name generates. With equal potency and currency, images of the writer himself mingle among those projected out of his imagination. There is Zhao as rustic, gaunt, sun-wizened, in felt skull-cap and ungainly sheepskin overcoat, smoking his little pipe and catching everyone off-guard with a bumpkinish appearance.® This is an image which enigmatically contradicts post-“Liberation” photos showing a handsome, youthful-looking man neatly dressed in the Mao jacket of the respected official (with or without the visored cap). However much exposure this
latter image gained in the public eye, it has always been informed by the former, as if
his donning of the cadre’s uniform were merely a grudging capitulation to the conven­
tions of the polite society with which his work threw him into obligatory association.
Descriptions of his personal life-style complemented and confirmed this notion.

Delight, for instance, not reluctance, characterized his embrace of official duty
in the countryside. His activities there comprised not the detached observations of a
writer-cadre looking for material and assessing the situation, but earnest participa-
tion in the projects of rural revitalization and intimate communion with the locals. He
was, after all, “one of them,” as Zhou Yang wrote in 1946, and as Zhou Yang was
quoted as saying countless times thereafter. Here is Zhao eating together with the vil-
lagers out of the same pot: It matters not the fare, he is not particular; there he is
crouching with the villagers on the same kāng, planning projects for their future;
here he is again laboring with them in the same field – he could grow vegetables with
the best of them. See, the cotton wadding is poking through the holes of his old khaki
uniform. Now he is tending the fire for the mess cook, now he is helping the local
artists write a play, now he is helping a technician fix a motor; and if an old grandpa or
aunty wants to chat, he is not stingy with his time. How many peasant meetings are
there today? It matters not, for the famous writer is not too busy to attend. He would
rather help people figure out their accounts than take a nap, mediate a young couple’s
quarrel than work on his next story; keep a balky water-pump going than sleep the
night through. If anyone thinks that Zhao has become soft in his cushy job in Beijing,
think again, for there he is down in the pit with the other villagers, digging out the
mud for a reservoir. Still there is time for fun: at any time he might break out into
vocal imitation of the drums and gongs of the Shangdang bangzi (local opera of southern
Shanxi) and pose a role with all its stylized gestures of the stage. Easy-going, gregar-
ious, unaffected, sympathetic, even in his cadre suit – as drawings in the 1980’s de-
pict him – the local people regard him not as a writer or official but simply as “Old
Back in the city, "Old Zhao" is the image of self-effacement. He shies away from public appearances and escapes as soon as possible when they are unavoidable.\(^\text{60}\) He disdains the amenities of his enormous success. Don't look for him in that eighteen room mansion the Writers' Association found for him in the southwest suburb\(^\text{61}\) — he traded it in long ago for a place half the size in the city center.\(^\text{62}\) The furnishings are spare and spartan. There he lives a very simple life with his country wife. He lets her chickens run around his combination study and sitting room. He cooks his own laobing (a wheaten pancake of heavy consistency) and when it is crisp inside and out, he pops it into a willow basket hanging overhead. The basket is one he wove himself. Meals are pragmatic and without ceremony. He merely fills his bowl with the simple country fare on the stove, carries it off to squat down in whatever spot strikes his fancy, and disposes of it in swift, efficient slurps.\(^\text{63}\)

His writings have made him a very wealthy man (e.g., he earned more than 10,000 yuen from his novel Sanliwan alone\(^\text{64}\)), but he declines to spend it on himself. His frugality is conspicuous. He only buys Green Leaf brand cigarettes, the cheapest, only about ten fen a pack. He saves the butts so he can liberate the unused tobacco for his little pape. His watch, already old when he bought it, keeps time only reluctantly — he jokes that it is a "Triple Hard" brand: hard to wind, hard to verify the time, hard to repair. But he has already paid forty yuen for it and is not about the buy a new one. He keeps that watch until someone relieves him of it during the Cultural Revolution.\(^\text{65}\)

He frowns upon gain without merit. The back door he holds open for no one, especially his own children. The good fortune they share in his success does not extend to their acceptance of complimentary show tickets paid for by the state or free rides in his organization's car: he tears up the tickets and gives them money to buy their own, and they can ride the bus like everyone else. He disciplines his daughter for presuming
that her status as the educated offspring of a celebrated writer puts her above the occu-
petions of the ordinary working man or woman. He spurns the “perks” of his posi-
tion. To his mind, receiving a government salary while reaping author remunerations
amounts to double-dipping: he repudiates the salary and refuses to apply for medical
and travel reimbursements as well.

Money repels him, at least as the object and tool of personal gain. He declines to
pursue it, refuses to hoard it, devises ways to get rid of it. He turns his manuscript
for Sanliwan over to the Popular Literature Publishing House: even though it means lower earnings for himself, it also means lower prices for his
readers. He turns his Sanliwan receipts over to the Writers’ Association to pay for
his living quarters; then when he trades the eighteen room house they select for him in
for the smaller abode, he refuses to take back the price difference. It is money that
came from the people, and it is simply going back to the people, he says. He person-
ally finances the filming of a Shangdang bangzi in an effort to keep this indigenous
opera form alive. When his old friend, Wang Chun, dies, he takes it upon himself to
help support his widow. He pours uncalculated amounts into the economic develop-
ment of his native village, providing machines, planting fruit orchards, establishing a
flock of sheep, and setting up a tailoring shop and a day-care center to reduce the bur-
dens upon the village women.

If in the latter two projects Zhao demonstrates a rarely seen sensitivity to the
plight of rural women, it appears again in the tenor of his own personal life. In an era
when it is not uncommon for educated, successful men to divorce their country wives
in favor of more sophisticated, literate, urban women, Zhao Shuli stands by the woman
who shared the sufferings of the lean years. Upon this aspect of his conduct, one of his
biographers concludes: “Through this little window upon his private life, can we not
catch a glimpse of Zhao Shuli’s basic moral constitution?”
Unlike with the effect of a chronological biographical account, the public personne of Zhao Shuli as perceived in the general imagination over the years resonated with the artificial juxtaposition – as in the above composite – of images belonging to different eras and localities. Writers of new reviews, features, evaluative articles, etc., cannibalized early accounts without contrition, cavalierly incorporating descriptive passages sans quotation marks and citations, and whether intended or not, old images took on a cachet of currency, notwithstanding the familiarity of the wording conveying them. The "power of suggestion" increased its efficacy with physical distance. For instance, Zhao's calling himself a "country-bumpkin" and his declaring he didn't know the formal rules of writing were two incidents that were first reported in 1949, the first having occurred when he declined to teach a course at Beifang University, the second in a twenty minute lecture he delivered at that same institution. By 1969, in an article in Zhongbao zhoukan, the time and venue of these incidents had shifted to 1957 and Beijing University. Furthermore, "corroboration" of his rough-hewn rusticity seemed to reside in the formulaic introductions that countless articles gave to his class origins. More accurate were those which identified him as the child of a middle-peasant family reduced to poverty by high interest rates, even if they conveniently neglected to mention the family's elaborate house and the fact that his grandfather taught the Classics in his own private school. But for every article that so identified him, there were others that simply declared him as having come from poor peasant stock, phraseology that could naturally evoke the sort of image projected by his character Li Youcai and his compatriots who lived under the old locust tree in "The Rhymes of Li Youcai," or even that of the unfortunate pariah, Fugui, in the story that bears his name.

Thus, while Zhao's rustic image to some extent emanated out of his own concentrated sympathies for his native place, it derived considerably greater vitality from the equivocations, omissions, and pregnant implications that fell however innocently
(or otherwise) into commentaries about him and his work. The ephemeralness of its foundation, however, did not attenuate its potency. Even as writers expanded his image to identify him as altruist, frugalist, sympathetic cadre, champion of the folk, preserver of indigenous art, visionary philanthropist, etc. — in short, as a moral paragon — there remained the assumption of his innate peasant virtue as prerequisite to and fountainhead of all his social and literary accomplishments.76

This is an assumption that has entered into the bedrock of Zhao Shuli criticism. Even with the post-Cultural Revolution ideological relaxation that muted the rhetoric of class struggle (rendering “peasantness” an unnecessary political asset), it continues on as a basic premise and plays an integral role in the perception and evaluation of Zhao’s works. Through that ten-year period of lucidity of which the Tiananmen Massacre provides a terminal demarcation (the era of New Period Literature, according to Liu Zafu),77 when scholars could contemplate Zhao and his works with relative objectivity, we find the spirit and essence of their evaluations consisely summed up in statements such as the following:

“His peasant honesty and his natural instinct to attach importance to reality made him not follow fashions when it came to writing, and made him not present false pictures.”78

“Although many writers since the May Fourth era have also written about peasants, only intellectuals find their works about peasants understandable. The root of this phenomenon certainly lies not in these writers having deliberately distanced themselves from peasants. Rather it is their culture which has made it so. Zhao Shuli’s cultural viewpoint and psyche, by contrast, endowed him with a natural cultural bond with peasants which exerted influence during his creative periods.”79

The escalating emphasis in the literary world upon Zhao’s identity, although related to the communist demand for class purity, finds greater foundation in a quest for authenticity prompted by the conspicuous lack of it in both political rhetoric and subsequent literary response. The Zhao Shuli of the 1940’s was a man whose personal identity initially grew out of the nature of his fiction, for it seemed to assert its origin
in the uniquely qualified hands of a peasant insider. It was fiction which testified to his personal authenticity, launching his distinct career as a peasant icon. Eventually, however, as reflected in the above quotations, this personal authenticity came to be perceived as testimony to the authenticity of his work. That is, as one imbued with the peasant ethos that only nativity could endow, he came to be adjudged a man who throughout his life was incapable of creating works that embodied anything less than the truth.

2 Yang Jun, "Wo su kan de Zhao Shuli" in Zhongguo qingnian, 1949, no. 8. Reprinted in the high school textbook Beijing renmin jiaoyu, Hubei renmin chongyin, 1955, pp. 70-83; and in Fudan University Chinese Dept., ed., "Zhao Shuli zhuanji" in the high school textbook, Shanghai, Fudan University, 1979, pp. 10-17. The latter two sources exhibit variations in the text.

3 Ibid. See also Gao Jie, et al., "Zhao Shuli zuojia" in Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo, ed. by Guo Muoroe, Hubei, Xinhua shubanshe, 1949, pp. 50-55. (This latter may be identical with an article of the same title by the same author which appeared in another work of collected articles on Zhao, also entitled Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo, published by the Ji-Lu-Yu shubanshe in 1947. The 1947 book contains items that do not appear in the 1949 book. See Huang Xiuji, ed., Zhao Shuli zhuanliu, Taiyuan, Beiye wenji chubanshe, 1985, p. 713.)

4 Ji Sou, p. 88.

5 Sai Feng, "Renmin zuojia Zhao Shuli," in Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo, ed. by Guo Muoroe, Hubei, Xinhua shubanshe, 1949, pp. 50-55. (This latter may be identical with an article of the same title by the same author which appeared in another work of collected articles on Zhao, also entitled Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo, published by the Ji-Lu-Yu shubanshe in 1947. The 1947 book contains items that do not appear in the 1949 book. See Huang Xiuji, ed., Zhao Shuli zhuanliu, Taiyuan, Beiye wenji chubanshe, 1985, p. 713.)

6 This incident took place in November 1944, when Zhao tried to enter the grounds of a production and military exhibition set up in conjunction with the first Peoples' Heroes' Conference, convened in Li Cheng (in southeast Shanxi, near the confluence of the border with Hebei and Henan). He was attending in the capacity of an editor for the New China Bookstore for the purpose of interviewing conferencegoers. One version of the story has it that a superior of his had to come out and rescue him. His short work, "The Emancipation of Meng Xiangying" (a melding of two genres, reportage and short fiction), was based upon materials he gathered there. See Sai Feng, p. 54; Huang Xiuji, "Zhao Shuli zhuanliu" in Lun zhuanji, Xin wenxue shiliao, 1961, no. 2, pp. 180-197 (see p. 188); Gao Jie, et. al., p. 87; Zhao Shuli nianpu, p. 64.

7 Sai Feng, p. 54.

8 Ibid.

9 Yang Jun, p. 80; p. 17.

10 This was in 1942. Although Mao had already delivered his "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art," news of it had not yet reached the Taihang Mountains. See Ji Sou, p. 86.
Zhao is reputed to have said in a short talk at Beifang University, "I understand nothing about composition or technique. I only honestly write out the peasants' true stories and say what is in their hearts..." See Ji Sou, p. 90. Beifang University was in Lu Cheng.

12 Gao Jie, et. al., p. 130.

13 Sai Feng, p. 53.

14 In April of 1949, Zhao followed the New Masses, a newspaper put out by the North China Xinhua shudian, for which he served as an editor, in its move to Beijing (where it continued publication under the title Dazhong ribao 大众报 ). He was 44 years old. See Huang Xiuji, "Zhao Shuli zhuanji," pp. 187, 189, 190; and Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli yanjiu ziliao, p. 593.

15 Shi Jiyan, "Wenyi suibi," 1947. One could just as well attribute this difference in characterization to the storyteller's policy of catering to the point of view of the inscribed audience, which being lower and middle class, prefer to see their upper-class enemies caricaturized rather than fully portrayed.

16 Zhao Yuqin, "Huiyi wode gege Zhao Shuli" 回忆我的哥哥赵树理, Zhao Shuli yanjiu, 1989, no. 2, pp. 50-51. The fact that Zhao's parents sold several of his sisters to pay off debts was unpublicized for more than forty years. Instead, this aspect of his life experience was represented by an assertion that he "nearly lost a sister" to this economic necessity. The writer of the article, Zhao Yuqin, is the sister who was "nearly lost."
The Bayinhui 八音会, was an organization typical to the villages of Jindongnan. The Yuchi Village Bayinhui met in the house of the four Lü 族 brothers, who, all being too poor to marry, had space for storing the various musical instruments which were the sine qua non of its existence. Zhao's father, Zhao Heging 赵和清, was an accomplished string player also adept at percussions and woodwinds. Young Zhao, who regarded the Lü brothers as his uncles (see Zhao Shuli, "Xin shitang 11 yi guren" 新世堂墨忆故人, Renmin ribao, May 24, 1959, reprinted in Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 4, pp. 1643-1646), became as familiar a figure at Society meetings as was his father. He too learned to play the various instruments and learned to sing opera as well. By age 15, he started learning or had already mastered the clapper (guben 聽, a pivotal instrument in the traditional orchestra whose operator is the conductor. Since the conductor directs the other performers, who listen for cues rather than watch, and sets the rhythm of the entire performance, he must possess a thorough understanding of the other instruments and the parts they play, as well as memorize all the singing and speaking parts of the piece under performance (or at least those parts that comprise the key links) (Shi Jiyan 史纪言, "Zhao Shuli tongzhi shengping jilüe" 赵树理同志生平略, in Fenshui 过水, 1980, no. 1, pp. 50-54).

Through his membership in the Society, Zhao was exposed as well to many different kinds of folk entertainment forms (quyi 曲艺) (Gao Jie, et. al., p. 6; Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhu, p. 15), including that which proved most pivotal to his later career, storytelling. But in spite of the extensive musical and performance education he received, his strongest memory of Society meetings centers upon what he learned about language and the people using that language. In his reminiscences he refers to the Eight Sounds Society as his "primary language school," for it did not devote itself exclusively to musical endeavors. It was, in fact, a club of sorts, where the members could get together for conversation and relaxation, leaving the cares of everyday life back in the fields or at home. The jam sessions in Li Youcai's cave in the story "The Rhymes of Li Youcai," reflect an oft-repeated scene from Zhao's youth.


19 Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhu, p. 147.


21 Wang Chun, “Zhao Shuli zang yang chengwei zuojia.” There were those who said he had spent most of his life in old-style operatic circles until he started over in his new career at the beginning of the war with Japan. See Sai Feng, p. 50.

22 A History of Modern Chinese Literature, p. 483.

23 Wang Chun, “Zhao Shuli zang yang chengwei zuojia.”
Zhao studied classic works such as the Hundred Surnames, the San zi jing, the Four Books (The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Confucian Analects, and Mencius), and the Five Classics, as well as classical poetry, from the age of four, first under the tutelage of his grandfather, Zhao Zhongfang, and later at the village school and at a school in Keshan, a town thirty miles from Yuchi Village. The latter was the Qin County Second Higher Primary School, a modern institution which offered a foreign-style curriculum as well as classical studies. There Zhao's reputation for expertise in Classical Chinese inspired many of his fellow students to turn to him for help with their assignments. In 1922, at age 17, he graduated at the head of his class, with the additional honor of the mathematics prize. After a stint of teaching at the lower primary school level, he took in 1925 an examination for entrance into the Shanxi Fourth Normal School in Changzhi, placing fourth on the list of the one hundred candidates who were admitted. There he set himself to the task of systematically reading the great works of Chinese literature, history, and philosophy. He discovered the world of foreign ideas, voraciously reading translated works on science and social science, and the works of such writers as Gorky, Ibsen, Turgenev, Gogol, Chekov, and Tolstoy. And he delved deeply for the first time into the realm of Chinese written narrative, from the traditional Ming-Qing masterpieces to the avant-garde May Fourth experiments in the fiction (and poetry) of self-realization and social consciousness. (See Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhe, pp. 16, 22; "Zhao Shuli zhuanshu," p. 182; Gao Jie, et al., pp. 2, 7, 13, 15-16; Han Yufeng, et al., pp. 5, 11; Lin Xianbi, "Renmin de zuojia Zhao Shuli," Nankei xuebao, 1982, no. 4, pp. 55-58.

24 Zhou Yang, "Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo."

25 Guo Moruo, "Dule Li jia zhuang de bieqian."

26 Chen Jihui, Lixing de xiao-zhang, p. 32; Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhen, p. 227.
20 At the Shanxi Fourth Normal School, Zhao was an activist student involved in the leadership of demonstrations demanding the ouster of the school’s president (on campus) and protesting imperialism, domestic oppression, and warlords (on the streets of Changzhi). His passion and capability caught the eye of clandestine communist schoolmates who invited him to join the Communist Party, which he did, in the spring of 1927. Zhao and his friends enjoyed a year of free association and discussion of the revolutionary ideas, such as the principle of “proletarian literature,” coming out of Shanghai, before warlord Yan Xishan moved against the communists in Shanxi. Various institutions of learning were being swept of communist infiltrators, and when the Normal School was targeted, many nervous students took formal leave and went home to wait out the dangerous period. One of these was Zhao, who, upon learning that one of his friends was arrested and killed shortly after arriving at his home, decided not to return to Yuchi Village, but to withdraw with another friend, Wang Chun, into the mountains near Yangcheng and Yuanqu 垣曲. He had been only several weeks shy of completing his third year of study at the school, but he was never to return. (Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuili pingzhuo, pp. 23-25; Gao Jie, et. al., pp. 21-22; Han Yufeng, et. al. p. 15; Dong Dazhong, Zhao Shuili Nianpu, p. 20; Wang Zhongqing 王中青, “Wode zhijing shiyou Zhao Shuili” 我的挚友史秋理, in Shanxi shiyuan xuebao, 1979, no. 3, pp. 14-19.

21 In fact, Zhao did teach at that level in spite of the lack of his diploma, at the Fourth Higher Primary School in Dongan 洞庵, Qinshui county, in 1932 or 1933. See Chen Wanguo 陈万国, “Zhao Shuili laoshi zai Dongan,” 1947, quoted in Dong Dazhong, Zhao Shuili nianpu, p. 30; Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuili pingzhuo, p. 33.
The severance of his connection with the Normal School plunged Zhao into a period of instability that subjected him to alternating stints of teaching school, sitting in prison on suspicion of subversive activities, and holding body and soul together with various and sundry odd jobs in Taiyuan. (Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, pp. 25-32; Gao Jie, et. al., pp. 21-31; Han Yufeng, et. al., pp. 15-19; Dong Dazhong, *Zhao Shuli nianpou*, pp. 22-30; Shi Jiyan, "Zhao Shuli tongzhi shengping jilue," pp. 51-52; Wang Zhongqing, "Wode zhiyou," pp. 14-15; Wang Baoqin, "Zhao Shuli zai Kaiming si," *Shanxi shiyuan xuebao*, 1963, no. 3, pp. 85-86; Zhao Shuili, "Chulu' zatan" "Chutu" lishi, *Zhongguo qingnian zhushu*, 1957, no. 9; reprinted in *Zhao Shuli wenji*, vol. 4, pp. 1533-1539; Jack Belden, *China Shakes the World*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1949, 1970, pp. 91-91, 95.) In spite of his capricious fortunes, however, he managed to stay abreast of the exploding intellectual issues of the times. Of particular interest to him were the discussions on literature and popularization spearheaded by the League of Left Wing Writers, whose essays and debates had claimed his attention throughout 1930 and 1931. He himself wrote a number of essays upon the subject of popularization, submitting them to Shanxi publications but never actually seeing them in print (Liu Panxi, "Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo zai wenxueshi shang de yiyi", *Shandong daxue xuebao*, 1963, no. 1; reprinted in: *Zhao Shuli zhuanji* (1979), pp. 177-188).

The premature end of his formal education thus, rather than preserving the boundaries of a fixed horizon, instead served to multiply his efforts to expand it. From approximately 1933-1936, through the offices of his friends from the Normal School, he was able to live without formal commitments in the student dormitory of the Shanxi Educational Institute in Taiyuan where they were now ensconced (Wang Zhongqing, "Wode zhiyou"). This enriched environment contributed to his continuing if self-sought education, for the liberal availability of books granted him license to constantly lose himself in them, both those from the school library, acquired through borrowed library cards, and those in an extensive collection ranging in subject from philosophy, politics, and economics, to literary and art criticism, poetry and fiction, that one of his friends, Wang Zhongqing, had privately amassed. Being that Wang was committed to pressing duties, it was Zhao who took the greater advantage of his collection. As Wang recalled, "At that time I bought the books but it was he who read them. He read them all, both those that I myself had read and those that I hadn't." (Gao Jie, et. al., p. 40. No references provided.)

Zhao indicated in later years that he felt his self-education to be vastly more valuable than that which he had acquired through formal channels. For instance, he stated that his formal writing courses were not of much use to him, as they focussed upon the Classical language, and that his writing ability derived from self-study (Dong Dazhong, *Zhao Shuli nianpou*, p. 21).
Zhao's earliest extant work to have appeared in a standard publication is "Song of Divination", a semi-narrative poem in the style of the gutishi 古诗 (a pre-Tang form that prescribes either five or seven characters to a line but does not require strict tonal patterns or rhyme schemes), which was published in the Beijing Morning News 北平晨报, Jan. 14, 1931. It describes in 85 seven-character lines the disasters that the fighting of the warlords brought to the ordinary people of Shanxi province in the years 1920-30. It appeared under the penname Ye Xiufeng. (Gao Jie, et. al., pp. 30-31; Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuan, pp. 29-32.) This poem, long lost, was recovered by Huang Xiuji in 1981.

Because of the unsettled nature of the times, Zhao's habit of writing under a wide variety of arbitrary pennames, and also because Zhao probably regarded the results of his efforts to be little more than expendable consumer items, the vast majority of these works have been lost. Though there remain only a few fragments and titles, the information available indicates the dominance of writing in Zhao's life during this era. Besides the above poem, also dating from 1931 and attached to the penname Ye Xiaofeng was a novella entitled "The Reinstatement of Tieniu" which was serialized partially in the supplement of the Shanxi Defengbao 大风报, a short-lived paper which ceased publication before the story was fully in print. (Gao Jie, et. al., p. 42; Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuan, p. 35; Liu Panxi, p. 178) Also at this time he was experimenting with the zhanghuxiao shuo 章孝小说 form in an effort to actualize his convictions concerning the concept of popularization (Shi Jiyan, "Zhao Shuli tongzhi shengping jilüe," p. 52).

From 1933-1935, Zhao depended at times wholly upon his writing for a living, contributing on a daily basis to "The Last Page" 最后一页, the literary supplement of the Shanxi Party Dispatch 山西党报 in Taiyuan. Though this was a KMT paper, the supplement had fallen into the hands of underground communists: the editors were none other than Wang Zhongqing and Shi Jiyan, who commissioned Zhao to write fiction, criticism, short sketches and essays in a terse, easy to understand style. He was paid 50 cents (三角) per thousand characters and earned between five and ten yuan a month. He also contributed articles to the supplement of Shen bao 申报, to the magazine Renjian shi 人间世, to the Shanghai bimonthly Lunyu 论语, and to other Taiyuan publications, Xin nongcun 新农村, and the Monthly of the Shanxi Chapter of the Chinese Cultural Establishment Association 中国文化协会山西分会月刊. (Shi Jiyan, "Zhao Shuli tongzhi shengping jilüe," p. 52; Wang Zhongqing, "Wode zhiyou," p. 16; Gao Jie, et. al., pp. 39-40; Lu Meng, "Sanshi niandai zhongguo Tiayuan geming wenxue huodong huiyi diandi", Shanxi wenxue, 1982, no. 4, pp. 61-63; Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuan, pp. 34-35; Dong Dazhong, Zhao Shuli nianpou, p. 32; Dong Dazhong, "Zhao Shuli sanshi niandai de liang pien zawen" 赵树理三十年的两篇杂文, in Shanxi wenxue, 1982, no. 3, p. 69.) [Cont. in note 32]
[Continued from note 31]: A few traces of his fictional output remain from this era: a short story, "Golden Characters" 雹雹, which Zhao rewrote from memory in 1957 (Shouhuo 隐戏, 1957, no. 3); the first chapter of an episodic novel, Coiled Dragon Revine 丝无端, rediscovered by Dong Dezhang in a 1935 Shanxi publication under the name Ye Xiao (republished in Fenhuo, 1981, no. 5); and a short short story, "The Muddleheaded County Magistrate" 餔理, written under the penname Hei Chou 黑子 and retrieved from some rarely preserved copies of the Shanxi Party Dispatch (Gao Jie, et. al., p. 40). According to Zhao, the manuscript of Coiled Dragon Revine was lost after the novel had been only partially serialized (Rong An 任安, "Renmin zuojia Zhao Shuli," in Renmin ribao, Sept. 30, 1949). Known titles of other fictional works are "Anxious Days" 愁心的蜚 a short story; You ge ren 有个人 and Bei xue 北雪, both thought to be novels. (However, You ge ren has recently been found and has turned out to be a short story.) A number of his essays found in the Shanxi Party Dispatch have been reprinted in vol. 4 of Zhao Shuli wenji. The recently rediscovered "You ge ren" has been reprinted in the periodical Zhao Shuli yanjiu as well as in Vol. 1 of Zhao Shuli quanj. It is estimated that Zhao's total output between 1933 and 1936 numbered from 200 to 300 thousand characters, a quantity which rivalsthat attributed to the years 1943-1964. (Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhen, p. 35; Gao Jie, et. al., p. 40; Shi Jiyan, "Zhao Shuli tongzheng shengping jilüe," p. 52).
It is likely that Zhao first became known among the local population as a playwright. During 1937, he devoted himself to writing and staging plays designed to inflame anti-Japanese and anti-Chiang Kaishan sentiment. Two that are known are *Knock Upon the Kitchen God* (Feb. 1937, no longer extant), and *Down With Traitors*, which was published in “Headway,” a special literary section of the *Taiyuan ribao*, Jan. 14, 21, 1937. Zhao rewrote it from memory in 1950 (published in *Dazhong wenyi tongshun*, 1950, no. 2). After the outbreak of the war with Japan in July 1937, Zhao was pressed into service as a propagandist for the Sacrifice League. Undoubtedly it was his effectiveness in reaching the population that inspired those in charge to engage him. During this time he wrote a play, *A Sorceress Sacrifice to the Kitchen God*, no longer extant. The exigencies of war however, left him little time for writing (Zhao Shuili, “Yunyong quanton xingshi xie xi-landai xi de jidian tihui”  in *Zhao Shuili wenji*, vol 4, pp. 1775-1784). By late 1939, Zhao found himself once again in a position that demanded his expertise with the pen, when he joined the staff of the Ludong edition of the *Yellow River Daily*, a Sacrifice League publication, where he served as editor for the supplement, “Shandi” 金山. He also edited *Renmin bao* for a short period until he was transferred to the office of the North China *New China Daily* around June 1940, where he served as editor and writer for the bi-monthly, *Resistance Life*. In July of 1940, he was also placed in charge of the newly established paper, *The Chinese* 中国人, which was to be “a propaganda publication directed toward enemy occupied territories.” This four page, octavo sized weekly, Zhao turned out single-handedly, doing all the writing and editing himself, until around Nov. 1942. It contained news, editorials, opinions on public affairs, letters to the editor (letters and replies both concocted by Zhao himself), and a literary supplement, all written in a lively, popular, and often humorous style. He often couched his pieces in such forms as the comic cross-talk, *guci*  故事, the folk song, parables, fables, rhymed narrative, random jottings  笔, seven-word poetry, new style poetry, *zhenghui*  xiaoshuo, short librettos, and *kuibian*. That the publication was a one-man show was obscured by the profuse use of pen-names. (Dong Dazhong, “Zhao Shuli zai Huabei Xinhua ribao she de liang nian,” in *Xin wenxue shiliao*, 1983, no. 3, pp. 143-152.)
Speaking in terms of a number of generations, the Zhao family had at one time been quite well-off. The house in which Zhao Shuli was born was by rural standards quite large and sophisticated, having been built, it is believed, by his ancestor, a successful Qian Long scholar named Zhao Junchong (趙鈞充). It featured a two-story brick construction of rooms surrounding a courtyard on three sides and topped by a tile roof that extended over second floor balconies. The north and west rooms, including the attic, numbered twelve. This does not include a later addition to the west side of six extra small rooms. These were the rooms that the Zhao family occupied at the time of Zhao Shuli's birth, and also where he lived at the time of his marriage. The rooms to the east side at that time were owned and occupied by distant relatives, also surnamed Zhao.

Although the initial period of decline in the family’s fortune remains unknown, by the era of Zhao’s grandfather’s generation, the family had fallen to what was considered to be middle-level status. The grandfather, Zhao Zhongfang (趙仲芳) had not initially been a farmer and it may be adjudged that he never became one, making the application of the term “peasant” to him quite problematical. In his knowledge of the Classics he exhibited the legacy of the family’s ancestral scholarship, and he taught the village children in his own private school. When it came to making money, however, one would have to describe him as incompetent, and under his tenure the family financial situation continued to decline. In his youth he had gone with a fellow-villager to Henan province, where the latter invested a small sum of money to open a general store. Zhao Zhongfang worked in that store as a clerk in an attempt to support his family back in Yuchi Village. Unfortunately, in the turbulent times of the warring Qing dynasty, he was unable to earn a worthwhile wage. Finally, with the birth of his only son, Zhao Heqing, in 1884, when he was already past thirty years of age, he decided to remain in his native village and try his hand at farming. It was at this point that he bought the 16 mou of land that the family possessed at the time of Zhao Shuli's birth. With the lack of background and training in agriculture (it is said that he brandished a hoe like a greenhorn city slicker and didn't know how to swing a pickaxe), however, the family could not maintain itself on what he could produce. He supplemented the family's income by opening his private school in a lower level room of the west wing of the Zhao residence, where he taught the Classics during the agricultural off-season to twenty or thirty students. Even at the middle economic level, in possession of 16 mou of land and one mule, life was not easy to maintain, and the family's situation may perhaps be most accurately described as one of “ genteel poverty.”

Zhao Heqing (趙和清), Zhao Shuli's father, was not illiterate, as some sources claim, but was what is known as a “cultured peasant” (文化農民) who spent much of his time reading novels and libretto scripts. It was he who insisted upon Zhao's continuing his education after the death of the grandfather deprived him of his resident teacher. (Huang Xiuj, Zhao Shuli pingzhuan, p. 10; Gao Jie, et. al., pp. 4, 18; Wang Zhongqing, “Taihang renmin de erzi,” Shanxi ribao, Oct., 15, 1978.
Besides his editing duties for the *Dazhong ribao*, Zhao also held positions of responsibility on various committees: Preparatory Committee for the National Congress of Literary and Art Workers, Standing Committee of the National Association of Literary and Art Circles, Standing Committee of the Chinese Writers' Association, Preparatory Committee for the National Theatrical Renovation Conference, and Deputy Directory of the Preparatory Committee of the National Traditional Renovation Conference. (Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, p. 146.

Different biographers provide different explanations for the dismissal. It is said that his lack of support from the local gentry subjected him to the machinations of a certain educational inspector whose policy it was to dismiss annually one or two unbacked teachers to demonstrate his professional conscientiousness. See Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, p. 17; Gao Jie, et. al., p. 11.

Gao Jie, et. al., p. 11.

Li Shide 李士德, "Zhao Shuli de shaonian shidai," *Qinshui*, 1981, no. 2, pp. 63-66. Li gives as the grandfather’s name Zhao Zhongzheng 赵中正.

Ibid.


Wang Zhongqing, "Wode zhiyou."

Zhao Shuli, "Ye suan jingyan."

Zhao Shuli, "‘Chulu’ zatan."

Dai Guangzhong, *Zhao Shuli zhuan*, p. 61. *Xiucai* 秀才, one who passed county level examinations under the old Imperial Examination system, nowadays used as a euphemism for "scholar."

Zhao Shuli, "‘Chulu’ zatan."

He Ping 何平, "Zhao Shuli tongzhi tan ‘Hua hao yue yuan’", 赵树理同志谈《花好月圆》, *Zhongguo dianying* 中国电影, June 1957. Reprinted in *Zhao Shuli wenji*, vol. 4, pp. 1884-1892.

Zhao Shuli, "‘Chulu’ zatan."
Toward the end of that year (1928), Zhao, under pressure from his father, took a primary school teacher recruitment examination administered by Qinxin county. He placed first in a field of more than 400 candidates (Dong Dazhong, *Zhao Shuli qianpu*, p. 22). He was rewarded with an appointment to one of the most desirable institutions in the area, a primary school in the Qinxin county seat at the highest salary then paid to primary school teachers, ten yuan a month, twice the salary of a village school-teacher (Gao Jie, et. al., p. 23).

Fan Lingzhi, a character in *Sanliwan*, did something similar. Although she did not give up education or even think of it in a suspicious manner, she did give up her classmate, Ma Youyi, to marry the uneducated inventor Wang Yusheng. As one writer pointed out, "She conquered the weakness of the intellectual: false pride." See Zheng Ying (征鹰), "Tantan Zhao Shuli de xin zuo *Sanliwan*," *Jilin wenyi* 吉林文艺 1955, no. 18-19, pp. 84-87.

Though "The Tobacco Leaf Caper" was Zhao's last fictional work, it was not his last creative work. The work which marked the end of his writing career was *Ten Mile Inn* (Shi li bian 十里店), an opera (Shangdang bangzi) in six scenes which he completed in 1965. It was thematically grounded in "rural class struggle" against the background of the rural socialist education movement that was underway at that time (the "four clean-ups movement" 四清运动 directed at politics, economy, organization, and ideology). The intensifying interference of political power holders in the creative act is reflected in the fact that he was made to revise it five times. It is considered to be a critical failure. For details, see Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, pp. 254-260. The final version of this drama appears in *Zhao Shuli wenji*, vol. 3, pp. 1057-1135. The first version was published in *Renmin wenxue*, 1978, no. 5.

This title had been long known ever since Zhao Shuli himself mentioned it, but it was only in 1984 that Dong Dazhong rediscovered it in the *Shanxi Party Dispatch* (Shanxi dangxun 山西黨訊), Dec. 5-21, 1933, under the penname Shang Zai 尚在.

He once wrote a letter to his daughter in which he referred to her high school education as a "millstone around her neck." See "Yuan ni juexin zuo yige laodongzhe" 你决心做个劳动者, *Zhao Shuli wenji*, vol. 4, pp. 1566-1569 (see p. 1567).

In response to a letter published in the *People's Daily* in 1949, in which a factory worker expressed admiration for Zhao's stories and a wish for similar stories about workers, Zhao took up residence in a Beijing factory to broaden his experience in preparation for fulfilling this request. He later wrote about the failure of this experiment: "I feel that abandoning a place with which one is already familiar in order to gain familiarity with a place not very easily knowable is an enterprise that yields only half the result with twice the effort"; it is a case of "giving up one's own field to go weed the field of someone else." Quoted in Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, p. 153.
In the 40's Zhao rendered himself quite conspicuous by appearing in public in highly idiosyncratic garb. In January of 1942, while participating in a Shanxi-Hebei-Henan Conference of Cultural Workers as a delegate from the New China Daily, he attracted attention with both a melodramatic speech on the cultural habits of the peasantry and his style of dress which, featuring a homemade padded jacket, wrapped legs, and a felt skull-cap, which made him look "neither like a cadre nor like a peasant" (Gao Jie, et. al., pp. 65-66). Sometime later at a mass meeting in a village he became an object of intense curiosity: "He was supposed to have been sitting on the stage but he refused to do so. Instead he mingled among the audience, observing. To this add the fact that his manner of dress neither resembled that of a cadre nor that of the masses. This aroused the suspicion of the people's militia in charge of maintaining order. They started questioning him, but he did not straightforwardly identify himself, instead giving evasive answers. He was probably trying to experience down-to-earth life, which he couldn't have done if people knew who he was, but this only increased the suspicion of his interrogators. The soldiers were not exactly discreet in their questioning and soon a crowd gathered around. The leader presiding over the meeting saw this and came down from the stage and introduced to everyone the author of 'Xiao Erhel Gets Married'" (Zhang Wanyi 张万一, "Hustian Zhao Shuli tongzhi," Fenshui 涩水, 1980, no. 4, pp. 51-54, see p. 51; Italics added).

A Japanese guest at the Eighth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1956, described Zhao as follows: "Zhao Shuli, wearing a black Chinese tunic suit, seemed to be only forty or so. Tall and powerfully built, he really gave people the impression of a plain and simple peasant writer" (Kamaya Osamu 畠屋喜男, "Liangge nongmin zuojia - Ito Einosuke he Zhao Shuli" 两个农民作家 — 伊藤定助和赵书理, Zhao Shuli yenjiu, 1989, no. 3, pp. 30-56, see p. 41). Contrast Ito's description with others that depict Zhao as being frail with a "thin and weak physique." (See, for instance, Gao Jie, et. al., p. 84.)

Third Fairy and Er Zhuge, characters in "Xiao Erhel Gets Married"; Li Youcai, "The Rhymes of Li Youcai"; Leg Pains, "Tempering"; Lovely Moth, "Registration"; Chen Bingzheng, "Ungloveable Hands"; young cowherds, "Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng"; highland peasants, Spirit Spring Caves.

See for instance the woodcut representation on the cover of Zhao Shuli yenjiu, 1989, no. 3; according to Dai Guangzhong's description, this appears to be the same woodcut image that was printed in the People's Daily in 1949. It also appeared on the frontispiece of Guo Moruo, et. al., Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo. The novelist and playwright Miao Peishi described how he once awoke on a cold wintry morning in an eastern Shanxi village in 1943 to discover a strange middle-aged rustic sitting in his room waiting for him to wake up, who turned out to be, to his infinite surprise, the author of "Xiao Erhel Gets Married." (Miao quoted in Gao Jie, et. al., p. 84.)

Zhou Yang, "Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo."

Gao Jie, et. al., p. 126.

Xuanwumen wei, Xianglu ying, no. 15 (宣武门外香炉影)

Dongdan, Meizha hutong, Mejia miao, no. 2 (东单煤渣胡同马家庙)

Gao Jie, et. al., p. 155–156.

Ibid., p. 154.

Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, p. 151; Dai Guangzhong, p. 271.

Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, p. 150; Zhao Shuli, “Yuan ni juexin zuo yige laodongzhe.”

Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, p. 15.


Niu Yunqing, p. 30.

Gao Jie, et. al., p. 156.

Niu Yunqing, p. 30; Huang Xiuji, *Zhao Shuli pingzhuan*, pp. 151, 210–211.

Li Yi 李毅, “Zhao Shuli bei zheng” 赵树理放 僧, Zhongbaozhoukan 中报周刊, Jan. 17, 1969, p. 5. According to Li, the lecture was given in Nov. 1957, but at that time Zhao was not even in Beijing, as he had already departed on one of his extended provincial sojourns; see Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli yanjiu ziliao, p. 605. Yet another late article characterized him as “the consummate peasant writer.” See Li Yuan 李源, “Bei qingsuan de dalu zuojia Zhao Shuli” 被清算的大陸作家趙樹理, Shibao 时报, April 18, 1968, p. 10.

Zhao himself said that his family was knocked down from middle-peasant to poor-peasant level by interest rates in his 1949 article “Ye suan jingyan.”


Huang Xiuji in his Zhao Shuli pingzhuan predicated a fundamental connection between the author’s personal conduct, his peasant qualities or temperament (农民气质), and the nature of his creative works. See pp. 151-153; 318.


Niu Yunqing, p. 29. Italics added.

CHAPTER III

The Politics of Criticism

The connection of Zhao's name with truth has had a long history, and given the variations in the political climate over the nearly half-century since he stepped onto the literary stage, the truth that is associated with him casts a wide net. The authentic language, structure, characterizations, and voice of his storytelling style, as the natural and fundamental components of this truth, accommodated, even generated, emphasis upon socio-political truth, which ironically included both the typicality and visionary "authenticity" of Socialist Realism and the unvarnished revelations of social and political evils that inhabit the domains of true realism.

That Zhao's fiction should have incited favorable assessment based on the Socialist Realist canon only to be praised as well for intrepid exposure of politically embarrassing problems presents an enigma of simultaneous opposites. It conjures up multivalent suppositions of analytical dissimulation, relativization of truth, interpretive fallacies (even among natives), hidden complexities in the author's works, a political split in a supposed ideological monolith, and the more innocuous supposition that Zhao deliberately melded realism with the romanticism inherent to the storytelling form. To whatever degree such factors influenced Zhao Shuli criticism, undoubtedly the largest contributor to this puzzle was the modern intellectuals' perception of limited intellectual choices and their consequent adherence to the exigencies of a critical fashion that forced them to discover aspects of Socialist Realist truth in literary works.
This fractional intellectualism more than once crossed the line of legitimate schematic analysis to endow literary works with non-existent attributes. Creative interpretations imparted to "Xiao Erhel Gets Married," for instance, political and dramatic substance that the actual text does not convey. Politically, it was said to relate the "new reality" of the liberated areas, to depict "peasant revolutionary struggle" as well as the "process of ideological awakening" in peasants "under the teaching and leadership of the Party," and to praise the seminal role of the Communist Party in inspiring the young lovers, Xiao Erhel and Xiao Qin, to fearlessly defy "feudal forces" and the power of the landlord class. Furthermore, that a "liberated" (communist controlled) area serves as setting for a triumphant love story was said to be an aspect imbued with "a high level of typicality." Dramatically, it was said to show, among other things, how the young lovers' parents, the two oracles Third Fairy and Er Zhuge, who oppose the marriage, reform and become socialist workers in the end.

However, in contrast to the emphasis critics placed upon the teaching and leadership of the Party, the story actually focuses upon a social aberration unrelated to the existence of the Party. That is, it is because Third Fairy and Er Zhuge some time in the past inadvertently revealed their superstitious practices to be inefficacious or fraudulent that the conflict in the story can arise. Both of them have become local laughingstocks as a result of their mistakes, while Third Fairy is especially subject to contempt because she dresses and behaves like an old tart. Xiao Erhel and Xiao Qin are inspired to rebel against their arranged marriages precisely because their parents' lack of respect in the community has diluted, even delegitimized, their moral authority as parents. This circumstance is what allowed the story to achieve spontaneous popularity: members of the older generation certainly would not have found amusing a story which depicted children successfully rebelling against parental figures with whom they themselves could identify (i.e., figures exhibiting cultural normalcy). Thus, the two lovers are rebellious teenagers enjoying the unusual advantage of social
sanction rather than participants in “peasant revolutionary struggle.”

Only after their acts of defiance do they learn of the recent legislation of free marriage choice. This, and not ideological awakening, is what makes them fearless before the village bullies, who had obtained positions in the village communist administration through artifice and who now attempt to use their power to revenge against the young lady for refusing their sexual advances. That the district government, where the bullies drag Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin off to be tried for “adultery,” supports the young couple against their parents and disciplines the bullies, is the extent of the Party’s “leadership role,” which, while integral to the outcome of the story, is unrelated to the internal social dynamic that fuels it.

If we reach outside the story into actual social and political phenomena of the time, we would find that the manifestation of “typicality” in regard to the story’s setting for a triumphant love story can find legitimacy only insofar as the story demonstrates that if changes hadn’t come to the village, then “the happiness of Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin would have turned into an eternal tragedy.” For it is well known that the genesis of the story was a similar real-life scenario that ended not in triumph but in a tragedy in which the young man upon whom Xiao Erhei was modeled was killed by jealous rivals who, like the bullies in the story, had inveigled positions in the local communist government.

The notion that the story depicts struggle against the landlord class is strictly interpolated, as no landlord is depicted nor even mentioned. The claim that Third Fairy and Er Zhuge became socialist workers is perhaps the biggest mystery in “Xiao Erhei Gets Married” analysis, as there is in the story not the slightest suggestion that such was the case. The two are depicted simply as acquiescing to their children’s marriage and reforming to the point of abandoning public display of superstitious practices, as their experience in dealing with their children’s coming of age had made them finally realize the extent of their ridicule in the village.
The obsession with *doctrinaire* "reality" that expressed itself in absurd misconceptions about Zhao’s "first" story achieved greater heights of intensity in commentary about his later works, commentary which not only rationalized obviously unrealistic scenarios as truth and extracted non-existent meaning, as seen above, but also neutered instances of critical irony by asserting their literal realism.

The novel *Sanliwan*, for instance, suffered subjection to discussions the thrust of which implied its status as a true-to-life docudrama abounding in "concrete facts" that affirmed the efficacy of the Party agenda for agricultural collectivization: unprecedented increases in food production, crop variety, labor morale, and idealism among young people; gain of opportunities in scientific experimentation and acquisition of technological modernization; and a peasant population exhibiting the benefits of the instruction that Mao Tsetung had deemed indispensable.® Under this aura of verity – or even unaccompanied by such conjuring – lavish attention to the novel’s “positive characters,” that is, Party leaders and enthusiasts, and little or none paid to ordinary or “negative” characters produced an impression that the Chinese countryside now teemed with communist idealists and that Zhao’s novel focussed upon them in depth as the work’s major point of interest.

Though in actuality these “positive” characters – Wang Jinsheng 王金生, Wang Yusheng 王玉生, Zhang Yongqing 张永青, Wang Manxi 王满意 – are colorless and/or undeveloped and often barely register their presence as individuals upon the reader’s consciousness, they nonetheless elicited assertions of Zhao’s in depth treatment of them (particularly the two Wang brothers) and their “representativeness” in regards not only to the characteristics of actual rural Party cadres, but also to the general nature of the actual rural populace.®

The “reality” of the idealist Socialist in ascendency exulted in yet other “realities” that Zhao “truthfully” depicted: that new families totally dedicated to collectivism had arisen while old-style family life had been extinguished through
"miracles" of ideological transformation; that peasants were clamoring to join agricultural cooperatives (this was their "irresistible demand"); and that the rural concept of love and marriage had changed, with ideological convictions having now become the prime consideration in determining the desirability of a prospective mate. With straight-faced seriousness, a number of writers asserted or implied that a triad of dispassionate love stories exemplifying ideological rationality and free choice that supplied the story with its happy ending, and the miraculous conversion of the "degenerate" Party cadre Fan Denggao from "capitalist reader" to socialist paragon, were realistic scenarios reflecting the actual trends of real life.

The extraordinary disingenuousness or naiveté that attributed literal truth value to plot resolutions manifestly steeped in the properties of romance or irony showed up again in discussions of his 1962 story, "Mutual Validation" (Hu zuo janding). Here, the protagonist Liu Zheng's sudden overtly grateful embrace of the rural collective society he had heretofore abhorred was said to illustrate the improvement Party cadres had made in dealing with uncooperative individuals since the era of "rural rectification" that Zhao had depicted in his controversial "Tempering" ("Duanlian duanlian").

In their eagerness to discover the artistic expression of requisite truth, the literary aficionados responsible for such imaginative constructs missed the significance of the fact that a writer famed for his authenticity (he had embarrassed the Party in 1948 by exposing the abuses of corrupt Party cadres in "The Just Prevail" (Xie bu ya zheng) and his "storyness" (gushi xingniang) of all his characters, with the conspicuous exceptions of Fan Denggao and Liu Zheng, arrive at the denouement of their particular conflicts upon the vehicle of rational and plausible explanations) should portray philosophical conversions with the most essential element - the logical thought processes leading to them - missing.
In spite of Zhao's special status marking him as an epitome embodying in practice the principle of Maoist literary theory, and his reputation as the writer most knowledgeable about peasant society, he and the critical direction of commentary on his works could not escape the impact of the various manipulative campaigns and ideological inquisitions that have blotched the history of Communist power in China. That a number of people insisted upon fantasizing the presence of certain elements in his works was on the one hand part of a larger, manifestly insane attempt to conjure a reality out of thin air by convincing the public that resistance to utopia was rapidly going out of style, and on the other hand their intense desire to claim among their ranks a reputable writer in unconditional agreement with their goals and strategies.

While such tactics apparently failed to convince the "masses," as the ultimate failure of collective and communal agriculture suggests, they undoubtedly influenced the view that communist-bashers had of Zhao Shuli, if we may take as example C.T. Hsia, who characterized him as nothing more than a naive propagandist (p. 483) and condemned Sanliwan for presenting "an idyllic picture of the village" to show "evidence of Communist success" (p. 493). Hsia's comments are, of course, consistent with the attributes imposed upon Sanliwan as documented above: had Zhao indeed written the story described in those evaluations, then he would indeed be nothing more than a propagandist. However, while Sanliwan contains a great deal of romantic posturing — after all, Zhao did believe in the communist cause and even in collectivization — and closes with a happy ending that is at least superficially consistent with the Party's goals, the overall picture presented is far from "idyllic." For its projected dream of a pastoral utopia is immersed in multifarious exhibitions of intolerance and abuse: traditional victimization, obdurate rejection of any kind of change, self-righteous and unsympathetic condemnation of those morally bound to contradictory loyalties, and authoritarian harassment of those who disagree with the stated Communist agenda.
Thus, while the comic mode artistically justified the use of even outrageously unrealistic outcomes such as Fan Denggao's miraculous conversion, *Sanliwan* nevertheless did not present a society in which backwards forces had been "swept away" (Shu Ren) and peasants were "irresistably demanding" to join co-ops (Kang Zhuo), any more than "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" had depicted the two oracles as becoming socialist workers. For in the very way the novel turns to a hasty wrap-up in romantic resolutions after having implied its commitment to realism, it reveals the recalcitrance of social problems actually unresolvable in a realistic scenario consistent with the Party's obligatory preconceptions. Thus, it has been noted that the novel "effectively [made] it clear that the agricultural policy of the Communist Party [was] less than popular." As Shao Quanlin implied in 1964, if the leadership had understood Zhao's stories, "it would not have embarked on such an unrealistic policy as the [Great] Leap [Forward]." "

That Zhao Shuli was a dedicated communist and a Party loyalist is a fact reflected in his willingness to focus his muse upon topics of specific concern to the Party in its role as government helmsman, e.g., armed forces recruitment, land reform, the 1950 Marriage Law, agricultural collectivization, rural rectification, etc." To assume from this fact, however, that his work must be none other than dogmatic propaganda would be to ignore its content and its internal structure as well as the author's own theory and philosophy of literature.

In the realm of the artistic work itself, *Sanliwan*, for example, clearly indicates the author's sympathy for the ultimate goal pursued by the Party. But it also clearly depicts the obstacles to its realization, while the happy ending only serves to emphasize the magnitude of the problems the government faces in attempting to implement its policy. It sends a subtle but unmistakable message that socio-political engineering requires a great deal more thought - and more prudence - than that heretofore applied to the situation. Here *Sanliwan* provides a prime example of how Zhao
manipulated the comic mode to convey social truths while yet avoiding the tabooed picture of darkness and despair (tabooed by both the indigenous conventions of storytelling and the demands of Socialist Realism - however, which of these Zhao had in mind as he wrote is hard to say.)

In the realm of theory and philosophy, Zhao assumed the harmony of political exigencies and artistic pursuits, at least in their ideal configurations, for he believed that the moral justification of both art and politics lay in their obligation to effect social good. A writer, he said, who lives among the people and associates with them intimately on a daily basis will perforce discover salient topics compelling in their import both to artists and to those bearing the mantle of authority. A good artist pre-approaches issues that good government will inevitably perceive and propose as topics of artistic attention. Thus, government requests to artists to deal with specific topics simply antedate or coincide with the artist's long-contemplated, independent decision to focus upon them anyway. Concomitantly, when the artist chooses topics outside the government's stated concerns, he is serving society by pointing out problems to the agent most capable of solving them (i.e., government), thereby accelerating the advance of government to its ideal state. Zhao's vision, then, was one of politics and art strolling together hand in hand, cooperating as equals in an essential partnership performing a task that neither could do alone. Reflecting his literary aspirations, then, he described his stories as "problem stories" (问题小说), for they were the issue of his impulse to showcase compelling and confounding problems that simultaneously demanded and defied resolution.

A literary concept and a creative motive that together enshrine the exploration of existing problems in the interest of securing a better society through better government leave little room for the fantasy world of propaganda. They in themselves compel the conclusion that the author had not intended to signify through his stories the success of Party policy, for if policy had truly vanquished the ills it targeted, his
subject matter would have been altogether eliminated. While his stories contain much that is useful for proselytizing the population (for instance, to renounce superstition, abandon mistreatment of women, throw off the shackles of passivity, etc.), there is much more that suggests their function as reverse cautionary tales intended for the edification of government leaders, especially those at the local level. Thus, unambiguous depictions of salutary government intervention - usually typified by outside cadres correcting local corruption - take their place as projections of what might be achieved if leaders governed wisely and well (as in "Xiao Erhel Gets Married," "The Rhymes of Li Youcai," "The Just Prevail," "Registration").

Furthermore, the philosophical progenitor of his fiction has imparted to that element most prominent in the comic mode - the happy ending - a legacy it displays in its multifarious purposes and effects: besides those endings that exhort the powerful to use their power properly, there are those that emphasize the recalcitrant nature of problems by depicting resolutions that are "too easy" or "impossible" or blatantly contradictory to reality, as in Sanliwen; or induce nagging doubt as to the lasting effect of the resolution, as in "Xiao Erhel Gets Married;" or superficially camouflage an actually ironic, socially and politically condemnatory ending, as in "Tempering;" or provoke disquietude over the efficacy or desirability of the resolution through deliberate interjection of jarring narrative defect, as in "Mutual Validation." (These will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.) The happy ending of amplified function, conveying obliquely meaning that qualifies or contradicts its surface posture, undoubtedly contributes to the ambiance of hidden complexity attributed to Zhao Shuli.

Zhao shared the same naive faith in the Party and in Mao Tsetung as did his literary colleagues and the other intellectuals of his era. It was a faith that he maintained over the years even as he gradually came to realize the elusiveness of that ideal configuration he had postulated for art and politics in egalitarian partnership. Having been singled out to bear the stigmata of the literary laureate did not immunize him
against fundamentalist machinations to exploit intellectuals as enemies and neutralize them through psycho-lobotomy. The first attempt to cast Zhao into the mire of suspicion, self-doubt, and mind-consuming controversy occurred in the year following his enthronement as literary paradigm.

It was his "The Just Prevail", a short story on land reform published in the People's Daily in October 1948, that first drew the attention of ideological perversity. In contrast to the celebratory nature of other land reform fiction of the time, exemplified by Ding Ling's The Sun Shines Over the Sanggan River (1948) and Zhou Libo's The Hurricane (1948), Zhao's story focussed upon the corruption and abuse perpetrated by those to whom the task of land reform had been entrusted. Through the tribulations of the character Wang Jucai, it depicted the plight of middle peasants illegitimately subjected to the same tactics of economic disenfranchisement and social leveling that had been applied, often with devastating excess, to landlords and rich peasants a few years earlier. This phenomenon and the disturbing set of conditions which made it inevitable had been the subjects of a number of articles Zhao had published in the ten months prior to the appearance of the story. Though the existence of these problems were beyond dispute, having even caught the attention of Mao Tsetung himself, Zhao was immediately accused of perverting reality in his story: he had failed to "depict the resistance of the feudal landlords to the mass movement," falsely portrayed morally upright persons as being weak in the face of evil forces, "ignored the decisive role of the Party in every aspect of change in the countryside," "disregarded the organic relationship between the individual personality and the objective environment," presented an image of the Party that in no way resembled its actuality, and failed to appropriately expand upon the development of the story's "positive characters" and the "positive" aspects of its fundamental conflict.

Although such criticisms failed at the time to gain momentum as a campaign of ideological disciplinarianism, or to cast a pall over the legitimacy of his literary
philosophy, or even to induce a sliver of remorse in Zhao, complaints and accusa-
tions of similar ilk were to echo in later years.

In 1950, as editor of the magazine *Telling and Singing (说唱歌舞)*, Zhao pub-
ished a story by Meng Shuchi (孟淑心) entitled "Jinsuo" (金锁) (in issues 3 and
4). It told the story of Cao Jinsuo, a Fugui or Ah-Q type vagrant who hired himself out
as a laborer to a tyrannical landlord. This landlord supplied to him a refugee girl to be
his wife in lieu of a salary, setting up thereby what he thought would be a convenient
pawn for illicit sexual ventures. When the girl refused to accommodate the landlord’s
concupiscence, he animated a plot to kill both her and her husband. Jinsuo, however,
managed to escape, and he joined the communist army. After Liberation, Jinsuo re-
turned to the village as a company commander to settle the score with the landlord,
who, after his crime was exposed, was executed. This story immediately upon publi-
cation caught the wrath of critics, who thoroughly condemned it as an insult to the
working people. The denunciations presumed the illegitimacy of immortalizing non-
peasant rural figures (by definition immoral) as protagonists in the pages of litera-
ture:

"The story does not show how Jinsuo resisted or how he hated the
landlord. In fact, in some ways he even admired the landlord.... This is a
peasant? This is a member of the working masses? He is simply local
riffraff destitute of any moral integrity, nothing more than a landlord’s
running dog. It was only the dregs of the old society who had such a
character, who could remain indifferent even to the landlord’s molesting
his wife just so he could eat. And the author takes this to be the correct
route of the working peasant."

Zhao had published this story because he felt that "the author truly understands
the pre-Liberation countryside" and because it offered a "comparatively realistic"
glimpse into the "natural state of affairs that existed in the countryside before revolu-
tion came." He had also published it over the objections of the other staff members,
the result of which the author was eventually labeled a rightist and Zhao himself was
subjected to corrective action and made to "confess." His explanations revealed his
obdurate dissatisfaction with the rural image the Party wanted depicted:

"Among the opinions of readers was one which stated that the protagonist Jinsuo is not true and that [his portrait] is an insult to the working people. I think that this is not correct. The reason why I selected this work for publication was precisely because some people who write about the countryside are subjectively enamoured of the working people. Sometimes they idealize the peasants and sometimes what they write does not tally with the facts. Thus I chose a comparatively realistic work to serve as a reference. In actuality, peasants who have gone bankrupt and have been turned out of house and home commonly take one of five ways to seek a livelihood: 'earning,' 'begging,' 'thieving,' 'robbing,' or 'swindling.' Jinsuo at the outset took up 'begging' and then afterwards turned to 'earning.' Only people who have some foothold in society can afford to talk about 'maintaining integrity.' Those who depend upon kowtowing to the wealthy and powerful for their food cannot afford it. But it cannot be said that none of them are working people. There are virtually only four methods by which they can deal with oppressors: 'begging for mercy,' 'hiding oneself (avoidance),'' 'taking it,' and 'striking back.' Sometimes one method is used, sometimes they are used in concert. Jinsuo is no exception to this."

In the spirit of his belief that literature should offer a fountain of information that contributes to the task of social construction, he noted the danger of harboring an inappropriately romantic view of the peasantry: "If the comrades who work in the countryside go with the preconceived notion that peasants are heroic like soldiers in the Liberation Army, then when they run into a person like Jinsuo, they simply won't be able to understand [him]." In spite of this desire to help the Party to achieve success in its stated ambitions, however, and in spite of the fact that he also chastized himself for undemocratically proceeding on his own to handle the story "according to my own opinion without consulting anyone else," his confession was not well-received and he was forced to write another. In his second confession he declared that "everyone is right and I am wrong," and that "that which led me to defend the story was my own millstone of familiarity with the countryside."32

In 1970, an article contributing to a twelve month public anti-Zhao Shuli persecution campaign (July 1970–July 1971) asserted that the abnormally long time it took Zhao to complete Sentiiwen was a phenomenon emanating out of his
counter-revolutionary stance. That is, when the Party Central Committee declared in December 1953 that agricultural collectivization would be accelerated, Zhao Shuli had no choice but to suspend his work on his pro-capitalistic novel to wait for a political atmosphere which retreated from collectivism. Supposedly this occurred in the Spring of 1955, when the Liu Shaoqi faction took advantage of Mao's absence from Beijing to proselytize against the collectivization project, at which time Zhao leaped at the opportunity to finish off his "poisonous weed, Sanliwan." Unfortunately for the credibility of this scenario, Zhao had finished the novel in October of 1954, and it had already been serialized in *Renmin wenxue* starting from January 1955.

Be that as it may, Zhao himself felt that the novel had indeed taken a longer time to complete than it should have (two and a half years from the beginning of his field work). He attributed his dilatoriness to the distraction of his official duties. However, we might also speculate that during this creatively arid time, he, as a result of his excoriating experience in the "Jinsuo" affair, was pondering the logistics of depicting his observations truthfully without offending Party sensibilities.

The sensibilities of at least some were offended anyway. *Sanliwan* was the subject of much commentary. Some, as seen above, blindly offered up doctrinaire eulogies that contorted the novel into unrecognizable shape. Some comprised reasonable, legitimate analysis of its artistic strengths and weaknesses. And some featured the martinet of prescriptive political correction.

Given over to the latter critical direction were those who expressed a sense of outrage by declaiming against the portrayal of a degenerated Party member such as Fan Denggao. Others who accepted the place of such a character in literature lamented Zhao's incorrect handling of him: the struggle against him should have been portrayed in greater depth, specifically by depicting the Party Branch Secretary, Wang Jinsheng, as being intolerant of his disgraceful conduct. Wang Jinsheng, they said, should have exerted a greater impact upon the consciousness of the reader by "pointing
out a definite direction within an acute struggle according to the Party's policies and directives." Zhao, in failing to create such a character, had not carried out his duty as a writer. He made Wang Jinsheng react in effeminate, ineffectual ways toward Fan's intransigence: when Fan used Party policies to cover up his opposition to the Party line, Wang "did not feel disgusted." When the masses expressed enthusiasm for expanding the cooperative, Wang "did not get excited." His "uninteresting and colorless" personality does "not correspond to the position he occupies" and is unsuitable for the "complicated and arduous task of leading the transformation of rural socialism."

Besides his failure to present in Wang Jinsheng a staunch, heroic champion of Party policy, Zhao was also chastized for ignoring the class struggle and the "fact" that collectivization and Party rectification were mass movements. Inexplicably, he had left out the attempts of landlords and rich peasants to sabotage the socialist enterprise and the corresponding indignation and enmity such machinations had aroused in the socialist-minded masses. Indeed, he had deleted the whole process of mass awakening, even neglecting to show "that the struggle with Fan Denggao was carried out by relying upon the mobilization of the masses." Instead, according to Zhao, this struggle was "the affair of only a minority of enthusiasts," while the masses remained in the torpor of their unraised consciousness.

Furthermore, Fan's behaviour was not shown up for what it really was: a factor of class. Even Deputy Secretary Liu, who came in from the outside to enforce Party policy, was confused about the true nature of the struggle - which was a class struggle between capitalism and socialism - and he wrongly placed Fan in the same category as that of the benighted masses. Thus the struggle against him appeared merely as a clash of progressiveness vs. backwardness that presumed his possession of a rudimentary
socialist temperament that simply needed a jump-start to maturation. Fan was not distinguished as the enemy of the people that he was. Instead, in spite of his anti-socialist stance, he retained a great deal of prestige in the eyes of the villagers.*

Even Zhou Yang, generally thought of as Zhao's promoter and protector, wrote that Zhao had failed to present a true picture of modern-day peasants:

"In real life peasants have the strength to turn heaven and earth upside down. Not only can they overthrow the several thousand year-old system of landlord ownership, they can also reject the land they themselves acquired under the individual ownership system and resolutely go the route of collectivism. It seems as if the author did not see much of this strength in the peasants, at least he could not manifest this aspect with thoroughgoing truthfulness."^^

Although Zhao's biographers have little or nothing to say about him within the context of the turmoil that erupted at about this time - i.e., the Hundred Flowers Movement and the Anti-Rightist Campaign - one might deduce from his activities that he may have looked upon the Hundred Flowers Movement with disenchantment, either disapproving of the torrent of criticism flowing from the pens of intellectuals, or at the very least regarding their frankness as exceedingly unwise. As the Hundred Flowers criticism approached its fever pitch (May-June 1957), Zhao absented himself from Beijing and traveled as a National People's Congress Representative to various Shanxi institutions of learning to conduct symposiums with figures in cultural and educational circles so as to "listen to the opinions of the masses." He also went to inspect an agricultural cooperative in Taigu (大同), at which time he "labored together with the peasants" and conferred with local educators on the teaching of language and literature.**

That he should have picked that particular time to involve himself in provincial activities suggests that he was avoiding involvement in the explosive issues inundating intellectual and political circles; or perhaps he was emphasizing his own detachment from the concerns of those challenging the government: either he disagreed with them
and sided with the Party, or he had the prescience to foresee the ultimate consequences of their rashness. Perhaps having been raised in the "heartland" he understood more acutely the volatility and danger inherent in the ancient authoritarianism that still gripped the nation than did those intellectuals who had grown up in the more liberal urban centers. Whether unsympathetic with the Hundred Flowers complainers, or merely cautious, he lent his name to notions that suited the Party. For instance, at about this time, both before and after the beginning of the Anti-Rightist Campaign in June, he expressed in public forum his aversion to the ambitions of fledgling writers who sought the aid and advice of established writers such as himself: he viewed them as mere opportunists looking for a way out of their socialist-construction duties, and he accused them of pursuing a writing career merely for the fame and fortune it promised.* This smacks familiarly of the "one-bookism" theme that invigorated the Anti-Rightist Campaign with its image of the writer as avaricious social climber.

Another event significant in this regard was the nationwide publicity given the letter he wrote his daughter in which he rebuked her for a poor attitude toward physical labor, service jobs, and working people, and forcefully enjoined her to abandon her misguided attraction to the writing and cadre professions, go back to her native village and engage in agricultural production labour. This letter, which he wrote on Sept. 14, 1957, was published in newspapers across the nation, including the People's Daily, in mid-November, about a month after he himself had gone to Jindongnan to "participate in the rural rectification (zhengfeng) movement." Clearly, the Party was using Zhao as a prescriptive paradigm for the edification of those writers who had provoked its wrath; and Zhao clearly did not object - otherwise how would a private letter have gotten into the hands of the press?

In consideration of the kinds of things Zhao was saying in print and the prominence they attained in the public eye, it appears that his rural sojourn at this time to participate in the rural rectification movement was self-propelled and unrelated to
the Party's forced relocation of numerous writers to the countryside and to factories as punishment for their Hundred Flowers audacities. The publicity he received, or perhaps even engineered for himself, sharply contrasted his philosophy and conduct with the exaggerated accusations heaped upon the hapless "rightists." Subsequent depictions of his physical involvement with various projects in his home village in early 1958, further enhanced his image as a writer standing in solidarity with Party aims and means. His words and deeds furnished proof of proper intent, a badge of political authenticity that complemented his personal authenticity — and served him in good stead, at least for awhile, once he released his next major work into the public domain. For that work was "Tempering," a short story whose humorous but unvarnished rendition of peasants dealing with collectivism against the backdrop of rural rectification virtually dared ideological extremists to unsheathe their swords.

As the earliest comment upon this work indicated, this story stood conspicuously in a field of recent fiction given over to "advanced characters." With its portrayal of the two "backwards" women, Leg Pains and Hunger Pangs, and the ineffectual cadre, Wang Juhai, it presented an unprecedented view of contemporary rural China. In fact, it was said, in Wang Juhai, Zhao had revealed a hitherto unrecognized rightist conservative type among Party cadres and thus had contributed a new character type to modern Chinese literature. These very elements which prompted some to praise his powers of observation, antagonized the proponents of Zhou Yang's latest (March 1958) theoretical concoction mandating that literature embrace "a union of revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism." In the minds of the devotees to this dogma, Zhao had shoved a travesty to socialism down the nation's throat: in portraying feminine resistance to collectivist policies and a leadership that was either ineffectual or devious and brutal, he had, they said, ridiculed rural women, negated Party cadres, and slandered both. In its entirety, the story did not "reflect the essence of the era or of society" but rather imposed an
unrealistic picture of social and political stagnation. Zhao's cadres were not the "em­body of the Party" as cadres in real life were, his society not galvanized by the staggering power of socialist metamorphosis that had transformed the face of the real countryside, his peasants not the inhabitants of the "Divine Land of 600 million Yao's and Shun's" in which the backward were merely minor exceptions, his collective community destitute of its essential mass(ive) opposition to capitalist thought. The story was founded upon an environmental description that completely contradicted its concrete counterpart and thus the characters, having been forced to react to these artificial conditions, could not help but be "untypical." The phrase that stood out in these criticisms and became the emblem of their assertions was "distortion of reality," and Zhao was pronounced a writer lacking the vision necessary to make an artistic generalization about the society he lived in. Ironically, the tirade against his "distortions" was interspersed with concessions to the truth of certain points - and objections to their revelation in the pages of literature.*

The criticism of "Tempering" contained a virulent tone that distinguished it from the (comparatively) civilized reiteration of "defects" that marked discussions of Sanliwan. This tone signaled the increasing boldness among the forces of extremism. Undoubtedly Zhao's reputation was a factor that helped prevent his fall from grace at this time when the mood for suppression had attained new heights. This criticism was not permitted to stand alone as an unchallenged indictment but rather was juxtaposed against the evaluations of Zhao's defenders. The decriers and the defenders together materialized a curious literary debate in which the two sides formulated diametrically opposed conclusions about the nature of the story and its tie to reality. The accusation that he had concocted an entire environment and populated it with characters which had no real life counterparts was countered by the assertion that Zhao had portrayed the countryside exactly as it existed. Those who panned him as an imposter with no talent for generalizing reality into fictional typicality were challenged by those who lauded
his astonishing ability to create highly typical and realistic characters. Depending upon which critic we listen to, Zhao indicated clearly the reason for rural backwardness or he failed miserably to explain it. He approved of cadre Yang Xiaosi's forceful tactics or he did not approve at all. He was correct in dealing with contradictions among the people or he was wrong to do so. He handled the contradictions correctly, showing the backwards peasants were victims of outmoded mores, or he handled them incorrectly, treating the backwards peasants as enemies or common criminals. The cadres' tactics were outrageously forceful or not the least bit forceful. The cadres ridiculed the peasant women or merely temporarily manipulated their backward psychology for the overall good of the co-op. The character Wang Zhenhai was the ideal party cadre or he was woefully unrepresentative of the true Party. His remark at the end about the laughability of the cadres' tactics indicated Zhao's approval of force or indicated his disapproval.

In the end it was Zhao's defenders who were granted the final say, a twist likely related to Mao's recently installed theory of literary purpose — i.e., the scrutiny of "internal contradictions among the people" — as well to his reputation. The defense drew upon his public persona as recommendation, pointing out that he had a much greater familiarity with and a much deeper understanding of life than did those who assumed the role of literary critic. For this reason, it was asserted, critics should be cautious in their criticism and not lightly question the authenticity of the observations of a writer such as Zhao Shuli. This was a conclusion that any extremists in charge of the official Party line could not refute and simultaneously retain their own credibility after having thrown Zhao's image of authenticity in both the political and personal realms into the faces of the "rightists."

The spiteful tone with which Zhao's critics impugned his story suggests that they were not innocent of a concerted effort to contaminate his name for political expediency. By this time the Great Leap Forward was showing vicious cracks in its
foundation, and it is not far-fetched to surmise that in the minds of its engineers Zhao's "problem stories" had become problematic vis-à-vis the Leap's rosy promotion. Though "Tempering" first appeared in August 1958, when the Leap had already been in full swing for several months, it did not provoke much comment until April 1959, when the first of the negative reviews adorned the pages of Wenyi bao. That the intent of the attack went beyond mere literary concerns seems evident from the fact that the failure to convince the reading public of Zhao's villainous design was followed by a successful bid to denounce him for "rightism" (右倾 ) a mere six months later. His accusers had to go outside his creative literary efforts to find the appropriate ammunition.

The scenario for this engineered "fall from grace" began in August 1959, when Peng Dehuai, who had criticized the Leap a month earlier, was accused at the Eighth Meeting of the Central Committee of the Eighth Party Congress (八届八中全会 ) of being anti-Party and anti-socialist and condemned as a "rightist opportunist." Meanwhile Zhao, who had initially supported the Leap whole-heartedly, had become alarmed at the disastrous direction in which it was heading, and he wrote a lengthy article (later known as the wan yan shun ) on the subject, sending it off to the Party's theoretical journal, Red Flag, on August 20. In it he discussed a number of serious problems he had observed with the Leap and with the newly established people's communes, such as the destructiveness of placing agricultural planning (quotas, etc.) into the hands of a distant and detached state agency that had no concept of local conditions and problems, setting up an atmosphere of competition that encouraged empty boasting and misrepresentation, and ignoring the personal well-being of and personal benefits for the peasants themselves.

This article was not published but instead ended up in the hands of the Party Group (党委 ) within the Chinese Writers' Association, having been turned over to it in excerpted form by the editor of Red Flag, Chen Boda (陈伯达 ). The Party Group
denounced Zhao vigorously in November, charging him with “singing the same tune in concert with Peng Dehuai,” “wantonly vilifying the Three Red Banners (the General Line for Socialist Construction, the Great Leap Forward, the People’s Communes),” and “restoring the capitalist agricultural bible.” His vision of a prosperous rural China, in which all peasant families would have achieved the economic level of the well-to-do middle peasant, was assailed as “the point of view of the backwards peasant intent upon restoring capitalism.” The Party Committee of Yangcheng county (阳城县) in Shanxi added fuel to the fire by preparing a file of Zhao’s “rightist words and deeds” and sending it to the Writers’ Association. From November on, he was harassed and censured at various meetings over a period of three months.

Zhao’s personalized initiation into the malestrom of perverse ideological persecution stopped short of intrusion upon his political status. When the Third National Congress of Literary and Art Circles convened in July-August 1960, he was elected a member of its presidium. Later he was reelected committeeeman of the National Federation of Literary and Art Circles, council member of the Chinese Writers’ Association, and the Chair of the Chinese Folk Art Association. But the anti-rightism excoriation to which he had been subjected must have extended into his literary works from the non-literary political expression that had precipitated it, for he now not only conceived of his own vulnerability to the forces of unreason, but also felt for the first time his very literary impulses hedged suffocatingly about with prohibitions. The basic premise of his creative efforts had been anathematized by the very movement that had inspired it. A sense of danger combined with one of frustration: his problem stories were now concertedly taboo, yet he was also unwilling to harness his pen to the current hysteria that had spawned an avalanche of faddist literature expounding absurd fantasies as facts. At this point, his dream of abandoning his professional career and becoming a farmer reasserted itself, and he even idly fantasized escape through the unlikely scenario of joining up with revolutionary forces in foreign countries he read
The crisis, nonetheless, did not stanch his creativity. Indeed it might be said that in the midst of reluctance — he now wrote virtually only on commission — his response to constraint comprised a seizing of opportunity. His style changed dramatically, in itself an indication of discontent and protest. His inscribed audience was obviously no longer that conglomeration of work-weary peasants gathered around the storyteller in the dusty marketplace. The “storyness” was gone with plot having flattened out practically to non-existence, caricaturized characters with their colorful nicknames had disappeared, the narrative thrust had become amorphous, objects of satire eliminated, clashes of acute contradictions failed to materialize, no social problems were overtly presented and solved, the characteristic wry humor obliterated.

His writing now slid in, out, and between the substance of two genres, now melding, now separating the elements of fiction and reportage in a tenuous combinatorial style given over to the delineation of heroic figures. But rather than having capitulated to dogmatic demands for stylized, undissuadable heroes with burning eyes and set jaws a la Rambo credibility, Zhao’s objective lay in showing up such representations for the nonsense they were. He sought to ridicule through the tacit but conspicuous contrast his portrayals set up the entire display of madness holding the countryside in thrall and manifested in such foolishness as the issuing of arbitrary orders in disregard of local conditions, boasting and exaggeration of accomplishments, and glorification of the imposed “ideal” of equal property division. His heroes — Chen Bingzheng (“Ungloveable Hands”), Pan Yongfu, Zhang Latxing (eponymous characters) — were ordinary men who lived moral, practical lives and whose heroism lay in graceful and unassuming other-directedness, the drive to do their jobs right, the impulse to go the extra mile, the dedication to no-nonsense, down-to-earth, attainable goals. The serene, level style of writing complemented their personalities, enhanced the conveyance of their level-headed pragmatism, and signified the foundation of their
portrayals in rock-solid reality. As for "problems," Zhao did not really avoid them, but slyly smuggled them in "on the side."

While the tyranny of "Leap" and anti-rightist mentality acted like a succubus upon the nation's literary soul, paralyzing writers' wills and ingesting all but the skeletal foundation of their expressive talents, Zhao's works unobtrusively emerged as an exception of the period. Though sparse in comparison to what might have been in gentler times, they revealed their author's gift for creative flexibility. He was, they testified, not a man congenitally bound to the confines of "national form" and the stunted artistic point of view that some would say this implied, but rather an artist of hidden reserves of versatility. Was he, we must ask, a man whose talents had been voluntarily or otherwise held in check to accommodate political exigencies? The persistence of ideological turmoil from this point to the end of his life — indeed which brought about the end of his life — ensured that his powers of observation and expression would never attain the room to stretch to the fullest reach of the capacity these works hinted at. But that which is taken to be more significant within the context of Chinese literary pragmatism and its emphasis upon moral excellence, is the fact that his works of this period represented a rare instance of a writer's ingenious manipulation of a perverse politico-literary environment to make it yield up truth. This fact consolidated and cemented in stone Zhao's reputation as the epitome of literary, political, and personal authenticity.

Hommage declaring as much was paid Zhao in 1962, at the Conference on Rural Themes for Short Stories held in Dalian (大连). Convened to repudiate the unrealistic portrayal of peasants and rural life in recent literature, and to launch a new era of literary honesty, the meeting focussed the thrust of its sentiments upon the "thorough affirmation and promotion of Zhao Shuli's spirit of realism."

That which precipitated this second apotheosis was the evidence of multi-dimensional dedication to truth. His stories "Ungloveable Hands" (età不住的手) and "Pan
Yongfu, Man of Action (永福 为民), cited as significant works deserving of greater attention and higher evaluation than that so far accorded them, were only one aspect of what was seen as an admirably staunch stand for truth and realism during the heyday of falsehood and misrepresentation. These works, though subdued and indirect expressions of his point of view, comprised the courageous public expression of the indignant attitude that he directly and vigorously displayed (or was willing to display) in non-public or limited forums (e.g., letters to Party officials and the circumvented article to *Red Flag*). Cited for fearless outspokenness, daring perseverance, and dedication to independent thinking, Zhao once again was declared the nation's writerly paradigm. His incomparably intimate familiarity with peasants and rural life had combined with his allegiance to his convictions to produce a writer who was "true to life and its objective facts." Nothing he wrote could thus ever be doubted as distortion. Recognizing this, Shao Quanlin, as representative of the Writers' Association Party Group, thoroughly repudiated the anti-rightism condemnation that that organization had inflicted upon Zhao in 1959.60 Zhao's commitment to depicting only what "he himself saw, felt, and believed" represented the "triumph of realism" in China. He who had coined numerous memorable nicknames for his fictional characters himself was endowed with the sobriquets "Iron Pen" (钢笔) and "Divine Physician" (神医) of rural writing, that is, the uncompromising master of rural mimesis and the one man capable of restoring the enterprise of rural depiction to a state of health.61

Zhao had little time to apply this declaration of the writer's autonomy to the artistic process before the backlash against the "middle-man" (non-hero) in literature once again reversed it. He wrote two stories within this window of opportunity that spanned August 1962 to September 1964, "Mutual Validation," which appeared in October 1962, and "The Tobacco Leaf Caper," published in January 1964. Both of them were even more "un-Zhao-like" than his story-reportage accounts of unobtrusive heroes. They conveyed a sense of schizophrenic allegiances and were heavily
imbued with the element of emotional explosiveness. Once again the "problem" came
to the forefront, but it was unlike any problem he had dealt with before, that of rural
educated youth and their inconvenient development of personal ambitions. Provoc­
atively, the two protagonists, Liu Zheng and Jia Hongnian, poured their energies into
carving out for themselves literary careers. Zhao Shuli himself had indicated that
such youth were misguided, that they should settle down, abandon their unrealistic
ambitions, and throw themselves into rural labour. Even his depiction of Liu and Jia
carry an unsympathetic tone. But, disconcertingly, what he said and the tone he im­
parted to his stories do not coincide with the actual effect the stories produce. From
between the lines there emerges a subtle inconsistency which induces sympathy for the
two youths in spite of their shortcomings. For one cannot but feel that the criticism
leveled at them is excessive in comparison to their faults, and furthermore that for the
most part their faults are faults merely because an artificial imposition of values has
made them so. In addition, the depiction of a case of ideological madness disguised as
virtue (i.e., in the character Wang Lan of "Caper"), a feeling of irritation that Zhao
had selected for attention phenomena that were monumentally petty in comparison to
the corruption, abuse of power, and even heinous crimes he must have known were oc­
curring in the countryside, and even the incorporation of a gross narrative defect
unique to his entire body of writing (in "Mutual Validation"), induce the suspicion
that Zhao was deliberately if obliquely conveying his sense that there was something
seriously wrong with the socio-political arrangements of the countryside and the as­
sumptions behind them.

These two stories, especially in the ambiguity and strangeness present in their
underpinnings, suggest the psychological and philosophical fluidity of a writer in cre­
ative transition. As the artificial tail-end of short-circuited career, they provoke
wonder at what he might have produced had the promise of creative autonomy at Dalian
been permitted an atmosphere in which to flourish.
As noted previously, "The Tobacco Leaf Caper" turned out to be Zhao's last piece of fiction, although he had not intended it to be so, as he had been working on ideas for other stories. At the time the Cultural Revolution broke out, he had been preoccupied with writing *Shangdang bangzi* dramas. Since we are here concerned only with his fiction and the interplay of his persona and his fictional world in the public mind, it would not be useful at this time to delve into the details of his work in other genres (which, though quite extensive, has little impact in literary circles) or to analyze how his vilification in the "middleman" controversy and the Cultural Revolution stilled his pen. Once the period of critical tyranny and political insanity subsided, and Zhao's name was posthumously restored, the evaluation of his career and his fictional works resumed its former thrust and elaborated upon the themes it had always embraced, that is, the authenticity of his person and his depictions.
The theory of socialist realism as a guiding principle was expounded by Chou Yang at the Second Congress of Chinese writers and artists on September 24, 1953. Joe C. Huang, Heroes and Villains in Communist China, New York, Pica Press, 1973, p. 239.

One writer, a proponent of Zhao Shuli as a true realist, ingeniously amasses words with the component "shi" into one sentence to make his point: "We feel that Zhao Shuli's stories contain the truth, the content is strong, the writing is sincere and honest, the depictions true to reality; indeed, the truth sometimes comes close to being too real, to the point of triviality." See Fang Yuxiao 方溶晓, "Zhao Shuli chuangzu de xianshizhuyi tezheng" 赵树理创作的现实主义特征, Liaoning daxue xuebao 辽宁大学学报, 1981, no. 4, pp. 79-84; see p. 84.


Si Ji Ji思佳, "Lun Zhao Shuli de qianqi duanpian xiaoshuo" 论赵树理的前期短篇小说, in Tan Zhao Shuli de duanpian xiaoshuo, Changjiang wenyi chubanshi, 1959. Reprinted in Fudan University Department of Chinese, ed., Zhao Shuli zhuanji 赵树理专集, Shanghai, Fudan University, 1979, pp. 209-218 (see p. 211).


The difficulty of transcending the conceptual limitations induced by the politically correct criticism of the past is demonstrated in the analysis of even a scholar as meticulous and astute as Huang Xiuji, who also writes that the two oracles reformed because of Party instruction. See Zhao Shuli pingzhuan, p. 282.


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Jin Demen, "Shehuizhuyi shiganjia," p. 54. See also Wang Zhongqing, "Huzuo jianqiang' du hou gan," Shanxi jiaoyu, 1982, no. 1, p. 19. (Wang does not compare the story to "Duanlian duanlian," but his premise is essentially the same. He says Zhao wrote the story to show how to handle people like Liu Zheng, that is, through rational discussion based on facts.)

That is, the deus ex machina is not a hallmark of Zhao's fictional world. In the case of Liu Zheng, in fact the story does end in a hidden or disguised rational and plausible explanation - it is that Liu Zheng has not arrived at the denouement of his problem.

Quan Lin (Shao Quanlin), "Cong yipian sanwen xiangqileide," Renmin wenzxue, July 1959, pp. 19-21.


Joe C. Huang, Heroes and Villains, p. 243.


See Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuan, pp. 230-231.


Zhao Shuli, "Ye suan jingyan." See also Zhao's essay "Huiyi lishi, renshi ziji" in Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 4, pp. 1825-1844, cited in Han Yufeng, et al., p. 52. See also Dai Guangzhong, Zhao Shuli zhu, p. 357.
He stated outright that his intention in writing “The Just Prevail” was “to record the various experiences and teachings of the entire land reform process of that time and place so as to let the cadres and the masses [involved] in land reform know what to go toward and what to avoid.” See “Guanyu ‘Xie bu ya zheng,’” Renmin ribao, Jan. 15, 1950. Reprinted in Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 4, pp. 1436-1440. We might also discern evidence as to his intended audience in the very fact that he expended much of his creative energies on fiction, whereas a more efficient way of reaching a peasant audience lay in the performing arts. A fictional work by its very foundation in the written word could practically end up before the eyes of political leaders near and far, while an opera geared to peasant taste would more likely remain in the ghetto of local performance. In fact, most peasants knew of Zhao’s fictional works through their adaptation into performance modes. It is significant that Zhao should have chosen as the primary form for his stories fiction rather dramatic forms, which were more immediately attractive to the actual peasant audience.

Ironically, Zhao had truncated the story, eliminating a whole last section that would have dealt with the love stories in greater depth. He eliminated this and condensed the love stories, supposedly to accommodate his readers, that is, not so much their aesthetic taste as their pocketbooks. However, given the truth of the assumption that he knew his readers thoroughly, he had to have known that such a truncation would have made them dissatisfied, since the condensation cut out all of the “reality effect.” Thus, it appears that what Zhao really had in mind was not “accommodation” but rather provocation. For his truncation motivation, see He Ping, “Zhao Shuli tongzhi tan Hua haoyueyuan,” Zhongguo dianying, June 1957, pp. 40-42 (see p. 41).

See Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli pingzhuan, pp. 262, 264. Zhao, no less than Liu Binyen, embraced “a higher kind of loyalty” which the Party threw back in his face with even greater virulence than it exercised against Liu. Liu documents his process of awakening to the truth of essential and intractible Party hostility to intellectuals in his A Higher Kind of Loyalty, New York, Pantheon Books, 1990. If Zhao Shuli had survived his Cultural Revolution ordeals, he likely would have come to the same conclusions as Liu.

The land reform project in the Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu area had been kicked off in June 1946, with the issue of the “May 4th Directive.”


See his “Guanyu ‘Xie bu ya zheng’”


For information on the timing of land collectivization policies, see Joe C. Huang, Heroes and Villains, p. 282.


37 Wang Yu, “Tan Sanliwan zhong de renwu mieoxie.”

38 Chen Kaiming, “Beijing shifan daxue zhongwen xi jinxiu ban wenyi liliun zuo lun Zhao Shuli de Sanliwan” 北京师范大学中文进修班文艺理论组讨论赵树理的 “三里湾”, Xinjiang shehui xue, July 1957, pp. 54-59.


40 Wang Zhongqing, “Tan Zhao Shuli de Sanliwan.”


42 Gao Jie, et. al., p. 166.


44 Merle Goldman, Literary Dissent in Communist China, pp. 210, 227.

45 Huang Xiuji, “Zhao Shuli zhuaniule,” p. 193; Dong Dazhong(179,628),(789,635), “Yuan ni jie xin zuo yi ge laodongzhe.”

46 See for instance Shui Tiansheng 夏天生, “Tahang shan zhong fang Zhao Shuli” 太行山中访赵树理, Guangming ribao, Jan. 30, 1958. See also discussion in Huang Xiuji, Zhao Shuli zhuan, pp. 208-209.


48 Merle Goldman, Literary Dissent in Communist China, p. 246.
武阳，“一出走在街上的小说——‘短篇短篇’读后感”，《文艺报》，1959年7月，第4-5页；
安阳，“‘几时他们曾经发生过？’这是什么办法？”，《文艺报》，1959年9月，第11页；
李连明，“‘短篇短篇’的典型性问题”，《文艺报》，1959年9月，第13-14页。

王西彦，“‘短篇短篇’和反映人民内部矛盾”，《文艺报》，1959年10月，第2-5页。

戴广忠，赵书礼，《赵书礼专论》，第354-359页；
黄秀吉，赵书礼，《赵书礼评传》，第213-214页；
高洁，等，《赵书礼年谱》，第155页；
赵书礼，“公社应该如何领导农业生产”，《赵书礼文集》，卷4，第1663-1669页。

该书引用了《赵书礼专论》、《赵书礼评传》、《赵书礼年谱》等多部著作。
CHAPTER IV
The Language of the Fictional World

It speaks eloquently to the cultural barrier that exists between the U.S. and China that very few modern Chinese writers penetrate the ghetto of Far Eastern scholarship to receive the recognition of the general public. Even Lao She, whose *Rickshaw Boy* underwent disfigurement in deference to the taste of Book-of-the-Month Club readers in 1945, does not enjoy the name recognition, not to mention the critical acclaim, bestowed upon such foreign writers as Columbia's Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Brazil's Mario Vargas Llosa, Italy's Umberto Eco, South Africa's Nadine Gordimer, Russia's Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Japan's Yukio Mishima, the Indian-Trinidadian-British writer, V.S. Naipaul.... The list, indeed, could be very nearly endless, while the average reader of modern literature would likely strike an impasse were he asked to think of a Chinese name to include on it. Even more telling is the conspicuous absence of Chinese names from the roster of Nobel laureates. This persistent underappreciation prompts the Chinese government to commission its own translations into English and other foreign languages in an attempt to spark international recognition. The products of this domestic enterprise, however, attract meager attention from among those Americans outside the parameters of Asian studies or even beyond the circle of those particularly interested in and sympathetic to China. Even renditions into English by U.S. scholars are subject to this neglect.

It is significant that this indifference prevails in spite of the transformations earlier this century that propelled Chinese literature into a metaphysic approximating the Western ideal of narrative form and purpose. The image of Chinese writers yoked
to a political machine which sabotages their creative potential, while not a mere phantasm, also fails to take into account the large influence Chinese writers exert in their society as well as the enormous enjoyment that their works provide their audiences. Furthermore, being equally applied to all writers in the People's Republic, it results in their relegation to a generic heap that obscures the variety displayed in their work. Meanwhile, it is notable that writers of Taiwan and Hong Kong, in spite of the politically contrastive systems under which they live, have equally been unable to break into the consciousness of the American audience. This neglect, then, cannot be solely rooted in a perception of circumscribed creativity, but also must necessarily lie in an American "horizon of expectations" that is inconsistent with the Chinese aesthetic.

This brings us to Zhao Shuli, who lends himself well to an investigation of this problem because his writing is quintessentially Chinese. This is not to say that he is typical and that a reading of his works would provide a general picture of Chinese modern literature. For, unlike his literary colleagues, he overtly exploited the aesthetic legacy of China's traditional oral narrative. This fact, even isolated from political considerations, suggests the basis for which his works have proven unamenable to transplantation into the Western environment. It also makes him uncommonly suitable for a study of the American quarrel with "Chineseness" in narrative literature.

Cross-Cultural Transformation

Crucial to the success of an alien work in a new culture is comparable access to its essence. Yet, even with all things being equal, cross-cultural reading by nature generates a transformed experience of the text in much the same way as a text from the past is subject to the "historicity of understanding." In discussing the volatility of textual understanding over time, E.D. Hirsch, Jr. noted that "there is a difference between the meaning of a text (which does not change) and the meaning of a text to us today (which changes)." This is a concept equally applicable to a text uprooted from the
place of its origin - a synchronic uprooting in contrast to the diachronic uprooting related to the passage of time.

In regard to this cross-cultural transformation, an observation made by T.S. Eliot bears relevance: "no artist...has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. ... I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism." Although Eliot related the perception of artistry to the text's historical milieu, this principle must also apply to its contemporaneous environment - to the live writers as well as the dead ones. The text's relationship both to historical and to other contemporary texts - its textual collegiality, as it were - comprises a part of its essence. For the impact it has on the reader is determined to great extent by the preconceptions fomented by the artistic matrix they comprise and in which it makes its appearance. This is related to the "pre-structured nature of understanding" which Heidegger conceptualized: "Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception." Since the literary environment, through the preconceptions it creates, determines the way in which the literary work is experienced, and, as Leo Lowenthal says, "what [the literary work] is, is determined essentially by the way it is experienced," then to remove the work from its original or "natural" environment is to annihilate a portion of its aesthetic base, to slice from it a section of its personality, and therefore to transform it.

The change in a text through change in environment was addressed by the Prague structuralist Felix Vodicka, whose view Holub (p.35) summarizes: "the structure of the entire work takes on a new character when the circumstances involving time, place, or social conditions are altered." Wolfgang Iser also noted that the "historical situation and social norms" comprise a system upon which the literary text draws, even though this system exists outside the text itself. Thus, it is not merely its position among
other texts that comprises a part of its essence; the larger, all-encompassing system of its originating culture at a certain point in time is involved. The work's introduction into an alien system, then, with its different beliefs and literary backdrop means an amputation of part of its essence. The greater the disparity between systems and the fewer the shared literary texts — i.e., the fewer the mutual cultural givens — the more serious the amputation, and the premise under which the work's *dramatis personae* operate or its plot is formed is obscured or disappears altogether. This puts characters and plot under a strain of credibility, making them seem bizarre or unbelievable or uninteresting or manipulated.

The members of two different cultures can never experience a work in precisely the same way, even if both cultures share the same linguistic matrix. A work that is successful in two different cultures is a work that is able to overcome the cross-cultural transformation because it embraces — or appears to embrace — at the very least a certain minimum of mutually similar cultural givens. Conversely, the fewer the mutual cultural givens, the more likely the work is to be rejected by the second culture. The cross-cultural transformation results in an unpredictable variety of responses based upon type and degree of appreciation. That is, the adopting culture may appreciate the work for reasons similar or dissimilar to those reasons upheld in the originating culture; and the adopting culture may appreciate the work to a greater, similar, or lesser extent than does the originating culture. Greater appreciation in an adopting culture suggests that the work is to some extent an anomaly in the originating culture. Lesser or negative appreciation generates accusations against the originating culture that focus upon artistic standards or perceived forces of repression. The rejecting culture, in an attempt to explain the work's high regard in the originating culture, sets up a premise of cultural inferiority or of a false success artificially imposed by authoritarian power.

As noted above, sharing the same linguistic matrix does not prevent cross-cultural transformation. When different languages are involved there is a potential for
intensifying or distorting the transformation. Here we may turn to a remark made by Hans Robert Jauss concerning the historicity of understanding: “A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence.” When applying this concept to synchronic cross-cultural transmission of a text, however, we may point out a difference in the logistics of understanding: that is, in the diachronic uprooting of a text within its cultural bounds, the text nonetheless maintains its original form; and although changes in audience disposition prevents the “monological revelation of its essence,” nonetheless, by the fact that its original form is preserved, there remains the potential for such a revelation. The entire work in its integral being at least remains available to the audience. Cross-cultural transmission, however, more often then not involves translation, an event which presents to the potentially adoptive audience a form drastically different from the original. Furthermore, the more the work’s essence is embedded in the peculiarities of the original medium, the more obstacles to it the audience encounters. Depending upon the nature of the original language - or rather the author’s original use of it - and the skill of the translator, there is to varying degrees less access to the work’s essential meaning in synchronic transplantation involving translation than there is in historical uprooting within the same culture. Translation, indeed, may destroy the very factors contributing to the effect that inspired the reverence of the original audience. A work that presents a high rate of mutual cultural givens may be able to overcome the damage of a poor or inevitably failed translation. In the case of a work that possesses a low rate of such givens, the linguistic misrepresentation of an inequivalent translation will serve to compound suspicions as to the validity of its original high evaluation.

To summarize, then, the cross-cultural transformation, which may merely slightly modify a work or go so far as to destroy its integrity, occurs through the loss of
the work's original environment with its three variously interacting matrices - artistic, cultural, and linguistic - and the imposition of a new environment with a new set of matrices incompatible to a greater or lesser extent with the work. In both environments all three matrices interact variably and unpredictably to determine the effect of the work.

The remainder of this chapter will show how the cross-cultural transformation denies to the American reader comparable access to the essence of Zhao Shuli's works.

Zhao Shuli and the Language of Prose

Language has played a conspicuous role in the reaction of the native reader to Zhao's writing. Not the least part of Zhao Shuli's obscurity in the U.S. stems from the loss in translation of what is most valued by the Chinese, that is, a specific linguistic configuration which in itself conveys the essence of Chinese rural culture. Now, there are certain assumptions about the language of prose, particularly in its relation to narrative, that make the implication of translation in a writer's failure to impress a foreign audience seem no more than palliation of the writer's failings as an artist. It is assumed that the language of prose is a raw material, like paint or marble, requisitioned to render tangible an artistic construct already existent in the artist's mind. As such, it, as an entity in itself, goes unnoticed under the perusal of the average reader, who notices, rather, the artistic edifice and not the material out of which it is made. This is what we may call the "invisibility effect" of prose. Seymour Chatman acknowledges it in a discussion of character as a non-verbal abstraction: "Too often do we recall fictional characters vividly, yet not a single word of the text in which they came alive; indeed, I venture to say that readers generally remember characters that way." Alastair Fowler describes the language of many modern novels as being "transparent," even insignificant, "so that foregrounding is rare, and for the most part we look through the words to the narration - the primarily ordered level of organization for readers of such
works." He goes on to say, "In such works it is not the language that carries implicit meaning." Thus, like the elaborate wiring behind an ambitious lighting scheme, the language of prose proceeds with its work unobtrusively, inducing impressions and images while maintaining a state of quiet anonymity.

Stanley Fish, too, in a discussion of the analytical potential of "ordinary" language, makes a comment which reveals the general, though not universal, "invisibility effect" of prose: "Poetry, it is asserted, is characterized by a high incidence of deviation from normal syntactical and lexical habits. It therefore offers the analyst-critic a great many points of departure. Prose, on the other hand (except for Baroque eccentrics like Thomas Browne and James Joyce) is, well, just prose, and just there." Of course, though Fish effectively refutes the conception that prose has no effective power by demonstrating that it "does" something as an "event" or "happening," in fact people (except for a few specialists) instinctively fail to notice its presence - unless it is the product of an "eccentric." To offer another analogy, it is like the motor of a car in that is ignored (except by a few specialists) until unusual noises start emanating from under the hood: that is, the language of prose becomes conspicuous only when it does not coincide with the preconceptions of a literary language.

The role that conspicuous language plays in the reception of an artistic work will be dealt with shortly. Meanwhile it is worth noting that the "invisibility effect" that characterizes most prose undoubtedly contributed to the formation of the conception that story is distinct from and prior to the language in which it is expressed, that "story is an abstraction from: 1) the specific style of the text in question..., 2) the language in which the text is written (English, French, Hebrew) and 3) the medium or sign-system (words, cinematic shots, gestures). Starting with story, rather than with the text from which it is abstracted, the former may be grasped as transferable from medium to medium, from language to language, and within the same language."
This concept is intuitively, though unconsciously, extended by the average reader to prose narrative in general, which is seen to be the conveyer of an intricate web of story (comprised of event and character)\(^a\), plot ("a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality")\(^b\), setting, description, and perhaps, or hopefully, insightful ruminations upon the human condition. Claude Bremond, whether consciously or unconsciously, picks up upon this feeling of the independence of narrative from a specific language and advances that narrative contains "a layer of autonomous significance, endowed with a structure that can be isolated from the whole of the message.... [This basic and autonomous structure] may be transposed from one to another medium without losing its essential properties.... [Thus,] the subject of a story may serve as argument for a ballet, that of a novel can be transposed to stage or screen, one can recount in words a film to someone who has not seen it."\(^c\) This prompts Chatman (p. 20) to remark, "This transposability of the story is the strongest reason for arguing that narratives are indeed structures independent of any medium."\(^d\) That is, since prose narrative consists of structural and conceptual elements which leave concrete impressions even though the language which conveyed them is forgotten and for which language is merely the vehicle or means of representation, it should be eminently translatable. Even an uninspired translation should not obscure its merits – even if the work is characterized by conspicuous language, since such conspicuousness is simply a factor of style.

To summarize, then, the "invisibility effect" of prose in combination with the discrete existence of the elements of narrative separate from and independent of the language which makes them sensorily manifest, challenges the validity of citing translation as a factor of a writer's obscurity in an alien culture.

The countless successful transplantations of literary works across cultures and languages lends great credence to this view of prose as a medium readily transformable into another language. Nonetheless, to take its validity for granted and to apply it to all cases is to ignore the capacity of prose to emit meaning from sources outside the
parameters of a language's normal lexical, semantic, and syntactic conventions. This includes meaning that arises from special contexts, from the incorporation of prosodic elements, and from the use of a linguistic conformation that deviates significantly from accustomed literary practices.

**Conspicuous Language**

The idea of conspicuous language is a concept of relativity. A writer who adopts a style so different from the literary norm that even the average reader sits up and takes notice is a producer of a conspicuous literary language. Its very deviation from the norm contains meaning in addition to that contained in the words and sentences themselves - otherwise one would have to conclude that the writer availed himself of it gratuitously. An eminent example of linguistic conspicuousness in American literature is seen in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. To render this novel into a neutral (i.e., accustomed literary) style would be to severely modify its meaning, not to mention destroy its color and life, since its choice of diction in and of itself illustrates the intensity of Holden's hostility for the social conventions and educational values imposed upon him. In the unlikely event that its deviant style were to inspire widespread emulation among contemporary writers, then, of course, the original additional meaning attached to it in the originating work would be lost to a new generation of readers, since widespread emulation will have transformed it into the norm (a diachronic transformation). Translation could equally contribute to the loss of this additional attached meaning as regards the new potential readers, since in order to maintain or at least approximate it, the translation would have to be comprised of language equally deviant in degree and kind from the literary norms of the adopting culture.

As it happens, in the world of Chinese letters, Zhao Shuli's narrative language is very conspicuous. Mao Dun once noted: "Zhao Shuli's individual style has long been
known to everyone. If a passage from his works were to be inserted into the work of another writer, an attentive reader could distinguish it right away. Upon what would this recognition be based? On Zhao’s distinctive literary language. The difference between Zhao’s use of conspicuous language and Salinger’s is that Zhao, instead of dealing with one individual in one discrete work, treats of an entire social milieu throughout the range of all of his works; and instead of using conspicuous language to illustrate a character’s abnormality, he uses it to convey the prosaic (normal) complexion and tone of the rural human environment as a whole.

Zhao’s source of conspicuousness is somewhat comparable to Salinger’s insofar as both writers delved into the constructs of their respective languages as internalized by a segment of the population not normally thought of as a source of literary language. In Salinger’s case this was the American adolescent, untempered as yet by the homogenizing forces of universal education. Holden’s is a free-wheeling, undisciplined language, unfettered by the formal prescriptive rules of rhetoric and diction, a language that some might describe as “illiterate,” though it would be more accurate to classify it as vernacular. Zhao’s source of language was the Chinese peasant, and the description applied to the literary result has been “colloquialized.”

This comparison, of course, does not denote a formal similarity between the writing of the two authors. The effect of indiscipline rendered in Salinger’s work contrasts with the precise simplicity of Zhao’s polished peasant language, the universality of which is implied in its identification as “the polished spoken language of the broad masses of Han Chinese people.” Because Zhao’s inscribed narrator is a peripatetic storyteller who strives to make himself understood in villages all over northeastern China (i.e., to speakers of dialects which fall under the classification of Northern Mandarin), this peasant style strikingly pervades the entire work rather than being restricted to dialogue. Therein lies the source of conspicuousness.
Zhao first emerged against a backdrop of literary language featuring Europeanized baihua, which Guo Moro described as “pretentious,” “artificial,” and “engaged in purposeless rhetorical entanglement,” pitted against the native styles — ranging from ornate classicism and four-six parallelism through to Soochow storytelling (tanci) and traditional vernacular (i.e., as in Dream of the Red Chamber) — that comprised the eclectic Butterfly school. From the foreign opacity of May Fourth intellectualism to the accessibility of the popular traditional vernacular, all of these styles echoed the stylization of urban civilization. To readers jaded by language molded into “sivilized” (as Huck Finn would say) form, Zhao’s rustic writing invoked a refreshing country breeze of unadorned simplicity and clarity, a style that harkened to an unsophisticated existence wedded to the earth, a language that produced the effect of being homespun, unprocessed and, above all, “natural.” Indeed, what Zhao had done was to forge the prosaic (daily) language of China’s truly common man — majority man, the peasantry — into its written representation.

This was a literary event comparable to that effected by Mark Twain, whose “use of Huck’s vernacular speech as the narrative medium, outside quotation marks [was] something new — a drastic, even a revolutionary shift in technique.” Americans long accustomed to the effect of colloquial language in literature pioneered by Twain, made popular by Hemmingway, especially in his early works, and practiced extensively by such writers as Gertrude Stein, Steinbeck, Saroyan, Raymond Chandler, Sherwood Anderson, Sandburg, Mencken, Salinger; and the “natural narratives” found in the works of such writers as Faulkner and Conrad, thus, could never experience upon reading Zhao Shuli the sense of the Chinese audience of having discovered something new and outrageous, exotic and exciting in literature. Early audiences greeted his audacity in patterning a literary language upon peasant vernacular with a comixture of dismay and delight, contempt and celebration, but never with apathy. The literary cognoscenti, initially disdainful (thus explaining the split in early audience reaction), came to lionize
his work as a seminal achievement that has infused new blood into the language of Chinese literary expression. The present-day audience seeks out his unique intangible voice as reflective of a regional-universal authenticity not unlike that achieved by Eudora Welty through her characterization and dialogue. Thus, for different reasons, from his initial appearance on the literary scene to the present day, Zhao brings to the Chinese reader a sensation of "defamiliarization" through language. This is evident in articles which compare the merits of his "colloquialized" language with the tried and tired characteristics of the florid, effected and prolix literary language readers commonly encountered. It is a sensation lost to an American audience inured to the appearance of colloquialized language in the pages of its literature from the "standard" colloquial of Gertrude Stein and Hemmingway to the Black dialect in Alice Walker. Because of this relativity, the translation of Zhao's unique style into the obligatory colloquial removes it from the realm of the extraordinary and transforms it into something mundane and unexceptional, something the potential adoptive audience commonly encounters. Deprived of its linguistic ambiance - that provided by the historical and contemporary texts of its own culture as well as that created within itself - Zhao's work loses its conspicuousness of language and is thereby stripped of a vital source of its eloquence: the voice of the peasant, distinctive because unusual in the pages of the literary work, is rendered neutral, pushed to degree zero, as Roland Barthes would say; and the author's rebellious proclamation of independence from the literary norm disappears.

Beyond Conspicuousness

Linguistic conspicuousness, of course, is an aspect of literary innovation, and innovation has long intrigued literary theorists and analysts. For instance, the Formalist School founds its principle of "literary evolution" upon it. But as Hans Robert Jauss, who went so far as to propose "the new" as both aesthetic and historical category, pointed out, "innovation for itself does not alone make up artistic character." More than exploiting novelty to attract attention, Zhao Shuli deployed the language of China's
majority common man with a full sense of its organic connection to the rural environment, both natural and human. It more properly expressed the peasant sensibility than could any of the available modes he inherited from various sources, from the halls of formal education to the popular presses. Indeed, it is more responsible for evoking this sensibility than any attempt he could have made to directly describe it. The rural atmosphere, Chinese critics and commentators assert, arises through the suggestiveness of linguistic nuance rather than through factual disclosures in descriptive passages:

"Zhao Shuli's narrative language is rich in Shanxi local color, emitting the distinctive smell of the soil of the Taihang mountains. When we read his works we can realize the heights of ingenuity which artistic language can reach. Through just a few strokes of ink, fresh and distinct tableaux of the native way of life emerge. Gently, the reader is transported to the little villages at the foot of the Taihang mountains, to the rows of earthen caves, to the washed out gullies and gurgling mountain streams, the slopes covered with and the hollows lined with crops, the pigs among the potatoes, the persimmon trees, the jujube forests, the threshing grounds; women riding donkeys to their weddings, men carrying their rice bowls as they go around to visit their friends or neighbors, old ladies pursuing the art of matchmaking, operas being performed in the temples...... Yet Zhao Shuli was not devoted to detailed description of the sights and the distinctive rural folkways of this place. Sometimes he merely applied a brushstroke or two, presenting them almost incidentally in three or four lines. But because he conveyed in uniquely evocative language the singular nature of its environment, its customs, and the sensibilities of its people, the reader is made to feel as if he is seeing and experiencing this environment personally."

Zhao's style of writing, in fact, emerged from the aesthetic philosophy of "less is more," and, as will be seen shortly, underlying his conscious deployment of minimalism was the objective of creating a specific formal linguistic effect. The result of his artistry prompted critics to bestow upon him the sobriquet "Great Language Master" (yuyan diashi). They observe that his texts are marked by "capacious" words, that is, words of simplicity and brevity but pregnant with meaning. He is admired for "digging out the deep connotations of language," for creating a lucid and lively succinct-
ness replete with factual implications and affective undertones such that "there always seems to be much more than what is written on the page." This effect of impressionistic repletion within economy of expression is further associated with the presence of prosodic and musical elements by commentators who apply to his language such descriptions as "interweaving of musical intonation and pitch," "aesthetically cadenced," "musically harmonious," "resonant in tone," "rich in musicality and rhythm."

Such evaluations represent native intuitive apprehension, for no text has yet been subjected to systematic linguistic and prosodic analysis attempting to explain the feeling that there is "more than what is written on the page." Nonetheless, some generalized studies and isolated remarks may contribute to piecing together a preliminary, though necessarily partial, picture of Zhao's affective stylistics.

**Dialect**

One important characteristic of Zhao's writing is his use of dialect, an aspect of his style that has been recognized to greater or lesser extent since Zhou Yang first called attention to him in 1946. The fact of differing degrees of recognition suggested here is intimately connected with the necessity to reconcile the presence of dialect in Zhao's writing with the statement cited earlier categorizing Zhao's language as "the polished spoken language of the broad masses of Han Chinese people." If, in fact, this statement were unequivocally true, then Zhao's language would represent the Chinese counterpart of Hemmingway's standard American colloquial English and the major problem in the linguistic aspect of textual transference would for the most part be limited to the loss of conspicuousness.

Since a standard colloquial language by definition excludes dialect, to characterize Zhao's language as that language spoken by all the Han Chinese is certainly problematic. Interestingly, the commentator who made this statement perfunctorily noted in the same article the existence of the dialect element in Zhao's works and then rationalized that
Zhao incorporated it only to “intensify the informality and the artistry of his own literary language, to promote the unity of spoken and book language, and to facilitate the widespread circulation of his stories.” The author, intent upon emphasizing the thesis of Zhao’s “national style,” ignores the fact that whatever was Zhao’s intention, it remains that dialect is regionally bound and therefore is excluded from the language of the broad masses. He was not the only one over the years to minimize Zhao’s use of dialect. Zhou Yang’s recognition of the dialect element, for instance, was couched in praise for Zhao because he used very little of it.” Other writers, ignoring the issue completely, characterize Zhao’s language as one which “the average person can speak” and which “displays the virtues of popularized language while being free of the detrimental insularity of localized language.” Yet another writes, Zhao “excels in assimilating the language of the masses, but he always avoids using local colloquial expressions and dialect. Since his language has the universality of a national language, workers and peasants in both the north and the south can all understand when his works are read aloud. This contrasts with some writers who are fond of using local colloquial expressions and dialect to strengthen the local color of their works.” There are yet others who do not feel at all constrained to minimize the dialect in his pages, for they are convinced that Zhao “never used one word of Shanxi local dialect.”

Such minimalization and denial contrasts with observations concerning Zhao’s accessibility across a broad spectrum of readers and listeners in spite of his penchant to draw upon dialect. Here, he is cited for ingenious exploitation of local linguistic peculiarities while yet simultaneously transcending the barriers to general comprehension. This achievement is attributed to the strict, disciplined enlistment only of what may be termed “universal regionalisms,” that is, words and expressions that typify local speech but which bear transparent meaning to outsiders either because of context or because of their relatedness to standard Mandarin or because the ideographic nature of Chinese characters transmits the meaning visually.” Here Zhao is seen as “avoiding the
indiscriminate usage of dialect,” adhering to the principle of “seeking similarity in difference” (yi zhong qiu tong 异中求同) when choosing dialect items,*® and of never using “dialect which people from other regions cannot understand.”*®

Pan, et. al., on the contrary, not only point out the inaccuracy of the minimizers and the deniers, but also challenge the notion of the exclusivity of universal regionalisms. They cite numerous specific instances of dialect usage, many of which, far from representing instances of universal regionalism, are actually obscure and difficult to understand from the standpoint of the average speaker of pûng hûa.*®

This discrepancy in the native apprehension of dialect items in Zhao’s texts is doubtless related to the difference between reading a literary work strictly for aesthetic pleasure and reading it for the purpose of making a “preaesthetic Investigation” of it. As Roman Ingarden has pointed out, the “investigative preaesthetic cognition of the literary work is above all a matter of discovering those properties and elements in it which make it a work of art, ......” Therefore it “can begin only when the work in question has already been read in the ordinary attitude of a literary consumer.”*® The “ordinary” literary consumer reads the work as it is meant to be read, that is, he or she experiences a dynamic flow of its constitutive elements such that meanings are immediately apprehended and are constantly and automatically modified and/or supplemented as each successive sentence passes under his or her perusal.” Encountering new words does not stop this flow since they “are not fully isolated entities but are always members of a linguistic system” and as such their meanings are apparent through contextual relationships.*® Ingarden gives as example the invention of a new expression for a new concept in a scientific investigation, but his remarks are equally valuable when dealing with dialect items inserted into a text composed in the “standard” version of a language.

For years Zhao Shuli had been praised for writing with supreme clarity and simplicity in “the language of the people.” Now it has been demonstrated that he interspersed throughout his texts numerous dialect items, a great many of them deemed
"obscure." Pan, et. al., cite 93 instances in their far from exhaustive study. Fang Yuxiao offers as primary example of Zhao's universal regionalisms the word *xiang-genzhe* (相跟着), "to...(verb)...together," which is universally understood even though it exists neither in the southern dialects nor in the standard Mandarin of the north. An instance of its usage appears in the sentence "Jisotongyuan...shuole jiu gen Da Hai xianggenzhe zoule" (交通员 ..... 说了乱跟大黑相跟着走), "After the messenger said [this], he and Big Blacky walked on together." This relatively "easy" example contrasts with the more esoteric *tuannong* (团弄), "cheat" or "hoodwink," [in *putonghua hongpian* (普通话红片)], as in *bei ren tuannong* (被人团弄), "hoodwinked by someone," or "be te tuannong zhu" (把他团弄住), "get him to play into our hands," and "Nei jiehao you nemma yigu niujin, kongpa tuannong bu zhu be!" (那家伙有那么一股扭劲, 恐怕团不起吧), "That fellow is so stubborn that we probably won't be able to get him to play into our hands!" This particular example may serve to illustrate in a specific way the differing conceptual base that the native readers have of Zhao's dialect. Fang Yuxiao (p. 56) regards its meaning as self-evident to the non-dialect speaker, implying that it is context which makes it so. Gao Jie (p. 260) states its meaning reveals itself through the visual form of the characters which represent it. Pan Baoan, et. al., on the other hand, imply by virtue of their discussion of obscurity that its meaning is not self-evident, and they feel obligated to clarify it by providing a *putonghua* gloss. It is possible that these contradictory viewpoints arise from different ways of regarding the text, that is, as a written work which the appreciator personally sees or as an oral work which an audience can only hear and therefore has not the advantage of visual prompting.

On the other hand, in light of Ingerden's conclusions, the discrepancy among the perceptions of Chinese commentators concerning Zhao's language may be resolved simply by recognizing that they are, after a fashion, all correct. For one thing, though Zhao in fact did use some dialect that is obscure in meaning, he also employed judicious
selection, choosing words that typified the area yet were amenable to adaptation into *putonghua* through polishing and through the use of standard characters to represent them. In other words, he manipulated such items into feigning membership in the linguistic system of *putonghua* (re: quote by Ingarden on p. 126 above). This, in fact, artificially rendered the relationship between the dialect and the standard language — a relationship of mutual unintelligibility — similar to the relationship that holds between standard American English and its dialects. That is, because the various dialects of American English, in their relationship to each other and to the standard language, are mutually intelligible, the average native speaker is deceived into thinking that there are no dialects of American English, only "substandard" ways of speaking.

This suggests why some native readers of Zhao's works have failed to perceive the dialect he incorporated and calls to mind an oft quoted remark by Jacques Derrida: "A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game." However, the more closely the specialist scrutinizes Zhao's texts, the more apparent the presence of dialect becomes. And when the specialist is asked to provide lexical definitions of the items he or others find, his previously unconscious dependency upon context becomes apparent to him, or he discovers in himself an ignorance which context had previously hidden from him and that this case of ignorance can be cured only by referring to a native informant of the dialect. Previous to his quest of detailed investigation, however, he, as an average reader swept up in the flow of reading, did not notice the dialect per se, but only the effect of rural atmosphere which its presence (subliminal presence?) conjured up. Thus, whether or not the native reader consciously apprehends the presence of the discrete dialect items, these items nonetheless contribute essentially to the special atmosphere and pervasive tone of regional rurality, which he does notice. Fang Yuxiao (p. 56) suggests as much in his article, and their elimination, as would most likely occur in translation, would be, to borrow Fang's analogy, like "singing Shanxi *bangzi* [Shanxi local opera]
In *putonghua*, a medium which is thoroughly incapable of rendering the original flavour."

"Flavour," "atmosphere," and "tone," however, are very ephemeral qualities. Their concretization lies in more than the mere decorative presence of dialect. The contrastive terminology of dialect, after all, bears ontological significance in that it points to a singular, even eccentric, way of knowing things on the part of those portrayed in the work. Being that there is no exact synonymy, to say that shepherds 聆羊 (ling yang) instead of 放羊 (fang yang), or that farmers 种地 (she di) instead of 耕地 (li di) is to conjure up meaning additional to or different from that encompassed by the standard language, implying a regionally unique conceptualization of man’s relationship to his environment. Thus, there is no interchangeability between 聆羊 and 放羊, though they both may be translated “to herd sheep,” nor between 种地 and 耕地, “to cultivate land.”

Similarly, alternative names for objects familiar throughout the culture; local colloquialisms, aphorisms, metaphors, and sayings; names for distinct topographical features; idiosyncratic description of human character traits, experiences, and actions, all collude to enhance the distinctive lineaments of a geographically bound society otherwise deindividuated as part of an immense homogenious culture.

This explains the popularity of (as well as the attention intellectuals pay to) Zhao’s works apropos of the observation that the average audience prefers the weird or unexpected in literature and has no interest in reading about people like themselves. Though unobtrusive and accessible, the dialect element exudes an idiosyncrasy that nonetheless inevitably weaves into the portrait of “common” people a sense of exoticism that seizes the imagination. This sense of the exotic replaces that attribute of traditional storytelling which Link styles “Extraordinary Inborn Gifts” in characterization, which “gives the reader that impression which is so important in popular, as opposed to elite, storytelling, namely, the impression that the author does not speak of
ordinary persons and events.* Thus, while the reader intellectually knows that Zhao's characters are common members of the masses, he emotionally reacts to them as unusual personages inhabiting a unique world. The foreign reader, of course, would also regard the text as portraying from his standpoint unusual personages inhabiting a unique world, but this is only by virtue of his intellectual awareness of the work's alien origins, setting, and characterizations. The basis for his sense of exoticism not only differs drastically from that of the native reader, it also gives rise to a discrepancy in the quality and intensity of aesthetic experience. For the original readership, it is language which concretizes the sense of place (recall that Zhao engaged little in description), yielding through the contrast between standardization and idiosyncracy a sentient experience of exoticism.

The inducement of sentient, as opposed to the intellectual, apprehension of the exotic, however, is effectuated by more than the simple insertion of dialect items into the text. In fact, the use of vocabulary, aphorisms, metaphor, etc. typical of the dialect is only the most discernible and not necessarily the most important device employed to this effect. Fang's remark concerning the loss of flavour inherent to singing Shanxi bangzi in the standard language is quite ironic here in light of the later article by Pan Baoan, et. al., in which it is shown that Zhao's achievement was precisely that—i.e., to render the impression of the Qinshui dialect through the medium of putonghua. The Qinshui (沁水) dialect, specifically that language spoken in the eastern part of Qinshui county in southeastern Shanxi, is characterized by gutteral sounds and a rapid rhythm. It has furthermore retained the entering tone, which imparts to the language as a whole an effect of brevity which notably contrasts with other dialects. To reproduce its effect, then, without confounding the nationwide audience with a display of actual "natural narrative," he wrote with shortness and succinctness, endowed his putonghua with a fast, strong rhythm, and created a grammar based upon the oral speech patterns of the area. Thus, he manipulated rhetorical texture (author's choice of a style based upon a
scale that ranges from the baroque to the minimal), tempo of unfolding sentences, and grammatical structure, not so much to forge a personal style or to foster simplicity for the sake of an intellectually uncomplicated mass audience, but rather to mime the lin­eaments of the dialect. This means that the aura of regionalism and its attendant exoti­cism is imbedded within the formal and stylistic features of the language itself and does not merely radiate from the surface of an indigenous “lexical constellation.”

Beyond Dialect

The task of rendering these formal and stylistic effects in translation to evoke the inherent flavour of regionalism as well as contrastiveness with standard literary lan­guage — already quite formidable — is further complicated by their relationship to the connotative density attributed to Zhao’s writing. Specifically, while the minimalist esthetic contributes crucially to the formal effect of brevity and rapidity, it is also inti­mately connected to contextual and stylistic semantics.

Although very little research has been done on this subject in its relationship to Zhao’s language, there are available examples which illustrate how a multiplicity of meanings emerges from context on the one hand and from the non-formal “poetic” as­pects of the text on the other. Representing contextual density of meaning is the one word with which Zhao describes the character Xiao Fei’e (小飞蛾 Lovely Moth) in his story “Registration” (Deng ji ) when he first introduces her. This word is “hao (好),” normally translated as “good,” and indeed the translation of the lines containing this description reads, “In a village, bearing the name of his family, there lives a carp­enter called Zheng and his good wife Lovely Moth.” Though the single syllable of the English word “good” parallels the brevity and simplicity of the original Chinese word, it is in fact inadequate to render the full complement of meaning embraced by the word hao in this context. In fact, the word embraces a complex range of meaning, reflecting the character’s ambiguous reputation in her village, and it simultaneously carries the implications of praise and contempt. For the full meaning of Zhao’s description to be
rendered into English, a translation might have to read something like, “In a village bearing the name of his family, there lives a carpenter, called Zhang, and his wife, Lovely Moth, whom some praise for her beauty and goodness while others condemn her for immorality and still others who, though in public say she is bad, secretly admire her.”

An example of meaning arising from stylistic configuration is seen in the emergence in certain contexts of characters’ emotional states via ABB-type alliterative descriptives (adjectives and adverbs) (or what Y.R. Chao would call vivid reduplication of the type XYY). In point of fact, alliterative descriptives are not a hallmark of Zhao’s style and his sparing use of them tends to concentrate their impact when they do occur. The Japanese scholar, Shugi Hagimo, points out the example “houdun” (厚墩墩) “very thick,” which refers to the hair of the activist student Tiesuo meets in Taiyuan in the novel Changes in Li Village (Li Jiazhuang de bianqian 李家庄的变迁). This adjective comes out of Tiesuo’s consciousness (indeed he uses it twice later in dialogue when describing this student), and the vivid imagery inherent to its reduplicative structure conveys the visceral nature of his reaction upon seeing him, indicating a state of heightened sensory awareness and emotional engagement.

Another example, “minghuanghuang” (明晃晃) “gleaming, shining,” appears in “Registration” in a passage describing Xiao Fei’e’s discovery of her daughter’s Luohan coin. As the daughter was sleeping, “a small bright object slipped out of her pocket...” Here, as with “houdun,” the aesthetic sound pattern of “minghuanghuang,” translated in the passage as “bright,” purports to imitate the visual impression in the way aural onomatopoeia imitates sounds. This sentient description (just as dingdingdang is a sentient description of the sound of a bell) signals the character’s concentrated focus upon, perhaps even mesmerization by, the object it describes, illustrating thereby that character’s intensity of
emotional involvement. Thus, the object which Xiao Fei'e sees has slipped out of her daughter's pocket is not merely "bright," as the translation states, but rather "glittering"; and it is not merely glittering, but "arrestingly glittering." By the same token, the student, who exerts charismatic draw upon Tiesuo, has from Tiesuo's point of view hair which is "arrestingly thick."

While Zhao intentionally sought to avoid unnecessary complexity in language, the connotative depreciation that accompanies the literal adherence to brevity in translation exaggerates the original austerity of the text and thrusts upon the text a false mask of superficiality and oversimplification and obscures the aesthetic experience of the native reader. The use of brief onomatopoeia to evince a character's inner impressions - rather than, for instance, rendering them through stream of consciousness - is an example of the minimalist aesthetic par excellence. It furthermore is consistent with the association by intuition in Chinese articles on Zhao of non-lexico-semantic and non-syntactical elements with essential meaning. The ability of ABB alliteratives to accomplish this upon occasion recalls observations made by theorists such as Roman Jakobson concerning aural effect in poetic art forms: i.e., that "speech sounds have an immediate relation to meaning or [....] they function as direct carriers of a latent, concealed imaginary meaning." The remarks of Chinese commentators, however, suggest that the overall sound-shape of the work - including rhythm, cadence, "musicality" - and not just speech sounds - contributes, as it does in poetry, to the connotative density which the native reader perceives. The destruction of this sound-shape through translation, then, must necessarily diminish the richness of the work's discourse and consequently to impoverish its expressivity, for even in the hands of the best of translators this sentient reception of meaning must necessarily be transformed into intellectual reception.

For the native reader, the experience of the text is largely, even primarily, an emotional one, enhanced to varying degrees by the disparate formal and practical
knowledge of culture and literature possessed by each reader, while for the foreign reader restricted to translation the experience is solely an intellectual one which is furthermore detracted from by varying degrees of ignorance of the work's textual, historical, and cultural background. This lack of sentient apprehension of meaning makes for a necessarily impoverished experience in comparison to that of the native reader, who, indeed, responds to the writer's style with equal, if not greater, measure than he does to his stories.
The "horizon of expectations" is the centerpiece of Hans Robert Jauss' model for the historical understanding of literature. [See his Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Beati (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.)] He purports to determine the "artistic character" of a literary work "by the kind and the degree of its influence on a presupposed audience." The theory sets up "aesthetic distance," that is, "the disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work," as the determiner of "the artistic character of a literary work." (p. 25). While Jauss never gets around to defining precisely what he means by "horizon of expectation," his usage imparts to it a meaning of (in the words of Holub) "an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a 'system of references' or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text." [See Robert C. Holub, Reception Theory, a Critical Introduction (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 59] Jauss implies, to put it simplistically, that artistic value is in direct proportion to the degree of "horizontal change" that an audience goes through in accepting the work. Since Jauss is dealing with literature in history, he deals only with works which are distinguished by success, whether immediate or belated, temporary or lasting. He does not address the issue of the artistry of the failed work since the failed work could have no influence on an audience and therefore could not enter the annals of literary history.


Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, p. 21.


Ibid., p. 6.


According to Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, p. 252, the concept of “differential qualities” meant three things to the Formalists: “on the level of the representation of reality, *Différenzqualitäten* stood for the ‘divergence’ from the actual, i.e., for creative deformation. On the level of language it meant a departure from current linguistic usage. Finally, on the place of literary dynamics, a... modification of the prevailing artistic norm.” (From a note in Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 199, note 122. Emphasis added.)


For this to be possible, the literary norms of both cultures would have to be comparable, for example, both focussing upon classicism or obscurantism or colloquialism, etc., so as to be able to effect a comparable deviance. Even under these conditions, the work would be additionally subject to the capriciousness of taste for deviant language: cultural, social, and literary factors may make such deviance seem irrelevant or uninteresting at the particular moment in time when the work appeared in the adopting culture.


25 Ibid., p. 185.


27 See Li Jingru, “Zhao Shuli zuopin de yuyan,” p. 48; also see “Shilun Zhao Shuli zuopin de yuyan fengge” 试论赵树理作品的语言风格, in Beijing daxue xuebao (renwen kexue) 北京大学学报 (人文科学), no. 5 (1959), pp. 119-120. On the subject of naturalness, this latter article says, “'The text is like its author.' The simple, well-knit language in Zhao's works is just like 'Old Zhao' himself, with his felt hat, his fur coat draped over his shoulder, his smiling face, and his natural style of conversation” (p. 119).


30 See for instance Zhou Rongquan 周溶泉 and Xu Yingpei 徐应培, “Huo de yuyan - Du Zhao Shuli de ‘Chuan jia bao’ 萤的语言—读赵树理的“传家宝”, in Yalujiang 雅露江, no. 9 (1978), pp. 69-71: “That which is most striking upon reopening Selected Works of Zhao Shuli (1951) is the unadorned simplicity, the easy comprehensibility, the lucidity and expressivity of its language. The fresh and novel aroma of the rural earth that emanates from this living language has not faded with the passage of time” (p. 69) Emphasis added.


Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, p. 33.

Wang Xianzhong, “Zhao Shuli de yuyan fengge,” p. 72.

Ibid., pp. 70–71.

Yang Yibing, “Lujuan Zhao Shuli xiaoshuo de yuyan mei,” p. 84; Han Yufeng et al., p. 57.

Zhou Yang, “Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo.”


Zhou Yang, “Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo.”


Ba Ren 巴人, “Lüe lun Zhao Shuli tongzhi de chuangzuo” 略论赵树理同志的创作, Wenyi bao 文艺报, no. 11 (June 1958), p. 11.


Fang Yuxiao, “Zhao Shuli zuopin zhong de difang secai,” p. 56.


Ibid., pp. 24–37.

Ibid., p. 29.

Fang Yuxiao, "Zhao Shuli zuopin zhong de difang secai," p. 56.


"Li Youcai ban hua" (李有才板话), chapter 6, in Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 1, p. 39.

See for instance Pan Baoan, et al., "Zhao Shuli zuopin zhong de Qinshui fangyan," p. 166. This article, along with all the others that touch upon this aspect, does not explain precisely the process of "polishing."

Nowadays with widespread education and official promulgation of putonghua, it may be necessary to modify any statement about mutual unintelligibility. While native speakers of the dialect may be able to understand speakers of putonghua, speakers of putonghua cannot understand the dialect without experience or training.


Here the structuralist model of deviation bears relevance. Iser, though critical of it, recognizes its contribution to the understanding of how literature produces effects: "Deviations can range from violation of the norm or canon as far as total invalidation of the familiar. This very fact enhances the semantic potential of the text, which thus produces a special kind of tension...." In "Narrative Strategies as a Means of Communication," p. 103.
For instance, the characters who inhabit the world of *Lingchuandong* eat "huang zheng" (黄蒸, a steamed bread made from cornmeal) rather than "wowotou" (窝窝头), which is what speakers of the standard language eat. The landlord's nephew in *Changes in Li Village* abuses a peasant woman with the term "caohui gezi" (草灰崽子), a reference to the offspring of female domestic animals such as sheep or donkeys, thus: "bastard" or "son of a bitch." (However, since it is a woman being abused, "bitch" would be more appropriate.) A speaker of *putonghua* would use "wangbeidan" 王八蛋 or "wangbeigezi" 王八崽子. In "Old Quota," ("Lao Ding'e" 老定额) the sense of place - the uniqueness of location - is evoked by the topographically descriptive terms "saigou di" (塞沟地) and "liaitiao di" ( lié条地), which the local people apply to certain types of cropland. The former refers to a particularly fertile piece of land created through the inducement of silting action by damming up a gully or ravine in the mountains; thus: "stopped-up-gully land." The latter, "rib-land," denotes a parcel of land in the mountains which is small, long, and narrow.

In "Xiao Erhei jiehun," Third Fairy's husband's philosophy in life is "to accept hardship to the death," or "sishou" (死受), the meaning of which is rendered in *putonghua* as "yige xinyan guangzhidao chiku shouzi" (一个心眼宽广知道吃苦崽子). (Pan Baean, et. al., p. 168.) The implication of this local expression is of an intensity of suffering not experienced by outside observers, perhaps due to a lower threshold of pain or subjection to conditions more severe than in other places. The translation "hardworking" (*Rhymes of Li Youcai and Other Stories*, p. 57) thus is inadequate and would better be replaced with "steeped in acquiescence to the hardships of peasant life," though, of course, this translation is still inadequate for conveying the flavor of regionalism. (The original sentence reads, "Yufu shi ge laoshi housheng, bu duo shuo yiju hua, zhi hui zai qin shou" (于福是个老实后生,不多说一句话,只会在地里受. "Yufu was an honest young man, given to reticence and steeped in his acquiescence to the hardships of peasant life.") (See *Zhao Shuli xiaoshuo xuan*, p. 2.)

The condition of Third Fairy as a physically comic yet psychologically pitiable person leaps off the page with vivid imagery by means of a compact bucolic comparison likening her powdered face to "a donkey turd struck with hoarfrost": "lufendan shang xia shangie shaanggan lian de zhao wen, kanqilai hao xiang lufendan shang xia shangie shaanggan. "(Lü fendan 上下肩膀的皱纹, 看起来好像到上下的蒜. "Unfortunately, instead of smoothing over the wrinkles on her face, the powder she applied produced, rather, the impression of a donkey turd struck with hoarfrost.") (See "Xiao Erhei jiehun," in *Zhao Shuli xiaoshuo xuan*, p. 3.) (Continued in Note 61.)
" (Continuation of note 60): In "Biaoming taidu" 表明态度, war-hero and cadre Wang Yongfu's (王永富) fall from grace is crystallized in aphorisms that villagers discussing him use: "Ji ye feile, dan ye deile" 鸡也飞了,蛋也打了, "The chickens have flown and the eggs are broken"; and "Tudi laoye zhu shenshan, zizai mei xianghuo" 土地老爷住深山,自在家香火, "The earth god has sequestered himself in the mountains, he is free but no one makes him offerings." (See Zhao Shuli xiaoshuo xuan, p. 340.) The flown chickens refer to his son and daughter-in-law having left his household to establish their own, while the broken eggs refer to his having been relieved of his post as Commissar of Arms (武裝主任). The observation about the reclusive earth god was a message that the villagers would no longer pay him any heed or help him in any way.


Link, Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies, p. 65.

Pan Baoan, et. al., "Zhao Shuli zuopin zhong qinshui fangyan," p. 166.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Zhao Shuli, Rhymes of Li Youcei and Other Stories, p. 130.

Feng Jiannan, "Zhao Shuli chuanguo de minzu fengge," p. 18. Also in Zhao Shuli zhuanji, p. 289. Actually both translations reflect further inadequacies: for one thing, the character's name in the original means literally "Little Flying Moth," and for another thing the text states that this name is a nickname. Zhao's use of nicknames to reflect various characters' personalities is well known, and though he later in the story relates that this nickname grew out of her resemblance to a beautiful actress in the traveling opera, it might possibly also be construed to bear additional meaning which has not been specifically addressed.


Since "onomatopoeia" sometimes refers to diction designed to evoke sense through sound, a distinction must be made between aural onomatopoeia and other types. The two examples referred to here may be identified as "visual onomatopoeia."

Not all ABB alliteratives in Zhao are held to have this effect, but the reason for the differential is not clear. Research of the subject might be guided by Michael Riffaterre's work in "stylistic context," which explains extra, stylistic meaning in terms of ruptures in the contextual norm rather than in "any preexisting and exterior norm. For if 'in the style norm relationship we understood the norm pole to be universal (as it would be in the case of the linguistic norm), we could not understand how a deviation might be an SD [stylistic device] on some occasions and on others, not."


It is notable that the paragraph describing Xiao Fei's discovery of her daughter's Luohan coin is frequently cited by commentators, who feel that it is particularly emotive of her inner state. Han Yufeng, et al., (p. 59) aver that it is her brief question to herself, "Suan ge shen?" which is especially effective in revealing her emotions. Interestingly, the translation referred to earlier has declined to deal with it.

Zhao discussed this in his short essay, "Ye suan jingyan" 他算经验 , which he wrote in 1949. He said, "...whenever I wanted to introduce to them [i.e., his family and peasant friends] some ideas of the intellectuals, I would think up ways to translate them into the kind of language they would use themselves. After awhile this became a habit. This occurred in my writing also - they were not used to hearing 'rener' 然而, so I wrote 'kashi' 可是; 'suyo' 舒以 was unfamiliar to them, so I wrote 'yinci'因此. If I didn't give them smooth wording, then they wouldn't want to read what I wrote. I used the same principle in sentence structure as I did in diction. With long sentences people would forget what was at the beginning by the time they got to the end, so I cut things up into shorter sentences. They were used to hearing 'chickens cackled' (鸡叫 ) and 'dogs barked' (狗叫 ), so why should I write, 'chickens were cackling' (鸡在叫 ) and 'dogs were barking' (狗在叫 )?" See Zhao Shuili wenji, vol. 4, p. 1398.

CHAPTER V

Two Stories About Old China

"... a point was reached in the history of mankind when the obstacles to continuing in a state of Nature were stronger than the forces which each individual could employ to the end of continuing in it." — Rousseau, "The Origins of Civil Society"

The compulsiveness with which China's politico-literary critics addressed the works of Zhao Shuli and which resulted in wildly disparate evaluations, strangely enough left two of his works stranded in a limbo of neglect. These two stories, "The Tax Collector" (Cui Huan ch'ai) and "Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng" (刘二和王 继圣) stand aloof from the author's other works in another way as well: they depict no social change, presuming only to offer a brief glimpse or "snapshot" of the traditional rural scene.

The narratives of both stories are contained within 24 hour periods. They contrast sharply with Zhao's time-lapse panoramas, which in covering long spans of time guarantee that some significant social and/or political transformation commensurate with actual historical events will have occurred before the end. Both take place in a time and venue not yet touched by the turmoil of war and revolution or the influx of iconoclastic ideas. They plunge into the past as an era integral unto itself. As such, they delineate its synchronic reality without reflections upon the future and remain within the bounds of the possibilities and probabilities peculiar to it. For this reason, perhaps, neither story succeeded in intriguing the contemporaneous generations of critics, who, by their strict adherence to Marxism as the guiding principle of
criticism, felt constrained not to take them up as legitimate literary offerings.

"The Tax Collector": Banality of Corruption

"The Tax Collector," which was written in 1946 and takes place "sometime before the start of the War of Resistance Against Japan," is a portrait of situational entrenchment. The story unfolds through following the actions of a man unconsciously caught up in a tyranny of conditions founded upon corruption as an integral component of life.

All the action originates with Cui Jiuhai (崔九孩), a character who, although far from assuming the proportions of an anti-hero, is antagonist to poor peasants who try to outsmart him. Sententious armchair moralists might readily sneer at this petty official who bows and scrapes to his superior only to turn around and persecute the most impoverished and vulnerable of the citizens under his jurisdiction. Nonetheless, one cannot help but be struck by the transparent chagrin he displays early in the story in insisting that Er Xiansheng (二先生), the Bureau Chief's younger brother whom his blundering deputy has offended, must be mollified, and note that he speaks to his deputy kindly rather than abuse him. This aspect of his behaviour returns to puzzle and haunt the reader after Cui reveals the cruelty he can muster up in his extortionate endeavors.

Prior to this revelation Cui is not incapable of eliciting the reader's sympathies. His interaction with Er Xiansheng establishes his sensitivity to his own vulnerability. He deals with him gingerly, as one might humor a snarling dog that has backed one into a dead-end alley: soothing words, a cautiously extended hand offering a friendly pat yet poised to speedy retraction in case of a toothsome lunge. It is clear that were Cui, in the manner of his deputy, to obstinately pursue the legal and moral course of arresting Er Xiansheng for his offence (tax delinquency), the consequence would be subjection to highly unpleasant experiences. Outside of taking such drastic measures as repudiating
his post, Cui is slated to be forever cornered in the alley, yet he accepts this situation with an unexamined complacency which confirms the unending cycle of victimization.

Cui’s behaviour must be viewed in the context of the deputy’s presence in the story. If the point were simply to dramatize and excoriate the hypocrisy of government agents, their uneven application of “justice,” their patronage and abetting of special privilege, their reprehensible failure to apply the lessons of their own sufferings to their treatment of those they rule, then in consideration of narrational efficiency, the deputy plays a gratuitous role. The deputy, originally a sales clerk in a pancake shop, was only a temporary hireling who never before had any connection with government service. His contact with tax collectors had always been as someone on the receiving end of persecution, and the scenario familiar to him was one in which the accused delinquent supplied the tax collector with a small remuneration for his trouble in seeking him out—a meal, and “travel money”—which was actually nothing less than a bribe to the tax collector not to arrest the accused and thereby disrupt seasonal chores. He was completely ignorant of the differential decorums involved in pursuing the various categories of supposed delinquent tax payers. He approached his first case, who was Er Xiansheng—and whom he knew to be the brother of the Bureau Chief—in the full bloom of naivety, altogether expecting to be cordially invited to a meal and to receive a small sum of money for his trouble. He was stunned to receive instead an imperious rebuff accompanied by a resounding slap and the confiscation of the warrant Cui Jiuhai had entrusted to him. He was equally surprised at Cui’s reaction to Er Xiansheng’s intransigence when instead of vowing to exert the authority of his office in the case, Cui rather explained to him the proprieties of special immunity to the tax collector’s jurisdiction.

It is the deputy’s naivete here that signals the essential point of the story. The deputy was “everyman,” the representative of the ordinary private citizen, and as such his ingenuous faith in the egalitarian application of the taxation policy testifies to
the general conceptual climate of his time and place. Surpassing in importance his ignorance of the double standard, however, is the implication for society borne by his assumptions concerning the precise nature of law enforcement in regards to tax delinquency. When he was approached with the offer to act as Cui’s deputy, the apparent simplicity of the task made him amenable: “He felt the job was easy. All he had to do was seek out the families on the list, have something to eat, and demand some travel money. Where was the difficulty in that?” Thus, his concept of the legal disposition of tax delinquents was that it consisted of extorting bribes from them.

Whether Cui himself also simplistically equates extortion with law enforcement or on the contrary is fully aware of the immorality of the practice is an aspect left unaddressed. His deputy’s innocent notion of correct official deportment, however, points to a public expectation of such conduct so ingrained that it has become, at least tacitly, public endorsement. That is, Cui’s job carries with it a sanction to derive personal gain through means recognized as corrupt that is so much a part of community sentiment that even the forthright deputy assumes he has a right to an identical privilege once and while under Cui’s official employ.

This skewed sense of ethics, which legitimizes the illegitimate, intensifies its own paradox by asserting the immorality of both refusing to pay and failing to collect bribes (as seen by the deputy’s reaction). According to this twisted logic, then, Cui’s immorality lies not in exacting money from citizens but in granting exception to Er Xiansheng. Conceptual perversions, however, have an affinity for further perversion, so it is not surprising that the selectivity of enforcement is, in essence, virtually institutionalized, giving persons like Cui ample cause to retain a sense of rectitude in spite of their disregard for justice and lack of humaneness. The banality of corruption, then, illustrated here in all its poignancy, usurps individual venality as the story’s central concern. The societal garbling of ethics conspires to annihilate the individual conscience and to weaken individual culpability. Cui himself is blind to the immorality
of his actions, for there is no enlightened individual or organization or statute to point it out to him and make him think in order to bring him to the conviction of this immorality.

Like a number of Zhao's other works, "The Tax Collector" features an oppressor and his poor peasant targets, but unlike those other works, it does not overtly pass judgement upon any of the characters. Juxtaposed against his other works, it emits an aura of detachment, as if it were an extracted detail from an Old China tableau that exists as an artifact of the past and is therefore unburdened with the responsibility of changing the present, displaying an amoral, dispassionate view of that which it records, like photographs and realistic paintings which decline to explicitly divulge the artist's moral evaluation. Throughout the story nothing changes, the characters learn nothing new nor gain new insights; there are no heroic actions, no victories, no defeats. The characters simply cope with life as they encounter it in the days before reform swept the country. Liu the Elder, the leader of the tiny mountain settlement Cui has descended upon, "succeeds" in preventing his young friend from being dragged off and jailed, and Cui "succeeds" in extracting money from these unsophisticated, impoverished mountain people, but in actuality these successes are carried off in an atmosphere of secret mutual connivance reminiscent of what occurs when a seller and a buyer wrangle in the market: each knows the other will get what he wants, for otherwise neither will benefit.

Didacticism, of course, in general played a primary motivational role in Zhao's writings. He wrote to educate, to provide examples of alternative possibilities in behaviour and thinking, to point out flaws in government policies and methods, as well as to signify his belief in the "triumphability" of the ideal and the just in the communist scheme of things. In "The Tax Collector," however, he disengaged from the didactic mode as well as the imprint of the communist exemplar. This in effect freed him to concentrate upon situational imagery, to paint the substance of the rural milieu
according to his private elemental vision unencumbered with extra-artistic goals. The result then may be regarded as a pure example of his essential point of view. Precisely because teaching or exemplification does not obscure this point of view, it confirms its author’s perception of the countryside as a strictly human realm where the struggle for sovereignty (whether over others or merely over the self) is a constant of reality even in the remotest of locales. Even environmental features are bound to this perspective, impressing themselves upon the consciousness — both character’s and reader’s — only as images extending from this struggle: through the rippled glass of his red-lensed spectacles, Cui Jiuhai sees extreme distortions of the objects that meet his eye — a straight and stately tree writhes like a monstrous snake, a house looms like a massive wall. This false imagery he regards as a mere small inconvenience well worth the magnified menacing aspect gained in his appearance: the glasses render him into a fearsome apparition from the point of view of the naive peasants who live in the mountains, thereby facilitating his intimidation of them.

"Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng": Innocence Betrayed

"Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng" also displays this perspective. Written in 1947, it is a “slice of life” type story that portrays the essence of village life by following its activities over a one day period. Like “The Tax Collector,” it takes place in pre-reform China (1934) and therefore involves no changes associated with the activities of the Communist Party. The change which does occur is a small, personal one, involving the growing-up process of a boy. An examination will show that 1) the non-human environment is entirely subsumed to human events, and 2) the very structure of the story itself is intimately connected to these environmental factors to express the facets of the human condition as manifested in this place and time.

At first it may seem that the two eponymous characters, Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng, may be identified as protagonists only with reservations, for the author
incessently treks off into the territory of numerous supporting actors who, in concert, vie for domination of the narrative. This tendency imparts to the work at least an initial appearance of discontinuity, with actions and events of apparent tenuous relationship juxtaposed. Duplicating the effect of a collage or tiled mural which must be viewed from a distance before its coherence crystalizes, the technique in the end transforms the work from a would-be account of an isolated incident involving boyhood revenge into a village vignette encapsulating the essence of Old China rural life. Reconstructed is the enclosed atmosphere of bell-jar conditions in which the village inhabitants are compelled to make the best of their existence. This extends contextual vitality to the boys' actions, revealing an implacable web of caste and respective privilege or liability which overlays the village and has captured the youths in their age of innocence.

Liu Erhe is the son of a tenant farmer, an “outsider” who came as a famine refugee to live in Huangsha Gou some years previously. Living among the caste-ridden villagers, his father feels the lash of a discrimination which denies him equality with townsmen of long-standing residency while demanding he serve the community without remuneration or even tokens of gratitude. At the beginning of the story the only way Erhe feels the diminished status of his father is in his diminished time for play in comparison to his cowherd companions. Erhe ends up watching the other boys’ cows while they play, because in the corner of the pasture his father has planted a stand of sorghum, and according to the notions of justice in force, “outsiders” have no right to restitution from owners of cows which get into their crops. Much of the Liu’s expected income for a previous year in fact was eaten up precisely in this way, and that is how Erhe came to hire himself out as a cowherd to the mayor, Wang Guangzu (王光祖).

In contrast to Erhe’s developed sense of responsibility, Wang Jisheng, the son of the mayor, has not yet passed beyond the stage of infantile egocentricity. Having fed for his eleven years on his father’s notion of personal suzerainty and inherent privilege,
he regards his relationship to others in terms of extracting instant compliance to his desires, whether through physical violence, threats to invoke higher authority, throwing temper tantrums, or subterfuge. Released from school for the holiday, he accompanies (or rather follows, for he has long ago evoked deep feelings of resentment) his schoolmates to the pasture where he attempts to use his repertory of slaps, orders, and tantrums to control the other boys' play. The cowherds, strafed once too often with his arrogance, finally pounce upon him, drag him in his fancy red jacket trimmed with tinkling silver bells through the mud, truss him up with his own belt in the fashion of "the old ox looking at melons," and leave him to bake in the gulch for the rest of the day until dusk. His schoolmates, standing aghast to the side during the assault, but nonetheless secretly delighted, run off to avoid being implicated in the crime.

The beginning of the story devotes itself to scenes of play on the expanse of pasture and in the gulch below. At first only seven cowherds decked out in tendrilled vines cavort through the tall grass, imitating the percussive sounds and combative actions of a martial opera. They consciously seek to maximize the intensity of holiday enjoyment as a form of revenge against their missing cohorts, independent cowherds who were able to obtain permission from their parents to remain in town for the day to enjoy the real opera. The unexpected arrival of the students on the scene precipitates a shift of activities into the gulch, where all the boys divide into two teams for a game of "bust the dam." At this point Erhe withdraws from the scene along with the cows to the other end of the pasture for the purpose of protecting his father’s stand of sorghum. Neither does Jisheng participate, for he objects to associating with cowherds. While the others are building dams, he is lying recalcitrantly on an isolated spot of ground throwing a noisy, imprecatory fit in a vain attempt to force compliance with his wishes.

Even though the seven cowherds (six after Erhe leaves) and the four students (not counting Jisheng) are the featured actors playing out a charming scene of carefree
pastoral frolic, it is the two who absent themselves and in particular the reasons for their absence which make the scene's substantive statement: that is, that the boys' absorbed and exuberant gaming is a surface phenomenon innocently camouflaging a turbulent dialectic lurking underneath it all. This eludes immediate discernment even once conflict breaks out, for it erupts in the guise of the classic spoiled-brat syndrome, in which one self-aggrandizing boy typically provokes his antagonists into teaching him a lesson.

This episode showing boys in contention for dominance and dignity calls to mind the body of Western works which revolves around the peculiarities of youthful male mentality. Readers accustomed to this tradition of celebrating the boy-on-the-brink-of-manhood experience might, at this point in Zhao's story, expect an excursion into the world of boyish turbulence in which the protagonist might finally relinquish his immaturity (as in Kipling's "Stalky and Co.") or hang onto it with a vengeance (as in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*). Zhao, however, does not concentrate upon the detailed development of the individual psyche but typically allows only brief illuminating glimpses set within a constellation of observable actions to suggest a character's psychic state. Thus, a plunge into the labyrinths of the immature mind is not forthcoming, although the author does dwell momentarily upon the childish, murky logic which leads Jisheng to take an action which, incidental to his motivations, hastens Erhe's advancement into the harsh world of adult realities.

Indeed, the dialectic the boys in their play do not acknowledge resides in the adult world, which has stealthily extended its tentacles into their midst. In the case of the two who have excluded themselves from the games, this adult world has disrupted childhood's natural inclination to play. One is too poor to play, the other too rich. One is obliged to bridge the lacuna that has sprung up between life's necessities and the ability to supply them; the other has been saturated since the advent of his existence with parental lessons in blind arrogance that alienate him from all the other village
children and deprive him of cohort camaraderie. Neither is yet conscious of the forces that are squeezing them into the respective deprivation and despotism of their eventual adulthood.

The reader's impulse to revile Jisheng is tempered by the boy's youth and the fact that childhood still extends to him the mantle of innocence. His blamelessness as a juvenile, however, is tainted by his disturbing lack of conscience—his nonexistent sense of wrongdoing when he gratuitously betrays Erhe—providing therein a salient glimpse at the nascent aspect of iniquity born in innocence. For unguided childhood innocence is subject to the absorption of evil unrealized as evil. As such it becomes the treacherous patron of the moral turpitude behind the unconscionable acts perpetrated by the intensely selfish against hapless fellow humans. Without intervention, such is the prospect for Jisheng, an innocent child betrayed by adults into growing up without the cultivation of conscience.

While Jisheng constantly threatens to tell various authority figures of inappropriate—though mostly fabricated—behaviour on the part of those who displease him, he is anxious to cover up this case of what must be termed as no less than assault against him—or at least hide it from his parents and his older cousin, since his inability to control his "inferiors" represents loss of face and exposes his personal ineffectuality. He reasons that he can control the mouths of the students through the usual deterrents while the cowherds' chatter will not go beyond their own circles. Only the garrulous Erhe, being in the employ of his father and therefore boarding on the premises, poses a threat to his secret. Thus, although Erhe is the only one who showed him any kindness in this incident, having released him from his bonds upon discovery of his predicament, Jisheng contrives to have him beaten. If anything, Jisheng is a great observer and manipulator of people's eccentricities: he had noted that Erhe's reaction in the past to a beating was to be withdrawn and uncommunicative for days at a time. He also knows that the foreman is easily provoked to violent anger
by the mistreatment of cattle and by being called a most detested nickname, "Old Donkey." Jisheng combines these facts in his gameplan with the result that when Erhe is approaching Wang Guangzu's house with the cows, he suddenly finds himself confronted by the foreman, who slaps him without explanation. Erhe, who is neither guilty of abusing the cattle nor of ridiculing the foreman, thinks Jisheng accused him of being his attacker. Stung by this injustice, instead of sulking in silence, he loudly protests his innocence (without specifying innocence of what) and curses Jisheng to his face, saying that liers should be punished with the death of their entire families. This only reaps more violence at the hand of both the foreman and Wang Guangzu himself. Bleeding from the blows and now mortally frightened as well as indignant he runs away shouting hysterically at Wang Guangzu that he will no longer work for him. Ironically, Jisheng's lie, although successful in preventing Erhe from talking of the afternoon fiasco, is totally ineffective in achieving the desired cover-up, for the students had sometime earlier already revealed the event.

Abuse of children before protection was extended to them, of course, was not unique to China, as the ample illustrations of it in the works of such writers as Charles Dickens attests. However, neither the foreman nor Wang Guangzu can be compared with Wackford Squeers in Nicholas Nickleby, or the Sowerberrys, Mr. Bumble, and Bill Sikes in Oliver Twist, since this beating is presented only as an isolated incident. This sequence rather bears striking affinities with a scene in Hardy's Jude the Obscure, in which Farmer Troutham visits upon the unsuspecting child Jude a thunderbolt attack that abruptly terminates his solitary rhapsodizing of the birds as he stands in the farmer's cornfield watching them eat the corn he was hired to protect. In both cases the violent excess of the punishment is intensified by the victims' total unanticipation of it. Erhe is genuinely stunned at this turn of events, initially feeling no fear whatsoever of Wang Guangzu but rather fully expecting that he would redress the wrong done him by the foreman.
This illuminates Erhe's conception of his employer. He must have been aware that Wang engaged in slapping people, but his reflex confidence in his fairness indicates that he must have assumed such behaviour to be part and parcel of mayoral administration of justice. That is, those who did no wrong had nothing to fear, just as the average law-abiding citizen these days has no fear of the police (presumably), and anyone who sustained a slap must have deserved it. Erhe's confidence that Wang would deliver justice indeed casts, for the moment at least, a redeeming light on Wang in spite of the subsequent violence, for, after all, Erhe had worked for him at least two years and yet did not hesitate to place himself before him in the crisis. Unlike his parents, he did not despair of his sense of rectitude. This suggests that Wang had never before personally lifted a hand against him. Or if he had it did not exceed the bounds of what Erhe himself considered to be justice.

Thus at this point, Erhe's unjust beating at the hand of Wang Guangzu, although unnecessarily harsh, bears the tinge of isolated incident, the product perhaps of unusual stress produced by an unusual day, as opposed to a general pattern of tyrannical behaviour penetrating the entire aspect of his office. Finally, it must be noted that Erhe's own father a short time later himself attempts to commit similar violence against his son, thereby diluting any impression of Wang as being, sui generis, unusually inclined toward brutality.

From the time Erhe releases Jisheng from his bonds until he runs home traumatized and aggrieved by the battering he has sustained, a gradual shift from the world of the child to the world of the adult has been underway. As will be seen in greater detail later, the accomplishment of this shift corresponds with the story's two-part structural framework, not formally delineated, encompassing a symbolic chronological progression of the individual into bondage as he grows older. The shift begins with the students' departure from the gulch. As they gad about the village playing, meeting other boys (the independent cowherds) who swell their numbers, and getting
into mischief, the adult world gradually becomes more prominent through their observations of and encounters with adults. Through the boys’ eyes, Wang Guangzu, his relatives other than his son, and his foreman all make their initial personal appearances, and the setting for the second part of the story is introduced.

Their peripatetic games finally take them to Wang Guangzu’s house, where they relinquish the story’s action to its inmates, but not before one of them shouts from a distance a brief remark that sets into motion another major series of events. That is, from afar they hear Jisheng’s mother inquire of the foreman, who is busy cleaning up the mess the boys made of the threshing field in their play, of the whereabouts of Jisheng. One mischievous boy gleefully shouts, “He’s in the gulch looking at melons!” and he and his friends all scurry away. This sends Jisheng’s mother into a state of hysteria and the foreman to the gulch in search of Jisheng, thereby providing Jisheng with an opportunity to fill the foreman’s ears with innuendos against Erhe as they walk back to the village. By the time Erhe runs home following his beating, all of the other boys have faded into the background and Erhe soon follows suit as his parents’ dilemmas – intensified by their son’s altercation with Wang Guangzu – take center stage. The boys, however, have not been discarded, for they are destined to re-emerge from time to time, in person or in name, in groups or singly, to nudge the action or to offer glimpses of their fates in the making.

The events which have occurred up to this point and which will occur are the product of long-existing tensions and the special properties of a day unique on the calendar. The tensions emerge against a backdrop of holiday excitement engendered by the scheduling of operatic performances in celebration of the festival of Guan Gong.° The holiday serves to elicit them in active manifestation, in some cases, as already seen, exacerbating them to the point of open conflict, for it has disrupted the normal routine, thrown people into uncommon circumstances, and drawn those who normally shun one another into provocative proximity. That is, the unusual has distilled the usual into a
concentrated, intensified version of itself, precipitating a situation liable to volatility and change.

In the case of the children's experience, the volatility inherent to the sudden unusual appearance of Jisheng in the midst of the cowherds was initially and unknowingly counteracted by the cowherds' naïveté. At the outset they regarded Jisheng as just another potential player, his social status and sartorial splendor being insufficient to overcome in their consciousness the solidarity proclaimed by similar age and identical gender. Another factor that served to mute volatility and postpone escalation of violence after the first altercation was the spaciousness of the out-of-doors, which allowed all the other boys to walk away from Jisheng and leave him to his tantrum while they went to play in the gulch.

In the case of the adults, however, the distillation of tensions becomes more immediately apparent because of, for one thing, their grasp of reality, and for another, the fact that the second half of the story literally throws virtually all the villagers into an enclosed cauldron — that is, the temple where the opera is performed.

The scenes and events that occur in the temple remove the imputation of isolated incident from the preceding account by implying a general pattern of casual overlord arrogance on the part of Wang Guangzu that routinely disrupts the prosaic harmony of simple village life. This is accomplished through a narrative configuration that parallels that of the prior child-centered episode. The reader is at first regaled with an incipient image of appealing collective congeniality as preparations are made for the evening's operatic performances. Though this scene of temple activity is pragmatically related to the arrival of Erhe's father (and therefore is partially refracted through his eyes), it unfolds in such a way as to produce the impression that the observer is actually a nostalgic returned native, or even an uninitiated visitor, who has entered the temple to enjoy a panorama of charming indigenous activities. Indeed, the image smacks of sentimental recall analogous to the earlier idyllic vision of boys
cavorting on the grassy pasture.

Just as the scene of pastoral frolic was shattered by juvenile conflict, this seemingly romantic and peaceful aspect of rural life is also belied by the fact that a number of peasants are attempting to escape it by joining the village's dominant society, whose chief member is Wang Guangzu. A privileged dinner party in an upstairs room of the temple contrasts the congeniality evident among the "commoners," drafted through the instrument of corvee into decorating the temple, with the strained revelry these would-be aristocrats voluntarily engage in. The palpable suffering among them induced by painful consciousness of their own inadequacies in the face of the mayor's education, status, and style suggests that these aspiring aristocrats would be much better off appreciating the company of their less fortunate brothers and provokes wonder at their willingness to subject themselves to the mayor's undisguised disdain. But at the same time the mayor's high-handed treatment of the average people who have come to watch the opera, his imperious order to halt the opera in progress and perform another to his own liking, and his arbitrariness in ordering the arrest of a stonemason who loudly protests his arrogance denote that the life of the commoner is fraught with a precariousness that renders it in effect impractical to embrace when better opportunities appear to be within grasp.

By the end of the story it is clear that Wang Guangzu is quite abusive of the power his position affords him, and that he evidently aspires to tsar-like dominion. The narrative builds up to this point unobtrusively, emphasizing for the most part, up until it approaches the finale, simply various facets of his personal style, i.e. - expensive clothing, ownership of horses, retaining of laborers, impatience with children, obsession with face, the supercilious attitude with which he and his relatives regard the ordinary villagers - none of which can be identified per se with any kind of patterned immorality or is sufficient in itself to brand him as a tyrant. In actuality, however, the implication of his malevolence is present throughout, but the story's design and
manner of execution attenuates the its impact for the purpose of strengthening it at the end. The seductiveness of the variegated activities and concerns comprising the human environment deflects the focus away from Wang Guangzu — inducing a kind of complacency or amnesia in the reader — until the time for driving the point home arrives. Dispersing each separate sketch of Wang throughout a tapestry primarily devoted to depicting his social inferiors mimics in a way the formulation of Erhe's own perception of him up to the point of his beating. That is, besides the fact that the boy through the insulation of childhood subjectivity and insensibility did not detect abusiveness in Wang since he himself had never personally suffered an unjust attack, the panoply of activities that filled his own little childish world also distracted him from discerning reality — until it slapped him directly in the face.

A similar effect is produced in the reader, whose immersion in the diversity of scene, character, and event distracts him from contemplating the significance of certain elemental facts about Wang Guangzu. For instance, Wang's status as landlord, which in itself would be sufficient to cast him in a sinister light in the context of the landlord-bashing works of the era, never receives any particular emphasis. Even the emotionally-wrought discussion among Erhe's family members concerning the predicament Erhe's clash with Wang has caused — primarily due to their owing him back rent and interest — does little to shift his identity to that of a landlord. For one thing the sequence is short, shifting over to a new scene and new characters with a speed unconducive to registering its implications. At the same time Erhe's father's behaviour might be interpreted in any number of ways that would attenuate any assertion of tenant abuse on the part of Wang. As a result, while Wang's identity as a landlord enters into the picture, his status as landlord, with all the negative connotations the word implies, never takes hold. It instead defers to his status as mayor: it is as a mayor, a holder of political power, that his image of rapacity and unjustness
eventually makes its impact. Indeed, his retaliation against the stonemason is grounded solely upon his power as mayor, for, as Huang Xiuji has pointed out, the stonemason, as an independent artisan, is not in the tenant farmer's unstable position of dependancy.*

Sometime after the scene shifts into the temple, a number of situations and occurrences offer escalating evidence of Wang's disregard for all people of lower social status—subtle put-downs of the petty officials, chasing the " riff-raff" downstairs, abrupt requisition of the best viewing spots, inconsiderate occupation of precious space with large chairs and tables, rude interruption of and replacement of the popularly chosen opera—but none of these actions take him beyond the bounds of ordinary if outrageous aristocratic narcissism. One might note at this point a certain parallel between the image he emits here and the erstwhile impression Erhe had of Jisheng—that he was dislikeable but wouldn't actually harm anyone. Considering the denouement, however, his conduct might be likened to the symptoms of a disease ignored by its victim until the development of pain drives him to the doctor, at which time the case is already terminal. Just as Jisheng disabuses Erhe of his illusion, Wang Guangzu discloses his own ruthlessness and contempt for citizen's rights through his inordinate retaliation against the stonemason for the unsubtle execrations he dares direct toward him. The stonemason's reaction to the arrest order in turn provides further grist for condemnation, for why should he feel obliged to precipitously abandon his home and flee the village to escape no more than a simple arrest on a disorderly conduct charge? Clearly he had more to fear than a mere night in jail.

It is at this point that Wang Guangzu loses the benefit of the doubt that any observer may have extended to him before, and all the other sketches and references to him, in hindsight, point to probable habitual malefaction. His striking of Erhe now appears to be indicative of regular cruelty, especially since his enjoyment of the banquet immediately afterwards indicates he suffered no remorse. That it had escaped Erhe's
attention before could be attributed to the foreman’s having taken on the role of dispensing physical punishment. If Erhe’s family is in dire straits it might well indeed be because he charges unfair rents and usurious interest rates in the manner of the stereotypical landlord. His son’s atrocious behaviour now appears to be an accurate reflection of his father’s attitudes, views, and conduct rather than a mere perversion by a spoiled child of the requisite duties connected with his official position.

The subdued approach to Wang Guangzu’s tyranny coincides with the human disinclination to dwell upon sources of trouble until actually confronted with them in a crisis and the reluctance as well to believe in a fellow human’s malignancy. Except perhaps in war it is rare that the average person is directly and constantly confronted with tyrannical forces. Howsoever the proponents of tyranny affect the circumstances in which average people live, the inhabitants of a community retain their central human energies and aims. They carry out their quotidian activities with the same aspirations for improving material well-being, completing their work, avoiding excess hardship, and socializing and celebrating as they would otherwise. Thus, even in a community ruled by tyranny, a faithful slice-of-life depiction cannot appropriately render immediate and relentless revelation of that tyranny, since it must also deal with the activities of inhabitants not immediately concerned with it. At the same time, history shows that villages such as Huangsha Gou were indeed subjected to tyranny, and so a faithful slice-of-life depiction can hardly avoid it. Given that the negative impact its own mayor exerts upon village life has turned out to be a major issue of this story, it is to the author’s credit that he did not succumb in his writing to the faddish litinization of the crimes of the “class enemy” that was in vogue in this era. For relentless reiteration of a character’s criminality does not coincide with the ordinary and realistic unfolding of daily life. The story rather reverberates with the energy of reminiscence, radiating a quality that can only derive from the innocent and passionately felt encounters of a writer’s youth. It lacks the connotation of contrived
villification, of brutal exposure and transparent derogation, instead presenting an impressionistic montage of village life that conspires with the reader's own observations to make its point.

The author has rendered a detached and remarkably restrained description of the mayor and his family, who, in their social maladjustment exhibit merely another instance of those petty despots who invariably arise wherever civil rights have not yet been invented or enforced and whose existence certain contemporary world leaders inexplicably strive to deny or justify. The author's restraint becomes apparent when the work is laid side by side with others which also deal with the problem of despotism. For instance, in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, a member of the local ruling family, Jose Arcadio Buendia, usurps neighboring lands without even so much as legal subterfuge, "knocking down fences and buildings with his oxen until he took forcible possession of the best plots..." and levied a weekly "contribution" on those lands he didn't take for his own (Avon Books, 1971, pp. 113-114). His son, Arcadio, to whom his uncle hands interim power in his absence, summarily executes villagers who show even humorous "disrespect for the authorities" (p. 105). Furthermore Zhao's detachment — for the greatest portion of the story his narrator resembles a disinterested party who has dropped into town for the day and is observing the events as cultural phenomena to be respected by outsiders — renders the problem of the mayor's monarchical pretensions into a fixture of rural life to be dealt with, much as one must bad weather or wild animals or a drop in the market price for agricultural products. In other words, it is not Wang Guangzu per se, as an individual, who is the core of the problem. It is rather an ethos which breeds a resigned assumption for despotic entities to exist.

The inclusion of the petty officials clarify this point. Though their origin be humble, these illiterate fathers of first generation students, who must struggle with the baggage of their rustic commonality in their attempt to ingratiate themselves with
the mayor, are the moral (if not pragmatic) candidates for replacing the mayor in the
event of his non-existence. In toady ing to the mayor, in vying for his favor and atten-
tion, in leaping to dictatorially order their fellow villagers about on his behalf, they
reveal that their goals go far beyond simply improving their lives or making contri-
butions to society: what they seek is the status that would proclaim their right to lord
it over others.

Notwithstanding the acute awareness among Western readers of modern Chinese
literature of the danger inherent in portraying groups - i.e., that of begetting an un-
differentiated nimbus - this group, whose coherence derives from its members' com-
mon embarkation upon the career of adjutant oppressor, nonetheless exhibits varying
shades of motivation that reveal the dissimilarities among them. Wang Hai (王海)
wields his derivational power with an energy and meanness that illustrates his convic-
tion of the rightness and justness of his own dominion. Zhao Qi (赵起) hesitates and
shrinks from opportunities that might procure for him any situation that rises above
the most elementary level of authority, not out of a conviction that power equates cor-
ruption but out of a deep-seated belief in his own inferior endowments and the limi-
tations they impose on him. Here arises out of the benighted bucolic setting a rare sym-
metry with the modern urban industri-individualistic society whose edamant demand
for individual initiative frees the bold to maximize their personal resources while
discomfitting those whose dreams of acquisition contradict their lack of the self-confi-
dence and dynamic energy necessary for their realization. Within this rural mini-
spectrum of ambition and ambivalence, the true common thread which connects those
individuals involved is the plan to sustain or strengthen their positions through the of-
fices of their sons, whom they are currently grooming through education to be the con-
solidators of family power in the village.

Here we have an indication of the work's primary aim, which is not to fulminate
against rapacious overlords or execrate those who, in emulation, lust after coercive
dominion (as opposed to meritorious leadership), but to reflect the effect that a society which generates such phenomena has upon the children. The students, of course, are oblivious of the future that their fathers envision for them. In the unconscious well of unobservant childhood, they are yet unaware that their scholarly pursuits will, if successful, most likely sooner or later raise a wall of alienation between them and their cowherd friends not unlike that which prompts their fathers to sequester themselves in the banquet room with their model of preeminent authority.

The banquet-table exchange concerning the boys' education opens a window on their fates such that even though the overt focus is upon the interchange between their fathers and the mayor, the real focus is upon the boys. This effect may be likened to the portrait of a room in which the eye is drawn to the bright scene depicted outside its window. Unlike the supposed painting, which embodies this effect as part of its immediate integrity, however, the written work as a linear art form necessarily achieves it through the build-up of reader interest in the boys in part one. It is as if one's interest in the outdoor scene integrated into the indoor tableau were aroused primarily because one had stood in the midst of it a few moments before. That is, because of the concentrated attention devoted to the boys in part one, they remain of uppermost concern in part two even though they have been subjected to a severe curtailment of personal appearance. Their "disappearance" on the one hand is a function of the slice-of-life technique the author has chosen: the author proposes to escort the reader about the village and environs for one day, and the reader who accepts this proposal must also accept what he finds there, even if the people of most interest to him can linger to entertain him only momentarily. What the tour reveals is that village life is primarily adult life and that what adults do will necessarily override the activities and interests of children. Of course there is more involved than mere slavish adherence to this fact of life. The story exudes a life of its own to be distinguished from that which it depicts, such that while it depicts the dominion of adults it proclaims that the main interest lies
In the children. Like words, the signs for their referents (and not the thing itself), it provides a subjective opinion of the object referred to. In the story everything the adults do is background to the destiny of the children, and the very structure of the story itself is an allegory of children's subordination to adult interests. Not only the structure but also the setting is marshalled to this effect:

The first part, featuring children, is set in the open expanse of grassland and in the free-wheeling gulch where nature resists the modifications conceived by adult minds. The gulch especially is inhospitable to civilization, representing thus nature in its most adamantly free state. No one except children who equal it in rambunctiousness can find in it compatibility with their own unfettered expectations. As the story progresses, however, it relentlessly advances toward and finally enters into the village temple — where it remains for the duration. Such is the inevitable fate of children — to advance into the structures (= strictures) of adulthood, to be obligated to forsake the freedom implied by grasslands and gulches and embrace an environment coerced into artificial forms.

The temple, like adult-invented institutions and other impositions, presents a deceiving facade of faithful service to humankind, its creators and caretakers. It at first appears large and spacious, and, as implied by the ritual of lantern lighting, anxious to accept alterations to benefit those it is meant to serve. In fact, however, when the waves of spectators move in to witness their long anticipated opera, it impresses upon them its determination to impose its own will. Their numbers strain its capacity, they are crowded and uncomfortable, unable even to move without endangerment: it is outmoded, refuses to function in the way expected; it is no longer the servitor of men but rather the constrictor of men's instincts to move and breathe.

That the boys disappear as main actors soon after the action moves into the temple is a function of this symbolism: it is not merely that their innocence is destined to be swallowed up by the vicissitudes of adulthood, it is also that they as children have no
niche of individuality to occupy in the adult world: to enter the adult domain is to be immediately subsumed and eventually consumed.

Erhe and Jisheng are now distanced from us, to be glimpsed only from afar in the midst of the crowd. We wish to know them better, but the very crowd inhibits our approach as if to emphasize their society’s insistence upon deindividuation and conformity. Jisheng, still segregated from the other children, plays in the areas declared off-limits to the “rabble.” He is the willing prisoner of the privileges imposed on him. Erhe again throughout much of the scene is conspicuous by his absence, which once again speaks eloquently of his circumstance – this time one featuring ruptures in relationships of dependency and distressing face to face confrontation with betrayal. His employer has destroyed his instinctive trust in the infallibility and inviolability of justice, while his father has discarded paternal protection and solicitude in favor of teaching a lesson that included potential violence in learning to embrace abuse as the only viable alternative to starvation and homelessness. Men and circumstances have conspired to betray innocence, sabotage harmony, and render impassable the path to self-determination.

Erhe finally reappears in the end to take up the mayor’s lantern, originally carried in by the foreman, to lead the procession of the privileged through the crowd, out of the temple, and home. The performance of this slight and unimportant act is emblematic of the profound change this day has wrought in his consciousness: brutally and abruptly he has apprehended that destiny, heretofore unexplored and ignored, has mandated for him a life of subservience, and he has bowed to the exigency of submitting to it. Reality has assailed his childhood illusions with the lesson that life is unfair and that he is one of those who must bear the brunt of its inequity. His perception of the mayor, Wang Guangzu, has undoubtedly permanently altered, and whenever he hears of a beating case he will think of his own encounter with injustice. When Erhe’s father goes to bribe the foreman to get Erhe reinstated, the foreman responds forgivingly,
"What boy doesn't get into scrapes now and then?" He can afford this patronizing remark because of his assurance that the boy will soon be properly socialized, moulded into a shape that will squeeze out youthful freshness and rebellion, and transform him into another patron of conservatism like the foreman himself, otherwise a docile pack animal that is party to his own oppression.

By taking over from the foreman the task of carrying the lantern, Erhe demonstrates that the imperative of self-immolation has penetrated his spirit. Here in this final scene, the texture of the language flattens out as well into a recumbent tone, generating an impression of normalcy, of matter-of-fact event that seems to casually affirm the ineluctable propriety of Erhe's suppression of pride and sacrifice of dignity. Here, authorial detachment approaches ironic cynicism as it manifestly clashes with the boy's indubitable if understated distress accompanying his altered view of life. At this juncture the child crosses the line into adulthood, and though the boy's sentiments receive no overt expression, the reader instinctively senses emanations of emotion in crisis valiently suppressed. Denying its expression, the story becomes a parody of society's unsympathetic response to individual psychic distress and concomitantly its preoccupation with self-suppression and conformity.

The publication background of "Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng" deserves some attention here because it testifies to the irrelevance of author intent in the area of literary effect. What the literary world now possesses is a self-contained story replete with vivid images and significant meanings even though the work is actually unfinished according to Zhao's original intent. Like the "Unfinished Symphony" it has become by virtue of its exposure to the audience an integral piece whole unto itself even though its creator had planned otherwise. Its publication history has made a major contribution to what it is today. Though it falls into two formally undelineated parts as seen above, it was originally intended as the first part of a projected three-part novel, with each
part being further subdivided into three chapters (章). In the originally serialized version it was segmented under the three chapter titles "School and Hillside" (Xuexiao yu shanpo 学校与山坡), "No Justice Around Here" (Shuo shemma li 谎言理), and "When Can a Temple be Said to be Spacious?" (Guandi miao jibuj 雍城庙几). The editor of The New Masses (Xin dazhong 新大众), in which it was published, noted in his introductory remarks that reader demand for "a good novel" prompted him to commission "the famous writer Comrade Zhao Shuli" to write "an emancipation story." The first part was to depict the childhood era of characters who were distinguished by their social class. The second part was to depict the era of their youth, which would have spanned the period of the War of Resistance Against Japan. The third part was to depict the era occurring after the "mass movement" (群众运动). Contrary to intent, however, after the three chapters of Part I were published, Parts II and III were not forthcoming.

In fact Zhao had indeed written chapters four and five (or the first 2/3 of Part II), but they were not discovered in manuscript form until after his death. Meanwhile in 1955, People's Literature (Renmin wenzue 人民文学) republished Part I as an integral short story with all the chapter divisions and headings removed. In this way it passed into the public domain as a complete work, and with the tone of finality that imbues its ending it deserves to be regarded as such.

Concluding Remarks

Besides the incidentals which bind them together - their unconcern with social change and the neglect on the part of critics and commentators - these two stories exhibit parallels in theme, characterization, and the use of symbolism which proclaim their artistic affinity.
Theme

While “The Tax Collector” in isolation may be thematically defined by “the banality of corruption” and “Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng” by “innocence betrayed,” they in tandem shift the narrative focus onto an overall encompassing theme, which may be identified as the abuse of political power and its adjunct theme, societal acquiescence to such abuse. Cui Jiuhai as a tax collector and Wang Guangzu as a mayor both abuse the power of their offices, while their victims compliantly modify their behaviour to please them. Erhe’s parents accept their lot without a struggle and Erhe himself capitulates almost immediately. No one supports the stonemason when his unjust arrest is ordered. In “The Tax Collector,” everyone accepts the immoral as moral and no one tries to countervene the corruption inherent to the tax collector’s office; even the mountain villagers who use their wits to minimize their losses help to perpetuate corruption by playing the tax collector’s game.

Characterization

These are the only two of Zhao’s stories which portray “negative” characters to present them with a subtlety and matter-of-factness that delays the reader’s apprehension of their antipathetic aspect until the story has advanced well toward its denouement. They lack the immediacy of exposure and the wholesale derogation applied to his other unmistakably negative characters, instead presenting them casually in gradually revealing narrative that conspires with the reader’s own observations to make their point.

Symbolism

Both stories use features of the natural and man-made environment to symbolize man’s condition or point of view. In “The Tax Collector,” environmental features impress themselves upon the consciousness—both character’s and reader’s—as images extending from the quest for dominance: the sole instance of vivid scenic impressions occurs as distorted imagery produced by Cui Jiuhai’s rippled, red glasses. As the
product of his endeaveour to increase his ability to intimidate his victims, these dis­
torted images provide a symbolically incisive commentary upon the world view and the
concept of ethics that Cui has absorbed from his culture.

In “Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng” this use of environmental features to symolize
man’s condition or point of view is even more pronounced and is furthermore coupled
with another facet of the author’s artistry, the use of structural allegory to the same end.

In reaching back to an era that antedated the revolutionary permutations of their
own age, these two stories adumbrate a vision of the ideal sabotaged. The tiny commu­
nity of isolated mountain peasants in “The Tax Collector” and the freely romping boys
in “Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng” evince a salutary, pastoral state clearly indicated in
the author’s special vision as man’s natural and ideal condition. It is a vision that
hearkens all the way back to the Taoist pastoral ideal which glorified a Golden Age in
which tiny utopian agricultural communities encompassed themselves within limited
bounds that admitted only of the sound of crowing cocks and barking dogs from neigh­
boring communities. Narrative tension thus arises from the discrepancy between what
should be and the reality of what is: man’s peaceful, pastoral life is disturbed or de­
stroyed by tyrannies which have treacherously insinuated themselves into the social
system. It is the victims’ own pastoral mind-set, one likely born of accommodating na­
ture, as the pastoral life-style demands, instead of defying it, which, projected onto
human relations, originated a pattern of routine acceptance of these tyrannies as if
they were indeed part of nature itself.

Individual attempts at resistance (re - Liu Erhe’s and the stonemason’s angry
outbursts) were doomed to be crushed, just as a lone man building an emergency dike
against rising waters must inevitably yield to the overwhelming force of the flood.
Understanding this, Liu the Elder, leader of the mountain village, played the tax
collector's game, for it allowed him and his people to avoid drowning, but it also contributed nothing to lessening or eliminating the threat altogether.

Dominating rural existence, then, is inertial instability, a condition indefinitely sustainable in the absence of radical coordinated attempts to supercede the philosophy of just getting by in dealing with malefactors. The upshot is that in essence the pastoral life is impossible, for to make such concerted efforts to defend it from tyranny is to automatically change it into something else, i.e., a martial life or a public, political life. To cling to the rural ideal, then, is to be constrained to accept a diminished, flawed version of it. In this motif of tarnished pastoralism we find the elusiveness of perfection lamented.

A premise behind this chapter has been the separateness of these two stories from the author's main body of works. An attempt has been made to regard them with an eye free from the influence of his other works - or, more accurately, from the analyses and interpretations of his other works - as a means of arriving at their own integral value as discrete aesthetic entities. The point of view the author is popularly reputed to hold has been held in abeyance for the purpose of discovering nuances of meaning that might otherwise be obscured. To oversimplify the author's intentions as being grounded solely in class feeling, as works like "The Rhymes of Li Youcai" and Changes in Li Village might seem to confirm, is to oversimplify his powers of analysis and range of perceptions. This may easily lead to the conclusion that "The Tax Collector" is simply an excoriation of bureaucrats and "Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng" is no more than a condemnation of the landlord class, when in reality they delve much deeper into society, down to the root of a systemic malaise for which everyone, including the victims of bureaucrats and landlords must bear responsibility. For the critic or scholar to concentrate only upon those points which seem to fulfill Marxist criteria is to deny these works the attention they deserve since neither of them conspicuously conforms to the established canons. To limit discussion of them to those points which confirm the
author's advanced thinking (e.g., portraying a rebellious stonemason) is to miss out upon the full complement of their value both as works of art reflecting a bygone era and also as foils to the author's main body of works.

In the latter function it is their very untypicality that offers insight into the author's mainstream works. For one thing their common motif of tarnished pastoralism and its implied regret for classic utopianism points to his other works as being essentially a reaction to a personal discovery of the inevitability of the fatal imperfections in the rural social system. Realizing that the classic kind of pastoralism is unattainable, he seeks another kind, one bound to political awareness, in effect sublimating the desire for the elusive ideal to enthusiasm for the possible as presented by the opportunities of the era. This relegates to the category of myth the assertion that he was in servitude to expediency, a mere plodding propagandist at the beck and call of arid Party ideologues, and confirms his right to the characterization that applies to any self-respecting literary artist, that is, a writer responsive to the social patterns of his time.

A second, related point refers to an earlier cited narrative characteristic of these two stories, i.e. - the lack of the exaggerated view and the extreme situation, the absence of pointedly dramatized abjectness in victims or egregiousness of oppressors. That is, the writer's translucent realism here inspires confidence in his judgement when he comes to deal with the age of reform.

These points, of course, comprise merely pragmatic application of the works' merits to secondary considerations. It is as artistic reflections of the enervated pre-revolutionary scene that they have their intrinsic significance. In the midst of the new, officially declared age of formative literature (i.e., a literature designed to alter society), the author took time off to step back from the pivotal historical period in which he was writing to recollect scenes from the society which preceded and necessarily prompted it. Simplicity and pithy vigor inform this trek into the past in evocative narratives that treat of a constant of human existence: the struggle of individuals
to get ahead or to stay ahead or simply not to lose ground in the face of man-made adversity. As such, though they date from the mid-40's, they lie in propinquity to the rural literature of an earlier era, contributing a valuable facet to the picture of rural life created in such works as Lu Xun's "My Old Home" (Guxiang 故乡), "Village Opera" (Shexi 社戏), and "The New Year Sacrifice" (Zhufu 祝福), and Mao Dun's "Spring Silkworms" (Chun can 春蚕) and "Autumn Harvest" (Qiushou 秋收).
"Xiao Erhel Gets Married" spans the time from Third Fairy’s youth until her own daughter becomes of marriageable age in the new era of reform. *Changes in Li Village* starts out in 1928 and ends with the end of the war with Japan and on the eve of the KMT crossing of the Yellow River to attack the Eighth Route Army (1945). "Fugui" covers the life of the protagonist from the age of twelve to middle age. Through flash-back “Registration” compares the difference in marriage experience between two generations of women, a mother and her daughter who comes of age in 1950. "The Emancipation of Meng Xiangying" begins in 1939, when Meng Xiangying is a young bride abused by her mother-in-law, moves through to 1942, when a women’s association is formed in her village, to 1944, when she is elected a labour heroine.

2 "The Tax Collector" (*Cuiliangchai* 催粮差) first appeared in *New Literature* (*Xin wenyi* 新文艺), no. 3 (Aug. 1, 1946), which was published by Tatyue New China Book Store (太岳新中华书局). It won the Taihang District Literary Award (first place) in the same year and subsequently appeared in the following publications: *Northeast Literature* (*Dongbei wenyi* 东北文艺) 2:3 (Sept. 1, 1947); *Popular Literature* (*Dazhong wenyi congkan* 大众文艺丛刊) (Hong Kong), no. 4 (Sept. 1948); Fugui (North China New China Book Store, 1947. This book was a small collection of stories by Zhao including "Fugui," "Land," and "The Tax Collector."); Fugui (East China New China Book Store, 1948); *Selected Works of Zhao Shuli* 赵树理选集 (Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1956); *Selected Fiction of Zhao Shuli* 赵树理短篇选 (Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1979); *Works of Zhao Shuli* 赵树理文集, 4 Vols. (Worker’s Publishing House 工人出版社, 1980), vol. i. (See Dong Dazhong, *Zhao Shuli nianpu*, pp. 72–73, 76, 85).

3 Notwithstanding the effect of the story, Zhao in 1966 claimed a didactic motivation in his "Recalling History, Knowing Myself" (*Huiyi lishi, renshi ziji* 回忆历史, 认识自己), an essay written under some duress at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. He said: ""The Tax Collector" digs at the despicable character of thugs in the old yamen. In 1946, I went to Yangcheng where I saw many such people currying favor with authorities everywhere, trying to squeeze through the crevices to find a job. I was afraid that some of the new comrades among us did not discern this situation and so I set out to expose it." (See Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 4, p. 1827)

4 "The old ox looking at melons" (老牛看瓜). This consisted of tying the victim’s hands together (in this case with his own belt), making him clutch his knees, and then passing a long stick through the space between elbows and knees (over the crook of the arm, under the back of the knee). In this way the victim could assume only one position and that was on his curved spine: he could only roll around on the ground like a camel smack on his back. Neither head nor feet could touch the ground, nor could the victim roll over to either side since the long stick extending to either side prevented it.
Guan Gong, better known as Guan Yu, a general of Shu in the era of the Three Kingdoms, a native of what is today Shanxi province, died AD 219. When the Eastern Han split up into the three kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu, Guan Yu fled south to Shu where he joined Shu’s founder, Liu Bei, in his struggles against the other two kingdoms. Cao Cao, ruler of Wei, had such great respect and admiration for him that instead of executing him upon capture, he bestowed upon him the title of Duke. Not to be distracted from his original endeavour, however, Guan Yu went back to Liu Bei. He was eventually beheaded by the ruler of Wu.

Over the centuries Guan Yu became a romanticized, even deified, figure through storytelling. He is one of the best loved characters in Luo Guanzhong’s *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in which he plays the role of Liu Bei’s sworn brother. Here he is the embodiment of loyalty, righteousness, and unsurpassed courage, with an imposing physical presence that matches his personality. One of the most memorable episodes involving him depict him undergoing surgery without benefit of restraints or blindfold, as he calmly sits playing chess and drinking wine. In another he vows to an assembly of nobles to slay a particularly challenging enemy they are discussing, rides off into the battle underway, and returns before the glass of warm wine they offered him has turned cold, the enemy’s head in hand.

The father’s reaction, which was to storm into the house and attempt to beat Erhe, could be indicative of reason gone haywire in the excitement of the moment, or of exaggerated emotional distress stimulated by an inferiority complex or general disappointment at not yet having achieved his life goal. The complicated nature of the human animal undoubtedly could inspire other interpretations. The point is that not enough information is given in this sequence to clarify the actual nature of the family situation. After all, Erhe’s brother, older and therefore presumably capable of mature analysis, takes a much more optimistic view of Erhe’s sudden unemployment and does not feel that there is anything to get upset about. The mother too is of this view. The result of the brevity of the sequence and the mixed signals it sends out is that any depiction of or allusion to the rapacious behaviour stereotypically attributed to landlords is distinctly underplayed.

In fact, the word “landlord” (*dizhubi*) is never used.


No. 34.


The story also appeared in *Selected Works of Zhao Shuli* (*Zhao Shuli xuanji*), Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958. See Dong Dazhong, p. 148.
In the uncompleted Part II, we see the characters ten years later when the village is in the midst of “cooperativization.” Wang Guangzu, who has been deposed as mayor, is more or less a broken man with a fatalistic attitude about his unstable autonomy over the not insubstantial property that still remains to him after land reform. Jisheng has become head of the cooperative store and continues to think in terms of his superiority over others, strives to “snow” people to gain benefits, and views those less fortunate than himself with contempt. Erhe still works for Wang Guangzu as a long-term laborer, though his accumulation of years and his joining of the agricultural coop have emboldened him, and he even dares to insult his employer’s wife through utterance of pornographic innuendos—an act for which his aging father still has the impulse to beat him. The exiled stonemason propels the beginning of the sequel with his return to the village and has blossomed into a major character whose impact in the available narrative is greater than that of any other character. It is clear from the direction of the narrative that had it continued it would have focused upon the unfulfilled expectations of the land reform movement, specifically the subjection of those least able to defend themselves to uncondoned deprivations, or “incomplete emancipation.” (See Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 2, pp. 579-600.)
CHAPTER VI
Structure, Theme, and Abstraction: Fundaments and Meaning of Technique in "Xiao Erhei Gets Married"

A Polyphony of Plots

The very title of Zhao's most famous story obscures the facts that Xiao Erhei is not its protagonist and that marriage is not its theme. If any character can presume to claim the role of protagonist, that character is Third Fairy (San Xiangu 三湘姑); for not only does the narrator devote greater efforts to her personality than he does for any of the other characters, she alone is concretely shown to move through all five of the phases of complex dynamic action in the fictional art. Nonetheless, even she fails to dominate the story's narrative thrust. In fact, if the eponymous character is not to be distinguished as the principle focus of the story's dynamic action, then neither is any other character to be so distinguished.

The plethora of characters relative to the story's length and the lack of concentrated focus upon one of them evinces the fulfillment of the work's thematic orientation. The expectation of marriage as theme shatters with the discovery of numerous plot lines that are attached to the lives of the various characters. Weaving a web among themselves, these plots, as a body, fail to illustrate the vicissitudes of marriage or its pursuit.

The most obvious of the plots, the one most commonly assumed to be the plot, is the one the title contemplates: a boy and girl wish to marry, but their parents object and independently arrange other marriages for them; the aspiring couple resist their parents' opposition until the district government officials interfere and force the
parents to obey the new marriage law mandating free choice in marriage. The boy and
girl marry with their parents’ blessings and live happily ever after.

Yet, in the absence of titular influence, the plot might be construed differently: a
man and a woman of middle age have led their lives according to superstitious beliefs
and practices, oblivious of the fact that many in the community place no faith in
their incantations and divinations. Through the conflict engendered by their chil-

In fact, neither of these two plots dominates the other, and their interdependence
requires that they be considered on a basis of equality: the story deals as much with
superstition as it does with marriage, presenting a thematic dilemma. Such a dilemma
is further complicated by additional plots that impose further limitations upon domi-
nation, thwarting as they do even a concept of a dinarchy of plots as well as a concept of
thematic duality. Consider the following plot: a woman of middle age (the same as
above) has lived her life according to the tenet that Woman’s mission is to flash her
beauty before all men and that Woman’s happiness lies in socializing with the men it
attracts. She has deluded herself into believing that the beauty she possessed at fifteen
continues to distinguish her features at the age of 45, and she makes herself up as
though still a young bride. Through a conflict of jealousy, she seeks to obstruct her
daughter’s marriage, which in turn leads her to a public humiliation that forces her to
realize the truth about her appearance, and she revises her life-style to conform to it.

In this plot the marriage issue relinquishes its thematic identity and merely
serves as a catalyst in the character’s personal change. Superstition, on the other
hand, plays no role at all in the plot’s master outline and enters the actual rendition
only obliquely, as a prop, when the character deploys it as a means of lending legiti-
macy to her flirtations and to (unsuccessfully) control her daughter. Thus, the pur-
suit of thematic duality to explain the work as a whole becomes unsustainable, for the
context of the third plot requires thematic expansion to an unwieldy tripartite structure that would include as the third leg, narcissism.

These plots comprise the building blocks that go into the construction of the work - they are the basic parts into which the work may be divided and analyzed syntagmatically. As such, they provide ample illustration of Tomashevsky’s observation that “each part of a work may have its own theme.” Their interrelationships furthermore demonstrate that a work’s thematically distinct parts may be intertwined and integrally connected.

As discrete parts of the text possessing thematic integrity, each of the plots may be named after the characters who enact them. Thus, the first plot is “The Young Couple’s Plot,” about Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin; the second is “The Oracles’ Plot,” about Er Zhuge and Third Fairy; and the third is “The Middle-Aged Woman’s Plot,” about Third Fairy alone. In other words, when the names are filled in, we discover that each character is the protagonist or paired protagonist of his or her own plot, which explains the imperviousness of the work as a whole to analysis based on a single protagonist. It also offers another explanation as to why only Third Fairy could remotely qualify as the main character overall: she plays a primary role in two plots, one of which is devoted to her alone. Upon the latter point she is unique.

Two additional plots, also with their own protagonists and themes, tighten the relationship among these three plots and increase the range of the chain of effects, extending the story’s dynamic movement from the protagonists of the three plots to the entire village. In “The Tyrants’ Plot,” two local bullies (the Cousins Wang) terrorize the villagers and commandeer village politics for lack of challengers. Consistent success in imposing their will on others has generated in them insatiable desire for more power while simultaneously breeding overconfidence and dullness of judgement. Jealous of Xiao Erhei because of his happiness with Xiao Qin, and frustrated by Xiao Qin’s rebuffs to their own lewd advances, they determine to revenge upon the young
couple through false accusations of fornication and evasion of military duty. This proves to be their downfall, for their draconian methods and easily discoverable deceit motivate the higher authorities, to whom they remand the young couple, to launch a general investigation into their activities. They are arrested, tried, and imprisoned for their numerous crimes against society.

In "The Villagers' Plot," the residents of the village, in spite of their superiority of numbers, have been spinelessly cowering before two bullies who have been intimidating them for years. Even when the higher authorities arrest the two, trepidation and diffidence continue to dominate them and they refuse to testify as to the tyrants' crimes. An unidentified angry young man, however, breaks the ice when he uncontrollably blurts out his grievance and, strengthened by it, dares to speak in specific terms. This in turn encourages the other villagers to discard their fear and provide enough testimony to keep their tormentors in prison for an extended period.

These latter two plots stand apart from the former three in that each is the thematic reverse of the other: "The Tyrants' Plot" deals with tyranny in its political sense and exists from the standpoint of the bullies; while "The Villagers' Plot," existing from the standpoint of the tyrants' victims, deals with the fear of tyranny. No such mirror relationship obtains between or among any of the former three plots. While Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin in "The Young Couple's Plot" are the defiant victims of their parents in their refusal to embrace traditional marriage customs, the plot that jointly portrays their parents, "The Oracles' Plot," does not basically treat of their victimization of their children (although that is an element), but rather of their dependence upon superstition. The two plots are interconnected yet maintain their own paths. Similarly, "The Middle-Aged Woman's Plot" (or "Third Fairy's Plot") has little to do with the route that marriage or superstition takes in society. It is rather the story of the women's belated personal maturation.
The political tyranny and fear of it sketched out in plots four and five furthermore have nothing to do with any of these three themes. With or without them, the young couple’s marriage would still have been obstructed, the oracles would still have devoted themselves to superstition, and Third Fairy would still have conducted herself like a flirt.

This is not to minimize the threads that tie these plots together at various and sundry places. The tyrants’ actions, besides hastening their own demise, also actually expedited the marriage of the young couple by drawing the attention of the authorities to their parents’ illegal obstructionism. Third Fairy would never have taken up superstitious practices if she did not desire to cavort with many men, however innocently. Er Zhuge would not have obstructed his son’s marriage with such vehemence if superstition had not thoroughly permeated his being. The villagers would not have had the occasion to shake off their fear if Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin had not devoted themselves to each other and aroused the jealousy of the tyrants. Third Fairy would not have realized the ludicrousness of her appearance if the tyrants had not been jealous of Xiao Erhei, setting off the chain of events that brought her to the district head’s office.

The presence of all these links and others, however, in no way affects the thematic integrity of each of the plots, nor the fact that each of the plots is discrete. Any one of them could have been eliminated to the thematic advantage of one or more of the others. For instance, “Third Fairy’s Plot,” for all of its devotion to the portrayal of the pitifully ageing village coquette, holds no requisite position in the presentation of the marriage theme. Her colorful character and personal problem remain unrelated to the fact that the obstruction of free choice in marriage was an outmoded tradition that was entering the throes of change. Replacing her with a self-immolating, socially conventional character unworthy of an independent plot line would not alter the statement the story makes about marriage (although it might alter its effectiveness in relation to the target audience).
Conversely, despite the threads that connect “The Young Couple’s Plot” to “Third Fairy’s Plot,” the former lays no claim to indispensability in Third Fairy’s transformation to conventional normality. The exigency lay in devising a conflict capable of driving her to the public humiliation that induced her introspection and consequent enlightenment. Although the narrator’s predilection settled upon a conflict that revolved around Third Fairy’s daughter and the question of her marriage, in fact any conflict would have done as well, for instance, a conflict with a jealous wife or an overprotective parent.

The role of “The Villagers’ Plot” offers another example. It alone ignores the fate of specific individuals, and to this is added the fact that its single causal connection with the other plots immediately circulates back to itself rather than setting off a chain of events that affect the characters who arouse our primary interest. That is, the villagers lose their fear and testify which in turn causes the imprisonment of the tyrants, which in turn allows the villagers to live without tyranny. The tyrants’ imprisonment is not shown to have any specific effect on Third Fairy, Er Zhuge, Xiao Erhei, or Xiao Qin. This contrasts with “Third Fairy’s Plot,” which also has a single causal connection but which sets off a chain that affects everyone in the story (see diagram in the Appendix).

This narrow circularity of cause and effect, which fails to draw in the four main characters inspires the question: what impelled the inclusion of “The Villagers’ Plot”? A viable and even more likely option for the narrator lay in summarily noting that the villagers testified and the tyrants were imprisoned, thereby eliminating altogether the fifth plot with its additional complicating theme, the fear of tyranny. It is this very theme, however, which consolidates and finally points to the work’s overall unifying theme. The villagers themselves consciously strive to submit to their fear of tyranny, modeling their lives after the anonymously quoted classical adage, “He who bears his burden in silence lives in peace” (Ren shi zhe en ren ren). Yet a
probe beneath the surface reveals that much more than a conscious philosophical posture determines their behaviour. The narrator's summarizing discourse suggests that the magnitude of the burdens they bear in silence exceeds the bounds of reason. Later, two congregations of villagers, one circumstantially spontaneous (when Xiao Erhei is arrested), the other formal (a village meeting), the one dominated by the tyrants' presence, the other free from the tyrants' presence but still dominated by them, demonstrate a mortal fear that permeates to the very center of the villagers' essence. On the one hand their superiority of numbers guarantees success in self-protective retaliation, while on the other hand the support of higher government authorities guarantees them immunity from revenge. Nonetheless they continue to cringe under what is in actuality an ethereal whip. What was once a philosophy of life - wisely lying low through legitimate fear of tyranny - has become enslavement to the tyranny of fear. Their initial reluctance to testify makes perceptible their visualization of a nightmare come to usurp reality, a nightmare in which the dreamer's most deadly attempts to thwart his murderer fall as feathers upon steel. Petrified before this amorphous nightmare, they have become the victims of themselves: fear tyrannizes them, not the tyrants, who merely take advantage of this predisposition of theirs. It is they, as victims, who make their victimization and all injustice possible.

This conceptual movement from the fear of tyranny to the tyranny of fear, in which tyranny shoulders the onus of thematic travail, points to the agent or source of thematic unification for the work as a whole: it is tyranny, in its variegated manifestations.

The varieties of tyranny range in the text from the obvious to the insidious, from the familiar mistreatment of people by those in naked pursuit of political power to tenacious concepts enjoying anachronistic influence. Thus, besides the conventionally political mien it displays in "The Tyrants' Plot," and the figurative aspect it embraces in the tyranny of fear, this protean theme branches out into the tyranny of
traditions; the tyranny of superstition as related both to the self and to others; the tyranny of parents; the tyranny of society; and the tyranny of inveterate personal habit.

Commentary upon each of these thematic variations will accentuate the aptness with which they illustrate Tomashevsky's statement, "The development of a work is a process of diversification unified by a single theme." It will also serve to elucidate the fact that the plot themes of marriage, superstition, etc., far from themselves deriving from this process of diversification are rather the vehicles which allow it to happen. The very multiplicity of the plot themes makes them vehicles of diversification, and as such they grant to the unifying theme its means of expression as well as evoke its multiformity. However, the variations upon the unifying theme do not necessarily coincide with the individual plot themes (although this is indeed the case in "The Tyrants' Plot"), nor do they necessarily confine themselves within particular plot boundaries as do the plot themes. They thus must be kept distinct from the individual plot themes, and to this end, to maintain consistency with Tomashevsky's phraseology, they shall be referred to as diversification themes.

Theme and Technique

Since the diversification themes do not necessarily confine themselves to one plot nor necessarily coincide with the plot themes, they are sometimes inextricably tied to one another, making it impossible to discuss them in isolation. An example of this is seen in Third Fairy's summoning of the spirit to convince her daughter to marry the retired army officer: she is using the tyranny of superstition to exercise parental tyranny.

Because of the largeness of the overall theme and the shortness of the story, the use of technique is especially significant in expressing that theme. This suggests a method of organizing the discussion: it shall be carried out through the selection of
specific items expressing the theme that adhere to or exist because of the principle of *vivification*. A delineation of the theory of techniques followed by a discussion of the manifestation of this theory in the work shall clarify this approach.

The theory of techniques, as set forth by N. Friedman, states that "A work must strive for optimal *intelligibility* while working simultaneously for optimal *vividness*, and it must do so in terms of the optimal *economy* of means overall." The first of these demands clarity, which implies a need for telling and explanation; the second implies the superiority of showing and suggesting; while the third reconciles the two and determines their proportions.

The short story has its own special demands. As Mr. Friedman again points out, there are two fundamental reasons for a short story's being short: 1) "the material itself may be of small compass"; 2) "the material, being of broader scope, may be cut for the sake of maximizing the artistic effect." "Xiao Erhei Gets Married," dealing as it does with the full scope of tyranny, belongs to the second category. The action of the short story may be static or dynamic, the goal of the former being to show a particular state and the reasons for it, while the latter is to delineate some sort of change. Zhao's story, which deals with the various tyrannies and their contravention, is dynamic. The change in a dynamic story may be either minor or major, with the former involving only one phase of the protagonist's life. Since some of the characters in Zhao's story, particularly Third Fairy, have almost their entire lives touched upon, the change involved is major. The change in a dynamic story may further be viewed in terms of simple and complex. The former shows a gradual change without reversals that results from "a single line of causation." The latter involves a change from one state to its opposite and involves "several lines of causation." Zhao's story falls into this latter category.

To summarize, Zhao's story is of broad scope and is dynamic, featuring major, complex changes. The reason for its being short is that certain parts have been cut
As the reader peruses the story, he is struck by two things: a steady concatenation of vivid images combined with a general spareness of presentation. Both of these principles — vivification and spareness — concentrate upon the various tyrannies and the processes leading to their demise. Zhao uses the principle of spareness to contract the action to the smallest denominator possible while maintaining clarity and to eliminate all material not directly related to the theme. He uses vivification to grab the reader's attention and to focus that attention upon the theme. Below we shall discuss precisely what entails Zhao's use of these principles.

The components of spareness include:

1) Avoidance of discription of physical objects, appearances, environment, mannerisms, and thought patterns except for those which illustrate the theme and the dynamic affecting it. Thus, Third Fairy's mode of dress and make-up are described in detail, as it is integral to the diversification theme of the tyranny of personal habit; and Er Zhuge's divination practices and reference books merit a relatively lengthy description since they are the agents of the tyranny of superstition.

2) The conveyance in a few words or in one line of the internal states of characters — their thoughts, sentient recordings, and motivations. This is a function of the multifarious narrator. This means that at any arbitrary time the narrator may drop his objectivity and adopt the powers of omniscience. For the most part Zhao's narrator chooses this option whenever it affords the briefest way of clarifying a situation. For example, in delineating the history of Third Fairy, the narrator states that the young men of the village had in mind ogling the beautiful medium rather than going to hear their fortunes, and that Third Fairy guessed their motivations and dressed accordingly (11.2). Here, complete objectivity on the part of the narrator would have encouraged an incorrect perception of Third Fairy's motives. To
say objectively, "The young men came to view her beauty, which was enhanced by her mode of dress," would be to create the impression that Third Fairy was genuinely "possessed" and that her mode of dress was merely a sincere effort to play the role thrust upon her by the "spirits." The narrator's provision of her internal motivation divulges her disingenuousness. Otherwise there is relatively little use of the internal point of view.

3) Flatness of Character, or one-sided portrayal.

The multiformity of the theme requires the creation of numerous characters to act as illustrators of its various aspects: those characters who perpetrate political tyranny cannot simultaneously embody the tyranny of fear, and those who quail under the tyranny of superstition cannot be identical with those who calculatedly use it to tyrannize others. The very shortness of the story, however, produces another exigency: that of single minded concentration upon the theme. Both of these - restricted length and thematic concentration - allow only limited manifestation of personality, and only those traits which serve to illustrate the theme make an appearance. Inevitably, then, those characters are as one-sided in the actual presentation (although certainly not in real life) as the people in their own fictional environment imagine them to be (e.g., the nicknames or descriptive phrases attached to Third Fairy and to Er Zhuge by the people of the village reveal the villagers' own limited, prejudicial, one-sided view of these two characters). Thus, for example, the definitive character trait of Third Fairy is selfishness, the factor which causes her to fall prey to the tyranny of her particular personal habit and to attempt to use superstition to tyrannize others.

4) Flash of Scene

This refers to the insertion into a summarized account of a brief glimpse of dramatic scene, usually consisting of a direct quotation which provides the essence of an entire scene, thereby making it unnecessary to present the scene in its
entirety. This represents efficient requisition of the technical elements of intelligibility, vividness, and economy *par excellence*, and also plays an important role in Zhao's principle of vivification.

5) Ellipsis, or Reverse Proaireticism

*Proairesis*, an Aristotelian term, refers to "the ability rationally to determine the result of an action." A reverse proaireticism, then, refers to the ability to look at a result and determine the action that precipitated it. An example of a proaireticism is: "to fall into a daydream," the mention of which already contains its logical conclusion, "to wake up from a daydream." In the realm of this example, the reverse proaireticism consists of the unprioritized mention of "to awaken from a daydream": one may logically determine from it that the dreamer originally fell into a daydream. This device makes it possible to eliminate entire scenes - a requisite of maintaining brevity - while yet retaining their essence. For instance, when Xiao Qin walks into the mayor's office with the head of the Women's Association (Jin Wang's wife) in tow and says, "Show the loot to prove the thief, produce both parties to prove adultery!" Does being the chair of the Women's Association give her the right to make accusations?" - when she says this, she fills a narrational lacuna that separated the plotting of the Cousins Wang and the encounter at the mayor's office. That is, her words clarify the exact nature of the unchronicled criticism session organized against her (VI.3).

6) Sayings and Proverbs

These contract the scale of action by replacing potentially lengthy discourse with a summarization of a situation's essence. For instance, Xiao Qin's use of "Show the loot to prove the thief,..." cited above. Another is the anonymous quotation of "He who bears his burden in silence lives in peace," which crystallizes the villagers' fear (XII.1); and "As soon as the recruitment flag goes up, hungry men come to join up," used to describe Third Fairy's search for a son-in-law (VII.2).
7) Rhetorical questions

The structural role rhetorical questions play is similar to that of sayings and proverbs. For instance, this question, which allows the elimination of a lengthy discourse upon Xiao Qin's feelings and intentions: "Xiao Qin's plans with Xiao Erhei were almost solidified - how could she be willing to listen to her mother?" (VII.4). The following question concerning Er Zhuge, "How can anyone with serious troubles sleep?" (IX.3), suggests an entire background to the impending scene, in which the prognosticating Er Zhuge and his wife emotionally express their fear for Xiao Erhei's fate.

We now turn to a discussion of vivification. Vivification comprises a kinetic (dynamic) appeal to the senses, producing distinct and striking imagistic or aural impressions in the mind. The word "kinetic" is crucial to the definition, for it eliminates static description of natural scenery, man-made environments, etc. It may refer to either kineticism in the actual imagistic or aural impression or to kineticism in the verbal configuration that produces the impression. This latter case refers to the vividness of image or sound produced through succinct and colorful description. Zhao's devices of vivification are the following:

1) Described Image or Imagistic Detailing: All cases focus upon Third Fairy, the lengthiest of the instances not exceeding four lines.

2) Anecdotes: Marked by the narrator's announcement of his intention to tell stories, anecdotes enliven the exposition by immediately animating the facts it presents.

3) Described or Summarized Scene: A definite visual impression of a dramatic scene occurs, but it is not dramatically presented; the time that is represented greatly exceeds the time needed for telling.

4) Dramatic Scene
5) Flash of Scene: Besides the role it plays in the creation of spareness in the text and compactness in the action, as noted earlier, flash of scene strives to break up the potential monotony of summary narrative by laconically dramatizing certain points.

6) Sentient Recording: Focuses upon an aspect of the environment or upon an event as it is seen, heard, or felt by a character. Third Fairy’s intrusion into Er Zhuge’s house is accomplished through Er Zhuge’s perception of the approach and entry of the sound of her crying. The depiction of Third Fairy’s realization of the truth about herself is carried out through her perception of the things the women in the courtyard are saying about her.

**Thematic Manifestation: Actual Cases**

Structuralist poetics takes as its basic tenet the syntagmatic and paradigmatic nature of the literary text. The syntagmatic structure involves “relations of configuration, of construction,” or syntax, and is concerned with the possibilities of combination of different elements. The paradigmatic structure involves “relations of meaning and of symbolization,” or semantics, and concerns the meaning of an element as it is defined by all of the other elements that might have appeared in the text in its place. That is, “the significance of the event appears only against the background contrast of alternatives.” This is to say that consideration of what has been excluded from the text is just as important in determining meaning as an analysis of the included item itself. This concept may be extended to include the mode of expressing the item in question. That is, besides asking what other event the author have chosen in place of the one in question “without making nonsense of the whole,” we might also ask what other means might he have chosen in realizing the expression of that item. Why did the author choose, for instance, dramatic scene when he could have used summary narrative, or why did he favor the internal point of view over the
external, etc.? This latter question seeks to determine the significance of the tech­
nique for the expression of the theme.

The basic assumption is as follows: particularly in the realm of the exigencies of
the short story, if an author puts forth the effort to apply some form of vivification to
a certain point, that point must bear special significance for the meaning of the work
as a whole. Thus, the following discussion of the story’s thematic material shall be
based on excerpts chosen because of their vivified form. They shall be indicated either
through direct quotation, or, in the case of lengthy passages, through descriptive sum­
mary. The Roman and Arabic numerals indicate their locations in the text: Roman nu­
merals indicate each of the story’s twelve subtitled sections, while Arabic numerals
indicate the paragraphs within that section, referring to the original Chinese text (the
paragraph indicators bear no relation to the paragraphing as it appears in Shapiro’s
translation.)”

The evocation of visual impressions dominates Zhao’s storytelling style from the
very beginning. Two of the apparently most effective lines – they are among those
most often cited in secondary writings – appear in the Introductory paragraph (1.1).
The first of these describes Er Zhuge: “In those years he had been a merchant, and for
every step he took and every gesture he made he had to first consult the forces of Yin
and Yang and the Eight Trigrams, as well as read the astrological charts.” The second
of these refers to Third Fairy: “Every month on the first and the fifteenth she draped
a red cloth over her head and swaggered about impersonating a celestial spirit.”

Qualitative differences mark the images created of these two characters. The
image of Third Fairy is strictly explicit: that of a woman audaciously strutting about
with a red cloth on her head in pretense of an other-worldly connection. It fulfills a
design of ridicule. The image of Er Zhuge, however, is both explicit and implicit, and
inspires both ridicule and pity: it is, on the one hand, the risible image of a man
feverishly and constantly consulting the oracle, an eccentric, a "character" (in the
disparaging sense of the word) of the same tenor as Third Fairy. On the other hand, in
its implicit form, it is the image of a man consumed with fear—a man who is so liter­
ally frightened of everything that he has become enslaved to the trappings of prognos­
tication.

Here, although Zhao does not invoke the attention-catching device known as in
medias res, i.e., the practice of plunging into the midst of the story before providing
background information, the ability of his verbal configurations to rouse attention and
excite curiosity is as powerful as a plunge in medias res. For although this opening is
strictly expositional, it is nevertheless marked by a sudden plunge, not into the story
proper (the fictive present) but into the succinct evocation of images that inspire
such questions as “Why?” and “What next?”

An integral component of the images is movement, expressed in an abundance of
action verbs: to swagger, to drape, to impersonate, to consult, to read, and in the
Chinese version, to step and to gesture (although these latter two are figurative).
Kineticism abounds in both the image and in the language expressing it. Here the au­
thor displays his appreciation of the value of depicting actions for capturing audience
fascination.

The quoted lines evidence an economy of words that creates “succinct vivifica­
tion.” Of even greater economical value is a usage which depends upon the collective
memory or cultural heritage of the audience: it is the nickname, Er Zhuge. This
character had been known by his real name, Liu Xiude 刘修德, until his increasing
involvement with prognostication induced the villagers to tag him as “Zhuge the
Second.” This nickname parodies Zhuge Liang, the historical general fictionalized in
The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and attributed with supernatural wisdom and
foresight. The image of the historically heroic Zhuge Liang, however, is superim­
posed with contradictory facts about the present-day character: in contradistinction
to Zhuge Liang, he is an “oracle,” he depends upon the tools of superstition to give him permission, or to warn him against, carrying out the slightest move, and he is associated in the same breath with the ridiculous imposter known as Third Fairy. Thus the name adds a satirical element to the image. Er Zhuge would like to be like Zhuge Liang, but in fact he is his antithesis. The image becomes abstract or symbolic: it is of an ever apprehensive, ridiculous prognosticator surrounded by the deriding figures of those who bestowed upon him this nickname.

The significance of these initial vivifications comes to the forefront when analysis turns to the realm of excluded information, an examination of what could have supplemented or supplanted the information given. It must be stressed, however, that any consideration of absent elements must exclude speculations upon the possibility of replacing the vivified subject with another; that is, for example, the possible replacement of this introduction to the Oracles with an introduction to, say, Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin, remains beyond the bounds of our contemplations, for the linear positioning of such story elements in the text is a function of the syntagmatic structure. We are dealing here with the paradigmatic structure. To clarify this, we may imagine that after the author determined the ideal progressive configuration of his story elements on the horizontal plane — e.g., introducing the Oracles first, Xiao Qin second, the Cousins Wang third, etc. — he then determined how he would express each element and what he would include as facets of each element. It is this how and what that occupies the attention in a paradigmatic study.

In discussing the question of how, we can conceive that the first choice confronting the author was between vivification and non-vivification. His choice of the former automatically excluded any kind of lengthy and detailed descriptive passages. His choice of succinct vivification stems from the constraints of story length in combination with the multiformity of the theme. That is, if the theme were singular, if there were only one plot and one main character, he could have devoted more space to
detailing, either through lengthy description (which has already been rejected) or through dramatic scene. The rejection of any type of lengthy presentation, including dramatic scene, opened the way for the projection of a definite, sharp, and memorable image of immediate impact.

The choice of precisely what to vivify had to be made from a field of numerous possibilities that included physical features, style of dress, thought patterns and beliefs, personal mannerisms — in short, any aspect associated with the human individual. Out of all these possibilities he chose to focus exclusively upon those activities of the characters that were concerned with superstition. We are given no indication of Er Zhuge’s appearance because it is unrelated to his superstitious beliefs, and the brief referral to Third Fairy’s appearance excludes any aspect of her physical self that has no direct relationship to her superstitious practices.

The lack of all character traits and activities independent of superstition places stress upon the one aspect of superstition that shows through the description: the basic motivations behind its practice. Besides their more obvious role in introducing the theme of superstition in “The Oracles’ Plot,” the descriptions reveal traces of the overall theme: Er Zhuge, in divining “for every little move,” shows the fear that dominates his daily life. He is the victim of two tyrannies: the tyranny of fear and the tyranny of superstition. As for Third Fairy, the fact that her image contains the element of “pretending” or “impersonating” reveals her insincerity: she is using people’s ingrained superstitious fears — the tyranny of superstition — to further her own ends.

Besides introducing the characters, setting up the plot theme, and hinting at the overall unifying theme, section I.1 further instills an attitude. The narrator, by straightforwardly calling a spade a spade — i.e., by noting that Third Fairy’s appearance results from her draping a material item, a red cloth, over her head and not, as people were apparently wont to believe, through some sort of supernatural
transmogrification, and stating that her shamanistic ritual was imposture and subversively describing her ritualistic movements as “swaggering” injects an attitude of ridicule. This attitude further appears in his contrasting the venerable name, “Zhuge,” associated with supernatural wisdom concerning activities of far-reaching consequence, with prosaic superstitious activities that descend to the most trivial of daily exertions.

The narrator then hastens to assure his audience – the members of which were probably firmly and faithfully entrenched in superstitious belief – that he is completely justified in his attitude, that he, in fact, derived this attitude from the very residents of the fictive village themselves. This he accomplishes through telling the stories (1.2 and 1.3) of the genesis of the two phrases that have come to be inexorably associated with the two oracles, that is “Bu yi zai zhong” (不适宜种, “Not suitable for planting”) and “Mi lan le” (米饭烂了, “The rice is overcooked”). These two phrases, originating from the mouths of the oracles themselves and transfixed upon by the deriding villagers, embody the essence of the diversification themes hinted at in 1.1. The anecdote delineating the origin of “Not suitable for planting” not only illustrates that superstition has tyrannized Er Zhuge into going beyond the bounds of reason and becoming an utter idiot incapable of even heeding the signs of nature and his own sensible instincts (inward-directed tyranny), it also shows that the villagers themselves have lost faith in his prognosticatory skills and have made him an object of ridicule. That is, the anecdote does not illustrate that the villagers are not superstitious, only that they believe that Er Zhuge has no talent in using what they regard as the valid tools of prognostication.

“The rice is overcooked” symbolizes the tyranny of superstition in its outward-directed form. The anecdote justifies the statement the narrator made about Third Fairy by proving that she is indeed an imposter and by showing that the villagers would be the first to agree with him. It says nothing about the villagers’
beliefs concerning the sincerity of oracles in general, only that they know that the
particular oracle known as Third Fairy is a fake. Proving her imposture, however,
has another purpose in addition to lending credibility to the narrator’s claim and
cloaking the character in ridicule. It reaffirms her own non-belief as well as the fact
that she is using the tyrannizing power that superstition has over others for some sort
of personal gain, whatever it may be.

The relatively lengthy treatment accorded to the precipitating force that lay be­
hind Third Fairy’s necromantic machinations contrasts with the absence of an exami­
nation of Er Zhuge’s initial attraction to superstition. Er Zhuge is superstitious at the
beginning of the story and is still superstitious at the end, and the only personal
change that occurs lies in the subdual of his vociferousness. The change in his attitude
toward Xiao Erhei’s marriage to Xiao Qin stems from his being forced into it by the
law. Since his is more or less a static situation, including background information
would contribute nothing to the diversification theme of the tyranny of superstition,
for it can be construed that if he practices superstition through fear, then it was fear
that drove him to it initially.

Such is not the case with Third Fairy, the only character destined to undergo a
real personal change. Fakery, unlike fear, cannot define itself in its own intrinsicsi­
ity, while the narrative progression requires that the audience knows why she has
chosen her charlatanish profession; for the reason behind it, in fact, precipitates all
of her behaviour in the story and is inexorably tied to the inducements that brings
about her metamorphosis back to normality. The consequential nature of her precipi­
tation into fakery is the reason why the author bypassed the option of merely summa­
rizing the beginning of her career, of merely stating that she entered the arena of for­
tunetelling at the age of 15, when, after an altercation with her new father-in-law
over what he saw to be a scandalous social life, she fell into a fit, which a local sor­
ceress attributed to possession by a diety known as Third Fairy. The author instead
chose animation through described and summarized scene:

"Yu Fu's father was scandalized by these activities and one day vented his spleen with an outpouring of shouts and curses. Although he succeeded in terminating the visits [of the many young men], the new bride went into paroxysms. Her tears flowed for a day and a night, and she left the tangles in her hair, the dirt on her face and her food on her plate, and spent her time lying inert on the khang heedless of all who tried to rouse her. The father and the son were at their wits' end. An old neighbor woman brought in for her a witch, who called down the spirits in her house. She said that [the spirit named] Third Fairy had visited upon the young woman, who began to senselessly chant to herself, 'My god this, my god that.' From this time forward she too invoked the spirits every month on the first and the fifteenth...."

(11.1)

This animation creates images that relate to two of the diversification themes. Third Fairy in the midst of a fit is the image of a refractory young girl attempting to escape societal and parental tyranny and to control the quality of her own life. Third Fairy engaging in her incipient oracular behaviour stresses the tyrannizing pervasiveness of superstitious belief and the ease with which one could take it up: even her strong father-in-law had no defence against it, and instead of him and his son controlling the bride, the bride controlled them, although she had no intention (at least not in the beginning) of propagating superstitious beliefs.²³

This episode implies her incompatibility with the society she was born into. She had a great lust for life, seen in the gay and boisterous partying she engaged in with her young male admirers, and was incapable of tolerating the retiring and colorless life society meted out to women, especially married women. She, like the young men who befriended her, wanted to be gay and carefree. In spite of societal stiflings, she was ingenious, daring, and talented enough to find in the institution of superstition a way to gain a certain amount of personal freedom—a modicum of the same freedom granted to her male cohort—that she otherwise could never hope to have. It was a way of retaining the social interactions that her father-in-law forbade. That is, she found in superstitious behaviour the key to valid rebellion against parental and societal tyranny."²⁴
Also unparalleled in the treatment of any of the other characters is the account of Third Fairy's physical appearance:

Third Fairy was different from everybody else. In spite of her 45 years, she still liked to play the coquette, and she persisted in wearing flower-embroidered shoes and trousers with decorative edging, while a cunningly placed black handkerchief hid the bald spot on the top of her head. Unfortunately, however, instead of smoothing over the wrinkles on her face, the powder she applied produced, rather, the impression of a frost-covered donkey turd. (11.3)

In a reconciliation between vivification and description, this passage produces through brevity and laconic language an immediate visual impact that simulates the effect which springs from a glance at a picture or the sudden discernment of the actual entity represented. Brevity ensures that the account ends before descriptive saturation deadens the mind's capacity for stimulus apprehension, evokes ennui, and transforms the image into a nebulous general impression.

This provision of a sharp, well-defined, and memorable image of Third Fairy in a work that virtually ignores the exteriority of the other characters impels a search for its motivation. It is noteworthy that the physical description is conspicuously marked by a concentrated focus upon only those aberrational aspects of her appearance while it avoids any and all overt expressions of her conformity to the social dress code. For instance, it can be indirectly construed that the clothing she wore was in itself conventional and only their decoration was not; that is, the text states only that the application of decorative edging to trousers was unusual for a woman of her age, not the wearing of trousers. Yet, the repetitious word pattern seen in “on her shoes...” (shēzǐ...,” xiaoxieshang...”), “on her pant legs...” (裤腿...,” kutui-shang...”), “on her head...” (顶门上...,” dingmenshang...”), beats relentlessly at her points of peculiarity. Meanwhile, the echoing of “rengao” (仍要 “still,” “persist in”), emphasizes her mood of pertinacity, adding to her image of exterior unconventionality a portrait of inner ossification: she is indomitably maintaining the
accoutrements of past success even though time has effectuated her unwitting passage from the sublime to the ridiculous.

This fact, i.e., that Third Fairy's blind, robotic accommodation of habits formulated in her golden days has transformed her into an absurdity, points to the thematic motivation of the passage. The production of malformed human psyches under the forces of tyranny has already been seen in the impotent human spectres that the villagers had evolved into under political tyranny and in the lopsided obsessions Er Zhuge nurtured under the tyranny of superstition. This passage illustrates Third Fairy's debasement under the tyranny of habit; deceived by blissful ignorance and a benighted concept of passing time, she has fallen victim to the comforting familiarity of her habitual self-adornment.

The exposition accorded to the eponymous character equally eschews the unrestrained profusion of personal facts and distinguishing traits. Restricting itself to thematic enhancement, the larger portion recounts Xiao Erhei's childhood exposure to his father's prognosticatory arts and the child's social experiences emanating from it. Interspersed throughout the summary narrative that prevails from the beginning of the section to the end are occasional instances of "flash of scene," a device that strongly characterizes Zhao's system of emphasis. The device can be likened to slowing down or stopping momentarily at an intersection followed by the immediate resumption of forward movement. That is, the narrator inserts into the field of summary narrative a discrete, specific event that occurred in an extremely short time span and which requires the same amount of time to express in the text. In Zhao's story, this nearly always consists of a direct quotation.27

For example, an exhaustive description of the various books of superstition from which Er Zhuge taught his son precedes the following flash of scene, which illustrates the child's experience at age six:

"Because he was talented and very cute, adults loved to play with him. This one would say, 'Erhei! Reckon for us the animal sign of a ten
year old.' And that one would say, 'Erhei! Tell my fortune!'" (V.2)

Erhei's own fortune underwent rerouting through his father's spring planting fiasco, and the indulgent attention he had received in the past became ridicule:

"At that time Xiao Erhei, being 13, had already reached the age of reason, but the adults still played with him as if he were a child. They loved to kid Er Zhuge and as soon as they arrived at his house they would invariably ask Xiao Erhei right in front of his father: 'Hey, Erhei! Reckon for us whether today is suitable for planting or not.' And as for other children his age, at the slightest provocation they would taunt him relentlessly, 'Not suitable for planting, not suitable for planting...'

(V.2)

Their unexpected appearance in the midst of summary narrative and their very isolation from dialogue render the quotations distinct and conspicuous and therefore memorable and capable of emphatic rendition. The paragraph that contains them also offers other material malleable to such vivification, for instance the child's compliant imitation of his father's teachings or Er Zhuge's wife's and elder son's remonstrations when Er Zhuge bungles the spring planting. Relegated to summation, however, they recede into the background while simultaneously accommodating or intensifying the stylistic accentuation of Xiao Erhei's formative social encounters.

The antithetical reactions to the boy point to the villagers' thorough socialization to superstition. Friends and acquaintances showered approbatory attention upon the child for his excellent imitation of what they perceived to be the master prognosticator while their disapprobation developed after Er Zhuge betrayed his ineptitude in the practice of the revered art. Society reviled not the practice of superstition per se but only its practice by incompetents. The indignities inflicted upon father and son reveal a kind of social tyranny that weighed most heavily upon the naive, uninjured boy. The psychological suffering he underwent, on the surface, resulted from his father's incompetency, which, justifiably or not, reflected upon him. But at an even more encompassing level it ultimately originated in society's reneging upon its approval of the course it itself had directed the pliant boy to take. Society's heavy investment in
superstition was requisite to and even responsible for the treatment it accorded the boy upon the discovery of his father's ineptitude. Conversely, the boy's heavy investment in social approval brought about his intense suffering when society reversed its judgement upon him. His experience pointed out to him two lessons: that he must disregard the father that society ridiculed, and that he must question society itself in its choice of institutions to approve and perpetuate.

That he learned and applied these lessons is reflected in a third flash of scene which crystallizes the essence of his reaction to his father's acquiring for him a child-bride:

"Father and son disputed for several days, but Er Zhuge insisted upon keeping the girl. Xiao Erhei said, 'If you want to raise her you're most welcome to, but I'm not going to marry her!"' (V.4)

This scenic flash, while ostensibly laying stress upon "The Young Couple's Plot" theme of marriage, conspicuously lacks reference to Xiao Erhei's relationship with Xiao Qin, a relationship which critics purport comprises the story's main theme. This omission of Xiao Erhei's love interest while stressing a situation which is incontrovertibly related to it suggests alternative thematic focus. The scenic flash, rather, presents the refractory youth that the once obedient Xiao Erhei had become, and it shows him contravening the very tyrannies that had triggered his recalcitrance: that of superstition, which now seeks to force upon him fixed configurations of human relations through inciting fear of the supernatural (Er Zhuge chose the child-bride according to superstitious divination); that of tradition, which dictates the universal appropriateness of arranged marriage; and that of parents, who seek to manipulate those cultural institutions to impel children to sacrifice themselves for real or imagined parental welfare. In the area of the marriage theme, which occupies only a fraction of the attention here, the emphasis is placed upon the refusal of the father's choice for the sake of refusing tyranny, not immediately for the sake of marrying someone else.
Emanating a presentiment of tyranny overturned, Xiao Erhei's unfilial outburst winds the exposition down to its conclusion. As the preceding excerpts and discussions intimate, it is an exposition firmly grounded in the thematic distention of tyranny. Even though excluding all manner of vivifying device, the expositional introduction to the Cousins Wang (Section IV) considerably amplifies the subject in ingenuously equating all their endeavors with the pursuit to tyrannous power. Additionally, a chronologically presented set of situations traces in Xiao Qin's life (Section III) the history of a subtle but merciless societal tyranny founded upon a vacuous and irrational stereotype: society judges her according to standards issued by the ghosts of her mother's wanton youth and applies to her the tenacious image of maternal degradation. As a small child she is already "the product of sin" and must be taught by her mother the means of quashing outspoken innuendos. As a teenager and young woman her fresh beauty marks her as her mother's daughter, stamps upon her, as it were, a sign of congenital guilt: it burdens her to dispel the assumption of numerous "admirers," who trail her movements in search of favors, that she is available to quell their pains of lust. Her undiscriminatory rebuff of Jin Wang's crass advances inspires a paradox: when Jin Wang later activates his process of revenge, he presumes to represent society in punishing her for refusing to embrace immorality in fulfillment of society's expectations.

The result of this examination is irrefragable: while the entire exposition — nearly half of the whole work — remains unexplained in terms of the young couple's relationship, it is thoroughly permeated with the idea of tyranny. It remains to be seen whether this pattern is repeated in the unfolding of the fictive present.

Although flash of scene contributes to the story's narrative progression in 17 instances, none of these instances attend to the love between Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin. Furthermore, out of these 17 instances, eleven involve characters other than Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin, and only one of them actually deals with the two as a couple. For
the sake of clarity all of these instances are briefly noted below, along with their locations in the text and a short interpretation of the nature of their relation to the theme, if any. (See Appendix for corresponding excerpts from the original text.)

Exposition
1-2. (V.2) Villagers ask Xiao Erhei to show off his prognosticatory skills: (Tyranny of superstition - discussed above)

3. (V.3) Er Zhuge divines a child-bride: (Tyranny of superstition)

4. (V.4) Xiao Erhei repudiates the child-bride: (Contravention of tyrannies of superstition, tradition, parents)

Fictive Present
5. (VI.1) The Cousins Wang plot against the young couple: (Political tyranny)

6. (VI.3) Xiao Qin takes Jin Wang’s wife to the mayor: (Contravention of political tyranny)

7. (VII.4) Xiao Qin repudiates the arranged marriage: (Contravention of tyrannies of tradition and parents)

8. (VII.5) Third Fairy calls down a spirit to frighten her husband and to force Xiao Qin into submission: (Use of tyrannizing force of superstition to achieve goals; parental tyranny)

9. (VIII.1) Xiao Erhei informs Xiao Qin of the law: (Contravention of the tyranny of tradition and of parental tyranny)

10. (X.1) Er Zhuge spends a sleepless night: (Political tyranny and the tyranny of fear - he fears a government that will harm his child)

11. (XI.1) Third Fairy’s husband worried about Xiao Qin, Third Fairy is not: (No thematic focus)

12. (XI.2) Third Fairy says she will ask the authorities to discipline Xiao Qin: (Parental tyranny; intention, based on an ingrained concept of governmental tyranny, to get authorities to augment the strength wielded by the tyranny of tradition)
13. (XI.4) Women in courtyard discuss Third Fairy: (Her submission to the tyranny of personal habit has brought her to shame)

14. (XI.4) Messenger ironically defends Third Fairy: (ditto)

15. (XII.1) Intrepid youth speaks out: (Contravention of the tyranny of fear)

16. (XII.1) The youth takes a rest: (ditto)

17. (XII.3) Jin Wang's wife reforms: (Repudiation of the use of political tyranny)

Unique from all the others, the situation that surrounds the ninth instance above arises out of Xiao Erhei's and Xiao Qin's coupleness. It takes place in a cave to which the young couple has retired after Third Fairy's attempt to frighten Xiao Qin into submission prompted the girl to run away and seek out Xiao Erhei. The unfolding situation resembles those previously discussed in that it is marked by the connotative absence of certain possible elements, most notably the words, actions, and even thoughts inherent to emotional involvement. In other words, the narrator has passed up the perfect opportunity for a great love scene, and has left their mutual emotionality unilluminated. The reader, like the Cousins Wang, can imagine what took place in the cave, but the narrative restricts itself to the following:

"Xiao Qin told him about how her mother arranged a marriage and how she impersonated a spirit, and what she chanted, recounting all to him in detail from beginning to end. Xiao Erhei said, 'Don't pay attention to her! I discussed it with a comrade at the district office, and he said that the only thing they require for a marriage registration is the willingness of the couple themselves. No one else has the right to interfere....' At this point footsteps sounded outside..."

Thus, although a love relationship induced their presence in the cave, the focus upon their activities in the cave conspicuously glances away from this love relationship. The flow of concentration settles instead upon the tyrannies that buffet Xiao Qin, with special stress, set forth in the flash of scene bound on either side by Xiao Erhei's
words, falling upon the means of contravening those tyrannies.

The decidedly subordinate role that the love relationship plays here exemplifies the function of plot themes as vehicles for the expression and diversification of the unifying theme. Specifically, here, the plot theme of (love and) marriage provides a situation that allows aspects of the varying tyrannies and their contravention to emerge.

Another equally obvious exemplification of this principle occurs in section VI.2 in which the jealous and emboldened Cousins Wang, in an attempt to lend legality to their persecution of Xiao Erhei, have handed him over to the mayor to receive punishment for the charges they have fabricated against him. The vivifying device of dramatic scene accentuates the governmental policy on marriage, the articulation of which comprises an essential component of the syntagmatic structure of “The Young Couple’s Plot,” and furthermore refers directly to the marriage theme. Nonetheless, the context of its articulation reveals the subordinate status of these functions. Section VI encompasses a tripartite action, each highlighted by a vivifying device: 1) flash of scene expressing the Cousins’ contrivance of legally sanctioned political tyranny against Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin; 2) dramatic scene featuring the mayor’s reactions; 3) flash of scene, setting forth Xiao Qin’s indignation at the false accusations. Each of the actions may be respectively named: 1) plotting of tyranny against the young couple; 2) contravention of tyranny against Xiao Erhei; 3) contravention of the tyranny against Xiao Qin. In this context it becomes clear that the immediate and primary function of the mayor’s statement of the marriage policy is to put an end to the Cousins’ harassment. The benefit accorded to the relationship between Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin is a merely secondary if fortuitous effect. This latter point is further supported by Er Zhuge’s argument in the district chief’s office (X.2) that the prevalence of marriage arrangements involving girls even as young as seven or eight means that he too should have the right to pursue the custom and that he should not be singled
out for enforcement of the new policy. That is, the continued commonality of the practice indicates that the authorities were not in the habit of initiating the enforcement of the government's policy. The mayor had had no intention of seeking out Er Zhuge to make him obey nor to seek out Xiao Erhei to inform him of his rights, but merely recited the law to demonstrate the invalidity of the charge brought by the Cousins Wang. Thus, if the Cousins Wang had been imaginative enough to trump up a different charge, the mayor would have ended up reciting a different law, and the young couple would have remained ignorant of the marriage policy, at least for a while longer. Here, both the emergence and the contravention of the Cousins' political tyranny is accomplished on the back of the marriage theme.

That portion of the story which encompasses the fictive present, beginning with the Cousins' plotting against the young couple (Section VI), assigns major portions of its expression to dramatic scene. A summary examination of each of the instances of dramatic scene will reveal an unrelenting lack of focus upon the love relationship of the young couple. There are twelve cases of dramatic scene, one of which, unusually, enlivens the recounting of the exposition:

**Exposition**

1. (III.4) Jin Wang tries to seduce Xiao Qin: (Social tyranny, illustrating Xiao Qin's susceptibility to societal misinterpretation of her virtue. Also illustrates the precipitating force behind the Cousins' vengeance)

**Fictive Present**

2. (VI.2) The mayor tells Xing Wang he has no grounds for persecuting Xiao Erhei: (Contravention of political tyranny)

3. (VIII.1) The Cousins Wang tie up Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin: (Political tyranny)

4. (VIII.2) Er Zhuge begs mercy for his son: (Political tyranny)
5. (IX.2) Er Zhuge recounts the bad omens predicting his son's ill luck. (Tyranny of superstition)

6. (IX.3) Er Zhuge and his wife lament Xiao Erhei's fate while Dahei keeps his head: (Tyrannies of superstition and tradition precipitate the old couple's fear. Their faith in political tyranny reinforces it)

7. (IX.4) Third Fairy raises a ruckus in Er Zhuge's house: (Extra-therapeutic development of Third Fairy's character. Her behaviour is amenable to an interpretation of self-expression in a repressive society)

8. (X.1) Er Zhuge meets Dahei on his way back from the district office: (No thematic focus)

9. (X.2) Er Zhuge is lectured at the district chief's office: (Tyrannies of superstition and tradition and their contravention)

10. (XI.3) Third Fairy is interrogated by the district chief: (Contravention of the tyranny of personal habit and of the self-interested use of the tyranny of superstition)

11. (XI.6) Xiao Qin indicates to the district chief her disagreement with her mother's marriage directive: (Contravention of the tyranny of tradition and parental tyranny)

12. (XII.6) Er Zhuge's wife chastizes him: (Contravention of the tyranny of superstition)

Consistent with the story material preceding them, the dramatic scenes of the fictive present provide extremely small active parts for Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin. The young couple's relationship remains unobtrusively in the background where it ever serves as a catalyst for the main action, which almost invariably involves some sort of tyranny or its contravention.

The Personification of Values

Through the assemblage of these topical extractions from the village scene, the work encapsulates, as in a mosaic, long-standing man-made stresses that mercilessly buffet the inhabitants and depicts the people's dawning but reluctant realization that
the past has outlived itself. It is a portrait enhanced by the demonstrative display of
basic human and social truths, often expressed through culture-bound mediums but
nonetheless universal. Essential traits of humanity permeate the work: ingrained
narcissism, inevitable inter-generational conflicts and jealousies, the need for ap­
proval and recognition, the pursuit of power, fear of the unknown, stereotypical vi­
sion, obstinate conservatism.

All of these human foibles distribute themselves in varying proportions and in­
tensities among the characters, who represent them in exaggerated, stylized poses.
Their enactment approaches the abstract through the lack of illumination upon the
characters' full range of individual attributes. This produces a starkness of character
presentation comparable to that found in the Bible (as described by Erich Auerbach)
and with the same intention that the Bible entertains: the concentrated drive toward
the specific point that engendered the text's existence. In the case of Zhao's work
this entails illustrating the undesirability of certain behaviours, concepts, and social
conditions. The exclusive focus upon the Cousins' untempered ambitions and abuses
constitutes a philosophical stance against the seeking of power. The absence of softening,
complimentary attributes creates in them a picture of the total permeation of
evil, which is not offset or balanced with a portrait of a benevolent, philanthropic
power-seeking: not only does power corrupt, but also the pursuit of power corrupts.

Third Fairy to a certain extent shares their values and has also fallen under the
spell of power's promise of control over others. She, however, represents the absurd
in contrast to the evil. The tussle she provokes with Er Zhuge's wife recaptures the
image of Lu Xun's Ah Q:

"Just at this time, Er Zhuge's wife was seething with a passionate
rage, and the instant she realized that the intruder was Third Fairy her
anger spilled forth. She leapt off the käng and pounced upon her. 'So!
It's you! Good! Saves me the effort of looking for you! You and that
dughter of yours have brazenly seduced my child, and you dare to come
here looking for me! Well, the two of us will just march right over to
the district office and have it out!' The two women locked themselves into
a rolling battle on the floor, while Er Zhuge could neither pull them apart nor return to his interrupted divinations. Third Fairy noted the reckless savagery with which her adversary contended while her own courage began to fail her. She dared not prolong her involvement, and after a moment of further struggle she wrenched herself free and ran away. Er Zhuge's wife pursued her to the door where, finding her way blocked by Er Zhuge, she shouted after the departing Third Fairy an endless stream of invective.” (IX.4)

"...Third Fairy had sought out Er Zhuge for two reasons. One was to demonstrate her ability to provoke people's attention; the other was to cover up the fact that she actually rejoiced in Xiao Qin's misfortunes. Thus, after her tussle with Er Zhuge's wife, she returned home and slept soundly. ... (XI.1)

Third Fairy, like Ah Q, indulged in a pathetic kind of self-assertion, reclaiming victories out of defeat by rationalizing the accomplishment of certain objectives independent of vanquishment. That Er Zhuge's wife overpowered her in no way diminished the amount of personal attention she had extracted out of her opponent, and so her defeat brought her a paradoxical reaffirmation of "power." This thought pattern further externalizes itself through her elaborate self-adornment. Time, in increasing her chronological age, had inflicted its ineluctable defeat, yet her "beauty" awarded the victory to her.

At the base of this enormous self-deception lay humankind's need for peer approval and recognition, rendered pathological through the aid of a society that preached beauty as the sole feminine virtue that did not require pain or self-immolation: "Third Fairy's life as a social being depended upon her victory over time, for she had learned no means of gaining positive expressions of approval other than through a display of beauty. Her caricature as a person whose need transformed itself into an unfounded conviction of its attainment criticizes a society that imposes upon its women unreasonable limitations upon their potential.

Third Fairy, nevertheless, is not to be absolved of all responsibility for her own absurdity by means of a social criticism. She is guilty of an infantile narcissism that of necessity contributed in large measure to the creation of the monstrosity " which
she had become. This narcissism exacerbated in her the regrets and jealousies mothers often feel upon observing their freshly blooming daughters and transformed, in her own mind, her only surviving child into a mortal enemy. Immanent in this state of affairs is a statement of intentional hyperbole upon the conflict of the generations, a statement that identifies as the sole cause of such conflict the base selfishness of parents. Her subsequent attempt to eliminate her competition – her choice of a son-in-law (a retired officer who served Yan Xishan, a man whose name represents the epitome of evil in Zhao’s pre-Liberation writings), her shameful motivations of ultimate superficiality – provides, in a situation of utter ridiculousness, a biting satire that condemns a system of marriage that can conceivably allow such gross abuses of parental rights.

Third Fairy’s expedient perversion of traditional arranged marriage casts by association a negative pall over Er Zhuge’s arrangement for his son, urging the questioning of motivation in his case as well. In contrast to Third Fairy’s selfishness and immorality, however, Er Zhuge enacts an ineptitude that comes from his helplessness, not from malice. He personifies unreasoning fear as he trembles before the unknown, quails in front of the future, discerns omens in all the details of daily life. His is a caricature that excoriates the practice of entrusting important decisions to the whims of fear.

Fear and self-interest, then, motivate the obstinate adherence to tradition, as well as inspire a basic belief in the “manifest destiny” of these traditions – the belief that the old ways are the only ways and that alternatives do not exist. This extends to the concept of government as the tyrannous enforcer of the traditions. Third Fairy takes a moral stance on the side of the two tyrants when she declares her intention to turn her refractory daughter over to the government, which will then force the girl to obey her mother, to adhere to the tradition. Er Zhuge, too, subscribes to this concept, as it reinforces his superstitious beliefs: the omens merely predicted a given, i.e.,
that the government would ill-treat his son, for there are no alternative governmental behaviours.

The belief in the immovable finality of the status-quo captivated the village populace in general: they could not conceive of a time or a situation in which the Cousins Wang could or would be powerless, neutralized. This fed the philosophy that had, like Third Fairy's primping, worked for them in the past, the philosophy contained in the line, "He who bears his burden in silence lives in peace." Man's classic inertia besieged them, confined them to one tiny spot. Their ossified minds refused to think of alternatives and even lazily applied their views and judgements of their neighbors to their neighbors' children regardless of their applicability: the daughter of a licentious woman was herself licentious, while the son of an incompetent man was himself incompetent. Stereotyping, like the adherence to an ancient philosophy, obviated the expenditure of energy in independent thought.

The contrastive flexibility displayed by the youth, constantly cited as the typification of a major driving force of change in the countryside, was achieved only at the cost of traumatic experiences that made such "flexibility" requisite to survival in their particular society. Their unfulfil insubordination was born of the villagers' disapprobation of their parents, which also reflexively if unjustly shone upon them. Defying their parents' wishes, even if it meant a transgression of tradition, was a way of disassociating themselves from the stereotypes, of disidentifying themselves, as it were, from the objects of depreciation for the purpose of gaining social acceptance.

The work, then, is grounded in a combination of realism and caricature, rendered in a few sharp strokes that enlarge and distill selected points of reality. The outcome, as in actual human affairs, evinces a melange of the felicitous and the unresolved, of the changed and the static. On the felicitous side, the villagers have freed themselves of the tyrants, the young couple get married, and the oracles have at least on the surface conformed to society's vision of acceptability (if conformity to social demands can
be regarded as felicitous). However, these latter two characters continue to exude evidence of unresolved problems: although she has thrown off the dress of a teenager and has put away her altar, and although he has ceased to publicly venture his superstition, in fact the two have merely eradicated the outer manifestations of their inner torments. Society continues to mercilessly taunt them, seen in the symmetrizing creation of new nicknames for them in the end. Given their personality traits, neither will find happiness in the void created by their yielding to social pressure. Third Fairy, incapable of being the motive power of her own happiness, was never given to self-immolation, and the removal of an exterior does not mean the retirement of her need to dominate, to find overtly expressed approval, and to achieve victories. Yet society has offered her no other self-fulfilling role to replace the one it has denied her because of her age. Meanwhile, Er Zhuge, deprived of an outlet for the open expression and salutary diffusion of his pathological fears, has been left defenseless in the face of potential psychological debilitation. Thus, society, in eliminating one set of problems, has traded in for another set, more terrible for the fact that its nature is unknown.

The Didactic Mold and the Genesis of "Xiao Erhei Gets Married"

In dealing with "Xiao Erhei Gets Married," it is impossible to ignore its connection to didactic provenance and purpose. It, after all, had been upheld as the first work to have been born of Mao Zedong's "Talks" at the Yenan Forum, which proclaimed the raison d'etre of literature to be teaching. Furthermore countless critics of both positive and negative tenor respectively pegged its success or failure to this requirement of didactic function. Needless to say, while blatant didacticism may be responsible for a work's failure, the determination of a work's artistic success cannot be based upon the message it purports to dramatize, or chooses not to dramatize, or fails to dramatize in spite of original intentions. For instance, one critic faulted the characterization of Xiao Erhei for not rendering him into a stronger
character with a greater initiative and with a more decisive role to play. Of course, to have followed this critic's directive would have been to violate the artistic exigencies of the fictional mode to which this story belongs (see later discussion). For critics who insist upon literature's conformity to a didactic mold, it would be more fruitful to examine how an artistically successful work uses its material to make effective didactic statements; or, conversely, how a didactic work achieves artistic success in spite of its didactic purpose.

Extraliterary sources name three specific objects of instruction that were the driving forces behind this work: superstition, the patriarchal system, and abusive, self-seeking cadres. Zhao had been concentrating on writing plays with an anti-superstition theme before circumstances inspired "Xiao Erhei Gets Married." In the early 1940's, he had worked out the plot of a play to be called "The Oracle's Family" (神仙之家), in which superstition would play the role of the aggravating force. He shelved this play in 1942 in favor of another, "The House of Myriad Images" (万象楼), which dealt with the use the Japanese made of superstition to deceive and persecute the peasants. When he was sent in April of 1943 to Liao County (辽县, now called左权县) in the Taihang Mountains during an anti-"mop-up" campaign, he discovered in a murder case the inspiration to his next work. A relative of the victim first introduced Zhao to the details:

His nephew, Yue Dongzhi (岳冬至), a 19-year old captain in the People's Militia, failed to come home one night after having been called to a meeting of cadres that afternoon. The next morning he noticed that the door to the barn had been bolted from the outside with a small rod also inserted into the bolt. Knowing that he himself did not lock the door in this fashion, he investigated and discovered his nephew hanging from a crossbeam, dead. However, the ceiling of the barn was so low that the body extended to the floor, in fact, was kneeling in the manure. Death had evidently occurred before the hanging. The village cadres he questioned claimed that Yue had gone home
after the meeting and that they knew nothing of his hanging.

A subsequent investigation into this event revealed that the dead youth had had a romantic liaison with a young woman named Zhi Yingxiang (智英祥). This young woman had been more or less independent ever since her mother, a member of the Sect of the Three Saints (三教通会), committed suicide by hanging. Without the intervention of her father, who had absented himself upon his wife having joined the sect, and her brothers, who were occupied in the fields, she established a relationship with Yue Dongzhi.

Both of the young people already had fiancés obtained for them by their parents. Yue was engaged to a girl his own age who had been raised by his parents for the purpose, a situation which was the source of constant ill-will between father and son. Zhi Yingxiang’s fiancé was a well-to-do, middle-aged businessman her mother had happened to meet on the road during a trip back to her home town. It is reputed that when this man sent the betrothal gifts, which were quite costly, Zhi Yingxiang quarreled with her mother and said, “Whoever has taken the guy’s things can go with him!” (谁拿了人家的东西,谁就跟人家去).

Before her relationship with Yue Dongzhi developed, Zhi Yingxiang apparently regularly entertained numbers of youthful village cadres, among them the mayor himself, who was the married son of a rich peasant and the only higher primary school graduate in the village. He, along with the secretary of the local Youth Association, became jealous when Zhi Yingxiang turned her attentions exclusively to Yue Dongzhi, and they used their influence to stir up trouble for both the uncooperative girl and her boyfriend. At one point a few of the cadres secretly held a criticism session during which they charged Yue with criminal decadence against. The accused refused to recognize wrongdoing and adamantly insisted upon the legitimacy of his relationship with Zhi Yingxiang. The stand off lasted through to the middle of the night, at which point the frustrated accusers resorted to physical violence. The death that resulted was
unintentional, and to cover up their crime the perpetrators hung Yue's body in his own barn, committing in their haste the incriminatory errors that brought their culpability to light.\textsuperscript{37}

Zhao has referred to his fiction as "problem stories" (问题小说). This term is to be distinguished from the identical term used in the May Fourth era to characterize works that dealt with the "problems of life" (人生问题), specifically the anguish and depression that accompanied the vacillation that many of the youth of that era experienced.\textsuperscript{38} Zhao's usage of the term, rather, refers to his stories' depiction of the social problems he observed while working in the countryside.\textsuperscript{39} The situation that he encountered in Liao County exemplifies the genesis of his artistic interpretations in general, and encompasses the inchoative motivational force behind the creation of "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" in particular. This force was that deadly combination which prematurely ended Yue Dongzhi's life: the traditional patriarchal system and arrogant, authoritarian cadres that sought to enforce it to their own advantage.\textsuperscript{40} His previous contemplation upon superstition inspired the incorporation into the story of this third element.

The target audience, of course, embraced superstition with the fervor that superstition inspired, and it was furthermore fiercely faithful to the patriarchal system that required for its nurturement arranged marriage and the unequivocal obedience of children. On this latter point, during the course of Zhao's investigation in Liao County he found that none of the villagers had sympathized with Yue Dongzhi's legally sanctioned aspiration and that although they had not called for or anticipated his death, all had persistently condemned his disobedience of his father and sought his censure.\textsuperscript{41}

Zhao's proposed subject matter, then, offered the opportunity for effortless audience alienation, as it inherently thwarted the transformation of the intended audience into the "mock reader" that could appreciate the work and thereby internalize its lessons. Paralleling the phenomenon of narrator-author disunity, the mock reader
emerges from the person of the actual reader as that actual reader temporarily adopts during the course of reading the mien and views of the narrator. If we accept the statement that "A bad book is a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become," then the artistic success of a work depends upon the successful creation of the mock reader. Concerning Zhao's particular literary endeavor, his direct condemnation of established tenets would create in the mock reader the ideological adversary of his audience, which would be paramount to provocative condemnation of that audience. A direct censorious statement of this particular sort could approach success in its intended influence only when addressing itself to a very sophisticated, educationally broadened audience, or when directed at an audience which is not simultaneously the overt object of attack. "The True Story of Ah Q" achieves its effectiveness in this latter way: the protagonist is a benighted rural illiterate created to make a statement of truth to the urban educated elite. Zhao's objective, then, lay in creating in the mock reader an ideological associate or accomplice with whom the audience could unconsciously identify and through whom the audience itself would become the source of the desired condemnation.

These circumstances and exigencies gave birth to fictional entities that both mirrored the reflections of the audience members while yet remaining diametrically distinct from them. This character concept found expression in the exaggerated, the ridiculous, the most outlandish personae producible by the existing society. Er Zhuge and Third Fairy in many ways display behaviour typical of and consistent with the actual rural society of the time - both in fact emerged out of Zhao's experiences with actual persons, the former his own father, and the latter a lascivious fortuneteller of repute in Yue Dongzhi's village. Concomitantly these two characters possess traits that separate them from the typical, evoking in the audience an unpremeditated sense of dissociation and engendering a subconscious conspiratorial alliance between narrator and audience (or mock reader) which asserts their moral and intellectual
superiority over the characters. It is a conspiracy which states: It is possible that other people are like these two, but you and I don't countenance such behaviour; we are pure and reasonable and therefore qualified to stand in judgement of them.

This fictional concept definitively projects itself through Third Fairy. She, like the average villager, has adapted herself to the ingrained precepts of superstition, and even though she herself endeavored to loosen the noose of the patriarchal system about her own neck, she is its intractable advocate in regards to her daughter. On the other hand she is "different from everybody else" in the overt if unintentionally opprobrious display of her narcissism. Yet she has no claim to singular infamy, as the existence of Zhao's real-life model indicates. Female mediums and outlandish dressers, whether one and the same or not, were endemic if minority elements of the village scene and just as subject to society's received values as anyone else in spite of their surface self-differentiation. Thus, her mien and conduct, while sufficient to induce derision and laughter in the audience, is not enough to induce audience condemnation of the societal precepts to which both she and they adhere.

She possesses, however, a distinctive feature of far-reaching implications, discernible in her execrable motivations behind her choice of a son-in-law. Here Zhao makes one of his infrequent incursions into a character's interior, made necessary not by the exigency of limited time and space, but by the character's own cautious concealment from the public of the trait that is essential to her portrayal:

"In spite of the mother-daughter relationship, Third Fairy and Xiao Qin had not been getting along in recent years. What Third Fairy loved was young men, but what the young men loved was Xiao Qin. Third Fairy regarded the boy Xiao Erhei as a tender juicy morsel, but unfortunately Xiao Qin was in the way and so Third Fairy didn't get her share. ... After the criticism session, rumors flew that Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin were going to marry of their own free will, and Third Fairy thought that if this were true, then afterwards she would not even be able to joke around with Xiao Erhei, and that would be pitiful indeed. Thus she begged people all over the village to find a husband for Xiao Qin." (VIII.2)
The historically persistent bestowal of sanction upon the sacrifice of (young) women to the pleasure of (old) men contrasts sharply with the tenacious repugnance of concupiscence in women. This latter view emerges out of such stories as those that discountenance the behaviour of Wu Zetian (武則天) of the Tang dynasty, and the accusations of lewdness against the modern-day arch-villain, Jiang Qing. Third Fairy, then, was not only of this lecivious tenor, she also proposed to sacrifice her own daughter to support her penchant. Her attempt to “inveigle Xiao Erhei for herself” is the one outrageous, unacceptable tait that the audience cannot identify with and must totally reject as an ultimate travesty against social decorum. Without it the audience could only assume that Third Fairy was merely doing her parental duty as proclaimed by tradition in finding a proper husband for her daughter; and since every audience member with children also aspired to fulfill that very same duty and expected obedience in return, there could be no sympathy elicited for Xiao Qin’s disobedience nor for her ultimate union with Xiao Erhei.

At this point the connection between the fiction and the reality of the day becomes irrelevant. Zhao could not have possibly really known the inner motivations of Third Fairy any more than Gustave Flaubert could know those of Emma Bovary. In both cases the authors merely made up or deduced the characters’ motivations from their external, easily observable appearance and behaviour in combination with the possibilities concoctable out of the social context. The question is not whether village society actually produced a woman who designed to sell off her daughter in order to amuse herself with her daughter’s boyfriend. Rather, enacted before the eyes of the audience is a hypothetical example - given the tendency of humankind to pervert power and privilege - of the abuses inherent in carrying the marriage system to its logical conclusion. That is, if Third Fairy could requisition the old and venerated marriage customs to facilitate her own immorality, then of course such a marriage custom should be abolished, as it is indeed in the story. Here the narrator-audience conspiratorial
relationship blooms: considering the evil behind this marriage arrangement, the au­
dience welcomes with relief the anti-traditional marriage policy that releases Xiao Qin from her daughterly duty.

The portrayal of Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin is marked by a thinness of character that belies all claims of their protagonist role. Contrary to numerous asseverations upon this point, the story is not about a young couple who bravely and undauntedly strive for marriage in the face of overwhelming societal objections, but about the forces and the people who strive to prevent their union. Even less than one-sided because their asymmetric traits receive no concentrated development, they are mere figures or props around which the action turns. Their particular fate is not at issue: rather, at issue is the desirability of maintaining institutions - i.e., the patriarchal system (which includes the marriage system) and superstition - that allow and even encourage society in its elemental components to be run by immorality and incompe­
tency.

The lack of expansion upon these two characters permits the formulation of only a very rudimentary and distant sympathy for them, of a type only slightly more potent than what one may feel upon hearing of the unfortunate victims of a distant disaster. It is an impersonal, fleeting sympathy, meager in its development for lack of personal acquaintance or substantial knowledge of its recipients. The elicitation of hope for the young couple's success in the attainment of their goal, then, rests with an appeal to the sense of excess and wrongdoing on the part of parents and certain authority figures. The parents' failure to enforce the arranged marriages occasions satisfaction in that through it Third Fairy has been reprimanded for her immorality and Er Zhuge for his incompetence. This satisfaction in the young couple's success intrinsically comprises a judgement against the patriarchal system as well as superstition, for their success could be achieved and the (audience's) satisfaction experienced only through the ren­unciation of parental authority and the hitherto supposedly credible and reliable
proclamations of prognostication. Thus, the work reaches its didactic target obliquely, entertaining the audience with the exaggerated improbities of the characters and then leading the audience to deduce for itself the inexorable connection between these improbities and the targeted practices.

The work, then, must be classified as being outside the bounds of socialist realism. Unlike socialist realism, which seeks to create and reinforce hyperbolic images of idealism, its personalities and events are grounded in a logicality consistent with reality. For example, Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin do not, in defiance of social possibilities, suddenly and inexplicably arise out of the ashes and gloom of centuries of parental tyranny and years of personal repression to “bravely and heroically” defy their parents. A prerequisite, lengthy fermentation of rebellion clearly unfolds in the delineation of their early lives: only their early and socially sanctioned loss of respect for their parents make it possible and even essential for them to assume the responsibility of making their own decisions and choices. In their portrayal we see not extraordinary, fairy-tale youth with glittering eyes ablaze with idealism and patriotic fervor, but simply ordinary people responding to extraordinary circumstances: the ill-fortune of having opprobrious parents.

In spite of its didactic roots, the work possesses an enduring quality that continues to attract an audience nearly a half-century after its creation. This quality emanates from its casting of the primary lesson among human truths, sociological processes, and the forces of tyranny that governed them all. It furthermore adapts to the Chinese village situation the classic formula of the Comic Mode, producing a scenario which has proven to be artistically satisfying since the earliest days of comedy. Northrop Frye describes the New Comedy, which dates back to Meander:

“New Comedy normally presents an erotic intrigue between a young man and a young woman which is blocked by some kind of opposition, usually paternal, and resolved by a twist in the plot.... At the beginning of the play the forces thwarting the hero are in control of the play’s society, but after a discovery in which the hero becomes wealthy or the heroine respectable, a new society crystallizes on the stage around the
hero and his bride. The action of the comedy thus moves towards the incorpotation of the hero into the society that he naturally fits. The hero himself is seldom a very interesting person: in conformity with low mimetic decorum, he is ordinary in his virtues, but socially attractive. ....” (Frye, p. 44)

Frye’s description applies to “The Young Couple’s Plot” almost verbatim. Xiao Erhei is indeed a rather boring character, a mere technical hero, who is not in possession of soaring ideals but is handsome and talented enough to capture the glances and admiration of numerous young women. Early in his story he is rejected and teased by society, in the middle persecuted, ostensibly, for ignoring social mores by the tyrants who literally control his society, and in the end he has been reincorporated into that society, which was wrong in persecuting him in the first place. The young couple do indeed marry after a discovery. Although that discovery does not result in monetary wealth for Xiao Erhei, it does result in a “wealth” of knowledge, that is, knowledge about the marriage policy that will allow the marriage. His bride does indeed gain respectability via her mother’s acceptance of society’s standards of behaviour and appearance. And a new society literally forms around the young couple, for it was their situation that precipitated the demise of the two tyrants that controlled the old society and brought attention to the need for abolishing old habits.

Further adherence to the Comic Mode is seen in the work’s fulfilling of the tendency of comedy “to include as many people as possible in its final society: the blocking characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated.” Indeed, this is the only decorous outcome for characters “whose chief function is the amusing of the audience,” for their rejection by society would cast a perverse tinge of tragedy upon the comic work. That is, while Zhao shows the reconciliation of Third Fairy and Er Zhuge to society to be a natural and logical outcome of their own psychological changes or of strong social pressure, this is the outcome that is expected of a work of the kind he created, even if it were to be achieved through unconscionable manipulation. It is a tribute to Zhao’s artistry that his outcome occurs with complete
logicality, while yet providing amusement for the intended audience up to the very end.
Norman Friedman in his Form and Meaning in Fiction, pp. 178–180, sets forth the parts of complex dynamic action:

1. A precipitating cause to bring the character into his first state: (Third Fairy is denied a social life, becomes a fortuneteller).
2. A counterplot action to represent the consequences of that state: (Third Fairy deteriorates into a monster).
3. An inciting cause which will serve to bring him out of the counterplot and on toward the opposite state: (Third Fairy caught up in the problems of her daughter’s marriage).
4. A progressive action to represent him in the process of change: (Third Fairy perspires with embarrassment as the women ridicule her).
5. A culmination where the process is completed: (Third Fairy removes her make-up and terminates her fortunetelling).


Tomashevsky, p. 67.

Norman Friedman, Form and Meaning in Fiction, Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 1975, p. 126.

Friedman, pp. 126–127.

See Friedman, pp. 170–186.


Roman numerals refer to the sections of the story (original Chinese text), arabic numerals to paragraphs within the section referred to.


“As soon as the recruitment flag goes up, hungry men come to join up” – Che qi zhaojun qi, jiu you chi liang ren 插起招军旗, 就有吃粮人.


15. Pettit, p. 43.

16. Ibid.


18. Earlier published versions of Zhao’s story state that the character was also known by another nickname, Er Kongming. Kongming was the courtesy name of Zhuge Liang.


22. It is believed that the Liguadao Riot, which took place in Licheng County (黎城市) in 1941, during the Mid-Autumn Festival, was instigated by the Japanese through the use of superstition. Liguadao (霧家道) was the name of a religious sect. See Huang Xiufi, “Zhao Shuli zhuoianlüe,” p. 186.


Ying Bai (p. 6) attributes Third Fairy's behavior patterns to a loveless conjugal relationship and ultimately to the tradition of arranged marriage. However, such a view must be identified as mere interpretive conjecture, as no part of the text supports it. It is true that in the scene preceding her trip to the district chief's office, the interactions between Third Fairy and her husband indicate that she does not love or even respect him, but there is no indication that this sterile relationship existed at the beginning of the marriage and originally drove her to seek the attentions of other young men. Of course, such a thing may be true, but it also may be true that it was her aspirations in attracting young men that produced the sterile relationship. The text provides no evidence either way. The evidence is that what she sought in life was the excitement that comes with being the center of attention on a scale that surpassed the boundaries of immediate family. If she had been a young man, she could have attempted to achieve this, as did Xiao Erhei through his expert marksmanship and theatrical talents. It is unlikely that the most loving husband freely chosen by her own hand could have prevented or cured her craving for concentrated admiration and approval. To claim that a loveless marriage and the marriage customs themselves caused her to develop an "abnormal psychology" is to fall to the fallacy that women live for love alone.

Wan Man, "'Xiao Erhei jiehun' fenxi,'" p. 113.

Description of actions may also comprise a flash of scene, but telling time relative to actual time would be difficult to determine.

Wan Man (p. 104), postulates the thematic status of Xiao Erhei's and Xiao Qin's love, but then goes on to say that in spite of its thematic status, the story cannot be classified as a mere love story, since a strong ideological content overshadows this theme. That is, the love interest serves as a thread that connects the various expressions of the New Society being built by youthful peasants through their victory over feudalistic thought patterns. Ying Bai (p. 4) says that the theme resides in the extolling of love and the extolling of the New Society, the Communist Party, and the People's Government. However, as will be seen, love plays hardly any role at all in the story. As for the "extolling" of the Communist Party, Zhao Shuli himself denied this function, noting that not a single party member had a part in the story (Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 4, p. 1718).
Ying Bai (p. 7) attributes Xiao Erhei's proclivity for opposition to the environment created by "the new era, the Communist Party, the People's Government and its marriage policy." While a new atmosphere of change introduced by the communists in Shanxi province may indeed have contributed to the development of oppositional youths such as Xiao Erhei, this cannot be construed from the story itself but only from supplementary knowledge of actual history. As for the marriage policy, it is clear from the story that it had nothing to do with Xiao Erhei's refusal to obey his father: Xiao Erhei knew nothing about the marriage policy and was unaware of the legality of his courting Xiao Qin until after the Cousins Wang dragged him before the mayor (VI), an event which occurred long after he had rebuffed his father's wishes. To be precise, Xiao Erhei articulated his unfilial statement at the age of 16, when the child-bride was eight, and didn't learn of his legally sanctioned freedom to court Xiao Qin until the child-bride was approximately 12 (see section X).

Erich Auerbach's description of Biblical narrative is remarkably applicable here: "...the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole is permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal..." (Mimesis, New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957, p. 9).

However, for those women who had to suffer the imposition of foot-binding, even beauty was not without pain.

Wan Man, "Xiao Erhei jiehun' fenxi, " p. 106.

One article states: "This story concentrates upon the depiction of the youthful, beautiful, and progressive couple, Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin, who struggle for the rays of light that they yearn for. It warmly eulogizes the heroic struggle that they wage against feudalistic superstition and the reactionary power of the local tyrants for the sake of freedom in marriage choice." (Yao Yuen and Fan Qiuqian, "Xiao Erhei jiehun' xin ping," in Zhao Shuli zhuanji, pp. 303-306 (see p. 303)). In another article it is asserted that in Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin we see "the images of a new type of character that has stepped into the domain of literature... These images represent an emerging force in the countryside. Their victory is the victory of this emerging force. Here the author is not only eulogizing the victory of freedom in love, but also eulogizing the victory of progress over backwardness, the victory of the peasants' opposition to feudalistic despotic power, and the victory of the new society." (Li Wenru, "Lun 'Xiao Erhei jiehun' 'Li Youcai banhua' zai xiandai wenxueshi shangde yiyi", in Zhao Shuli zhuanji, pp. 260-282 (see p. 262)).
The tragedy of Zhao's persecution and death during the Cultural Revolution is made all the more poignant by the irony of arbitrary and antithetical evaluation of him: the man who was eulogized as the very embodiment of Mao's teachings on literature and art came to be reviled as the diametrically opposed enemy of that very same aesthetic concept. The virulence of the persecution inflicted upon him undoubtedly was rooted in the very praise that had been bestowed upon him, for the eulogistic adulation of critics who blithely misinterpreted his works and credited to them non-existent attributes set him upon a false pedestal doomed to crumble under the weight of its own disingenuousness. By praising Zhao for what he was not, they in essence signed his death warrant.

As the analysis has shown, the content of "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" is very different from what the early ideologues said it was (see discussion in Chap. 3), and also vastly more complicated and more revealing of Chinese society that what those critics (or any critic who has been permitted to appear in print) realized or would wish or approve of. The fundamentalists who could perceive this were bound to suffer profound disappointment in the man who supposedly embodied their beliefs, and, thus, that they should have turned against him with unbounded viciousness was inevitable. For example, that which had prompted much praise of the story — its supposed extolling of the Communist Party and the People's Government — became a point for condemnation in the Cultural Revolution precisely because such depictions did not exist. The following criticism of that era faults it for its lack of a strong portrayal of Party cadres: "Zhao Shuli is simply not a proletarian writer. Just as he has said in his self-explanation, he did not depict 'the great movements of land reform, revenge, emancipation, etc.' He never portrayed the image of Party leadership or the image of heroic characters. Take 'Xiao Erhei Gets Married' for an example. In this work one simply cannot see the strength of the Party in the basic village organization. All we see is how the people were benighted and how local tyrants ran roughshod over them. The mayor as a positive character is merely a wooden figure who doesn't even have a name, while the District Head does no more than resolve a dispute. Those characters which are portrayed 'vividly' are backwards characters like Third Fairy and Er Zhuge. Zhao Shuli stopped at nothing to vilify these two, yet in regarding them from the standpoint of class and origin, they are precisely the Party's basic masses of the village." (Liu Ye, "Jiekai Zhou Yang he Zhao Shuli zhi jian de hei mu", Jiefangjun bao, Jan. 9, 1967. Reprinted in Mingbao yuekan, Feb. 1967, no. 14, as well as numerous other publications of the period. Cited in Man Shu, p. 29, goes on to remark upon this criticism: "This shows that Zhao Shuli was a down-to-earth person who had his feet firmly planted in reality rather than blindly extolling whatever."

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56 Fang Yuxiao, "Zhao Shuli chuangzuo de xianshi zhuyi tezheng" 作论主义特征, Lishui de xuebao, 1981, no. 4, pp. 79-84 (see p. 81).

57 Huang Xiuji, "Zhao Shuli zhuanlue," p. 187.

58 Dong Junjun, "Zhao Shuli zenyang chuli 'Xiao Erhei jiehun' de cailiiao de" 作论怎样处理《小二黑结婚》的材料的, Wenyi bao, 1959, no. 10.

Zhao Shuli, "Dangqian chuangzuo zhong de jige enti" in Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 4, pp. 1647-1658 (see p. 1651).

Fang Yuxiao, "Zhao Shuli chuangzuo de xianshi zhuyi tezheng"; Dong Junlun, "Zhao Shuli zenyang chuli."

Dong Junlun, "Zhao Shuli zenyang chuli."


Dong Junlun, "Zhao Shuli zenyang chuli."


Ying Bai, p. 4: "This is a story about a young couple’s struggle against the remnants of feudalistic consciousness and despotic power in order to obtain autonomy in marriage choice." Li Wenru, p. 262: "Xiao Erhei Gets Married" takes as its theme the love of a young peasant couple. The protagonists, Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin, are two young, heroic peasant activists, and Xiao Erhei furthermore is a crack shot who won honors during the anti-'mop-up' campaign." Wan Man, p. 107: "Although quite a bit of space is devoted to Third Fairy and Er Zhuge, the protagonists are, of course, still Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin." Lü Yuanming, "Lun Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo," Journal of Jilin Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences), 1979, no. 4, pp. 82-95, see p. 83: "The story’s plot is very simple. The principle characters are two figures of the younger generation in the rural liberated areas, Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin."

Ting Yi (丁夕) classifies all of Zhao’s works as socialist realism: "His works are not only not peasant literature, they are also not consistent with most of realistic literature; rather they belong to the category of socialist realism." (Cited in Wan Man, “Xiao Erhei jiehun fenxi,” p. 104.)
Zhaoshu's niche in the literary world continues to be taken for granted in intellectual circles, as this passage from Li Kuanding's *Romantic Goddesses* indicates: "Cheng Xin was a teacher whom all the women students idolized. He was of noble, dignified appearance, one meter and eight in height, a beautiful forty-year-old man whose every facial line was a study in seductiveness. He was the only one who didn't follow a lesson plan. He just stood like that on the rostrum exuding poise, from the slightest gesture to the flamboyant toss of his hair. And not only that, he had a most unique point of view. On Zhaoshu's *Xiao Erhei Gets Married*, he reserved his vigorous criticism not for Third Fairy, but for the mayor, whose behaviour, he said, was nonsensical. The mayor didn't do anything for the villagers, but was only concerned about what the people wore fancy clothing. As for Third Fairy he certainly had a singular viewpoint: What was there to reproach in a forty-year-old woman's making up her face and wearing fancy clothes? What was so bad about having a lust for life? Indeed, a graceful woman who has entered upon middle age has all the more need to dress up! Now that was a real 'heresy,' but the problem was that you couldn't help but recognize that there was truth in what he said, and furthermore you didn't get the slightest feeling that he was just saying it because he thought that was what you wanted to hear." (Li Kuanding 李宽定, *Langmen nushen* 浪漫女神, Series: *Dangdai xiaoshuo wenku*, Beijing, Zuofa chubanshe, 1989, p. 151.


* Ibid., p. 170.*
CHAPTER VII

Narrative Strategies: The Case of *Changes in Li Village*

Now the purpose of a book I suppose is to amuse, interest, instruct but its warmer purpose is just to associate with the reader. You use symbols he can understand so that the two of you can be together. The circle is not closed until the trinity is present - the writer, the book, and the reader. ... Critics dare you to be "great." But this is all after the fact. You didn't want to be great. You just wanted to write a book and have people read it. - John Steinbeck

The novel *Changes in Li Village* is distinguished as the first modern realistic novel written specifically for a peasant audience. To this distinction are added the facts that it attained success among that audience and caught national - even international - attention. Up until its appearance, the ordinary, uneducated, rural population had access to very little interesting reading matter that related realistically to their own day and their own lives, other than Zhao's own short stories. Zhao himself in 1942, pointed out with public indignation that the only cultural materials to which the people of his own hometown could relate were dusty works that creaked with outmoded tradition and superstition. It stood to reason that as long as nothing else attracted their attention, such would remain the case. If peasants found nothing of interest in the May Fourth literature because of its - for them - esoteric subject matter and incomprehensible, un-Chinese-like language, the rurally based literature produced up to that time also failed to enthrall them. The latter, after all, had been written for the entertainment of urban dwellers and tended to portray peasants either as pitiful creatures or in terms of romantic strength and vigor or as slow-witted bumpkins and buffoons. They furthermore projected urban attitudes and values upon the peasant protagonists,
creating characters to which real peasants felt no affinity. In a word, the failure of urbanite originated rural fiction to penetrate the rural “mass market” lay in the non-concurrence of author and audience point of view.

Li Village (this abbreviation of the title to be used from now on), by contrast, completely renovated the modern novel’s concept of its audience, a fact complementing its additional uniqueness in the realms of content, form, and language usage.

As a study of the social-psychological transformation of the people of an obscure Shanxi province village it is a novel named after its plot. Although individual characters emerge out of the narrative as memorable inhabitants of the fictional world, the story’s central concern is the dynamic of an antithetical relationship that dominates the entire village and determines the nature and quality of life for all its citizens. The individuals focussed upon cluster at either end of the antithesis, representing on the one hand the force of evil, which may be identified as the Power Class or the Collective Anti-Hero, and on the other hand the (sometimes latent) force of good, here the Populace or the Collective Hero. The author in telling his story has deployed one of the most compelling of plot structures as identified by the Russian formalist, Victor Shklovsky, the move from one relationship between characters to that of its opposite. For the Populace, this means their achievement of emancipation. Emancipation, thus, is the theme upon which the novel builds its narrative edifice.

In choosing the theme of emancipation, Zhao also chose for himself a formidable task. For in spite of his novel’s surface resemblance to the notions of proletarian collectivism that dominated the literary theoretical rhetoric of the time, it is still grounded in the laws of realistic possibilities: the task that the downtrodden peasants face in eradicating evil and emancipating themselves finds no mitigation in the rise of a superhero to lead them to victory, nor do they even as a group accomplish superhuman feats, as one might expect to find in a revolutionary romance.
The author's task lay in depicting the origins and process leading to true emancipation. Since true emancipation lies within the individual human psyche, which is characteristically unamenable to its own rapid and intrinsic transformation, the protracted time span involved in the process was an exigency that Zhao could not ignore. For the initial presentation of his characters, then, he settled upon the year 1928 or 1929, and carried them through to the end of the Resistance War against Japan, a period of about 17 years. Confronting him, however, was the necessity of simultaneously compressing the story into a text short enough to make oral rendition of it practicable (total characters number 70–80 thousand) while yet maintaining the ability to sustain audience attention.

Time, then, was of the essence, and it can be regarded as the material from which the broad, overall outline of the novel is fashioned. As Shao Quanlin, et al., pointed out, the novel is divisible into large, historically identifiable blocks of time. Chapters one and two depict life in Li Village as it was in 1928, before change began to occur. Chapters three and four cover the year 1930, which the novel’s most memorable character, Zhang Tiesuo (张铁锁), spent in the provincial capital, Taiyuan. Chapters five and six encompass the period between the time when warlord Van Xishan temporarily relinquished his power in 1930 and the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937, which was immediately followed by the re-entry of communist troops into Shanxi province. In terms of story action, this period covers the time of Tiesuo’s decision to return to Li Village from Taiyuan, through to his arrest as an accused communist sympathizer, to his release from prison when the newly-arrived communists persuaded the provincial government to release all political prisoners.

Chapter seven through to the end covers the entire Resistance War period, with chapters seven to nine dealing with the period before the Japanese troops actually entered southwestern Shanxi where Li Village was located. That is, chapter seven starts with the three-way cooperation among Yan Xishan’s army, the KMT, and the
communists in an attempt to oust the Japanese. Chapter nine ends with the period in which Yan Xishan was having his decimated troops trained in communist guerilla tactics, near the end of 1937. In terms of story action, chapters seven to nine deal with the period following Tiesuo's release from prison, whereupon he met for the second time the communist cadre, Xiao Chang (小常), through to the official establishment of the Sacrifice League in Li Village, to the breakup of the Power Class plot to neutralize the Sacrifice League. Chapters ten to fifteen cover the period between the invasion of Japanese troops into southwestern Shanxi in February of 1938 and the final defeat of the Japanese in the summer of 1945, which was followed up in Li Village with rectification of village Power Class wrongs. Chapter 16 is something of an epilogue which delineates a short period of peace in the village followed by the village peasants joining the Eighth Route Army to fight the KMT troops in the autumn of 1945.

This skeletal compositional outline, produced through the blocking out of historical time, incorporates extremes in the expansion and contraction of storytelling time. Three chapters may cover only six months, as do chapters seven, eight, and nine, while two chapters may include a time span as long as seven years, as in the case of chapters five and six. Complementary to, but not necessarily corresponding to, this outline are the author's variegated usages of immediate scene and summary narration, two modes of story transmission that are actually the two sides of one antithetically constructed compositional device. Within the outlined blocks of historical time this device serves as the fine tuner in the control of storytelling time. Thus, chapters that dispatch several years' time may yield instances of leisurely immediate scene, while it is not at all unusual for chapters that pace off historical time more slowly to make extensive usage of summary narration. Since the device of summary narration/immediate scene is basic to most fiction writing, it may conveniently serve as the jumping off point for an examination of the author's technique in reconciling the exigencies of storytelling and the modern novel.
Summary Narration

Norman Friedman notes that the difference between summary narration and immediate scene is the difference between “telling” and “showing.” To the former belong the attributes of generality, statement, exposition, narrative, explicitness, and idea; while the latter belongs in the realm of particularity, inference, presentation, drama, implicitness, and image. Zhao uses summary narration to effect temporal acceleration, to sketch out the larger events that cannot with practicality be focused upon in detail and yet remain crucial to the story’s development. Included are situations impossible to compress into a single scene, such as Tiesuo’s wife Erniu’s year-long sojourn in the mountains; events that affect the whole of the village, not just the main characters, such as the decimation of the population during occupation by central and provincial government troops (i.e., KMT and Yan Xishan); historically significant occurrences that nonetheless bear little relationship to the central question of psychological emancipation, such as the Japanese invasion; and sketches of historical context.

The story of Li Village unfolds through the discourse of a multifarious narrator who possesses the option of total omniscience but uses it very sparingly. A.W. Friedman describes the multifarious narrator: “At times he may approach omniscience, at others provide only occasional explication of the internal realities of those within his province, at still others become little more than a roving reporter—.... a ‘camera eye.’” In the above cases of summary narration, the multifarious narrator of Li Village may adopt a detached and external reportage technique, restricting himself to the synthesis of facts and occurrences belonging to the public domain, whether that domain be limited to the village or include the county or even the provincial levels. Or the narrator may become the invisible companion of an individual character or group of characters, summarily relating their activities, their external reactions to
varied stimuli, and sometimes even their thoughts. On occasion the narrator, already very unobtrusive, eliminates himself altogether and turns the narration over to one of his characters, who in his place brings everyone—characters and audience alike—up to date on past events he had witnessed.

An example of the first of these instances is seen in a paragraph in chapter five concerning the fate of the money Tiesuo had earned working in Taiyuan and which he had successfully prevented from falling into the hands of renegade soldiers "patrolling" the road back to Li Village:

"The Shanxi dollar dropped lower and lower in value until it was worth only twenty cents. Xiaoxi took the dollars he had amassed and ran over to the army stationed in Jincheng, where he turned it into opium. Tiesuo didn’t know how to do such things and so helplessly and nervously watched his money tumble ever further in value. After awhile there was a rumour that Yan Xishan had returned to Taiyuan to take charge of pacification, and the dollar climbed back up to 25 cents. This occurred just at the end of the lunar year, and the owner of Fushunchang Store, Wang Anfu, thought that since Honorable Yan had returned to Taiyuan, the dollar would surely rise further. This prompted him to freely borrow dollars, and he accepted Shanxi dollars for payment of debts as well as for payment of goods. At this time, it would have been very easy for Tiesuo to get rid of his hundred or so Shanxi dollars, but when he saw Wang Anfu borrowing all he could get, he thought that they would rise even higher and so couldn’t bear to let them go. He took out only about ten dollars and bought from Wang Anfu a few miscellaneous items for celebrating the New Year. Little did he know that after the New Year a decree would be issued from on high devaluing the dollar so that twenty dollars were worth one. This naturally was very bad luck for Wang Anfu, while poor Tiesuo was struck numb: a half year’s worth of labor had all been for nothing."

In this passage the narrator maintains the detached, external voice of a well-informed reporter. Stationed above the village, he shifts a spotlight sequentially if panchronically from character to characters as each one reacts to the current province-wide trends and events. He compresses into one capsule an extended albeit undetermined period of time as well as sketches out in stark contrastive juxtaposition the typical behaviours of the three actors, thereby effecting a flash of emphasis upon the intrinsic natures of these characters: Xiaoxi’s immorality, Wang Anfu’s greed, and
Tiesuo's helplessness. The reference to warlord Yan Xishan midway through the passage is marked by an ironic tone that is born of a clash between the narrator's ideological point of view — buried in the deep compositional structure of the text — and his momentary adoption of Wang Anfu's phraseology (the phraseological level being a component of the surface compositional structure). When the narrator remarks, "Wang Anfu thought that since Honorable Yan Xishan had returned...," he is effecting a phraseological shift to Wang Anfu's point of view: the term "Honorable Yan Xishan" is a part of Wang Anfu's vocabulary, not the narrator's, as it reveals admiration and support for a man whose policies are at variance with the general well-being of the peasant population. Through this instance of textual multivalence — i.e., the simultaneous presence of two or more viewpoints — the narrator consolidates in one swift telescoping stroke the impression of Wang Anfu as an unsympathetic character whose interests conflict with those of the Populace, without actually committing his own point of view to that proposition. Later in the text (chapter nine) the narrator reveals himself to have been somewhat disingenuous on this point when Wang Anfu turns out to be actually on the Populace side of the novel's antithetical construct. In this way, the audience's knowledge is made to parallel that of the outsider cadre, Xiao Chang, who knows nothing of actual village dynamics when he first arrives and assumes mistakenly that Wang Anfu because of his mode of earning a livelihood and relative wealth must be an enemy of the common people.

**Point of View, Theme, and Narrative Density**

The following example of summary narrative, excerpted from chapter two, concentrates upon the actions and reactions of a single character, Tiesuo, during the prelude and aftermath of his property loss. The point of view is generally that of an immediate bystander who had invisibly accompanied Tiesuo throughout his ordeal and who is now reporting the events in a condensed, synchronic presentation that occasionally
offers the direct perspective of Tiesuo himself. The beginning of the narrative finds
Tiesuo heavily into debt, the result of fines imposed upon him for trumped-up charges:

“A month later with the maturing of the silkworms and the ripening
of the wheat, the $200 Tiesuo had promised Chunxi fell due, the $30 he
owed the Fushunchang Store had to be returned, and delayed fear hit him as
he realized the full import of his $250 debt to Liu Taiye. He thought,
“Better to cash in my assets now than to carry interest. If I put it off another six months, then even if I sell everything I won’t have enough to pay
off Liu Taiye alone.” With that he grit his teeth and gave over to the
Fushunchang Store his silkworms as well as the proceeds from the sale of
two Chinese bushels of wheat to clear away the $30 debt. Then he sold ten
mou of land to Li Ruzhen and used the money to repay Liu Taiye’s $250
loan, of which he had actually originally received only 80%. He turned his
own house over to Chunxi plus three Chinese bushels of wheat to make good
on the $200 he owed him. He himself moved to a place once used as a barn
beside the grain mill outside the gate of his courtyard. In this way, there
remained to him only five mou of land and this old barn. Since Chunxi had
many brothers, the rooms allocated to him were not very spacious, and so
he took possession of Tiesuo’s house with great satisfaction. He hired
workers to repair the eaves, put in a ceiling, paint the walls, and refur-
bish its facade, and within a few days the compound was fixed up very
tastefully. When the remodeling was complete, he moved in with his wife.
And Tiesuo? The barn into which he had moved was crammed full with
hoes, plows, rakes, pottery ware, cooking and eating utensils, bamboo bas-
kets.... These things filled up two of the three rooms. In the middle of the
remaining room was a manger, in front of which he built a cooking stove
and on top of which he set up a bed. It was so crowded that there was
nowhere to set even a water jug.

“Living in such conditions, Tiesuo each day upon arising would look
across the way at the newly painted gate with its gold character inscription
hanging above. How could he be anything but angry? Within a few days he
succumbed to an illness that no medicine he took could cure, and he lan-
guished like this for several months. As a popular saying goes, ‘It takes a
heart medicine to cure a heart sickness.’ Later San Ye went to Taiyuan, and
Xiaoxi and Chunxi went with him. Someone said, ‘In the county seat over a
hundred families got together and sued him, and the provincial authorities
arrested them all.’ Someone else said, ‘San Ye’s big brother is Yan
Xishan’s Secretary General, the second most powerful man in the province.
It’s said that he behaved so scandalously at home that he was called to the
capital and jailed.’ Whatever the implications, it bore no good for San Ye.
Tiesuo heard this news with elation and gradually he recovered from his
illness.”

In compressing the action of several months into two paragraphs, the narrator
has extracted the essence of Tiesuo’s experience, punctuating externally based
The loss of his home and other property meant the negation of his father's and grandfather's efforts at material acquisition as well as the termination of his own accustomed way of life. It was a sudden personal tragedy that could be surpassed in intensity only by the death of a close family member. In muted tones his emotional response to this tragedy threads throughout the narrative's situational development. Structurally, then, this sequence is founded upon the interweaving of binary oppositions: a situative/emotive opposition in narrative functions (discussed below) and the external/internal opposition in point of view. It must be noted that the left components of these oppositions do not necessarily parallel each other, nor do the right. This shall be illustrated below. A third binary opposition also makes up a part of the fabric: that of telling/showing in narrative mode (also expressible as direct/indirect). Although the passage is an example of summary narration, which by definition advances a story through "telling," it sustains a number of instances in which the "telling" of a certain fact in turn "shows" a certain state.

Before proceeding with analysis, the notion of the narrative function must be clarified. Roland Barthes has borrowed the concept of the function from Vladimir Propp to build a descriptive scheme of narrative. Philip Pettit describes Barthes'
usage: "The function is the basic element of a text, consisting in a string of words of variable length, and constituting an event proper or the 'event' of a state: a trait of character, a type of situation, and so on." The "string of words" referred to does not necessarily conform to conventional grammatical boundaries. Although such may often be the case, the function may commonly encompass several sentences, or several sentences plus part of another, or a single sentence fragment, or a syntagm, or even a single word. This situation results from the fact that functions are determined through meaning alone rather than through the components of a linguistic system.

The division of the above quoted passage into functions will illustrate this point (see below). Each of the isolated functions may be named, or, more accurately, the fact that a name can be applied determines the boundaries of the function. These names further serve as abbreviated identifications of the functions which may be conveniently inserted into tables or illustrative figures. The functional demarcation of the above passage is as follows:

(1) "A month later with the maturing of the silkworms and the ripening of the wheat, the $200 Tiesuo had promised Chunxi fell due. The $30 he owed the Fushunchang Store had to be returned. (DEBT)

(2) and delayed fear hit him as he realized the full import of his $250 debt to Liu Taiye. (FEAR)

(3) He thought, "Better to cash in my assets now than to carry interest. If I put it off another six months, then even if I sell everything I won't have enough to pay off Liu Taiye alone." (DECISION)

(4) With that he grit his teeth (PAIN)

(5) and gave over to the Fushunchang Store his silkworms as well as the proceeds from the sale of two Chinese bushels of wheat to clear away the $30 debt. Then he sold ten mou of land to Li Ruzhen and used the money to repay Liu Taiye's $250 loan, of which he had actually originally received only 80%. He turned his own house over to Chunxi plus three Chinese bushels of wheat to make good on the $200 he owed him. (LOSS)

(6) He himself moved (MOVE)
(7) to a place once used as a barn beside the grain mill outside the gate of his courtyard. In this way, there remained to him only five mou of land and this old barn. (POVERTY)

(8) Since Chunxi had many brothers, the rooms allocated to him were not very spacious, and so he took possession of Tiesuo's house with great satisfaction. (ACQUISITION)

(9) He hired workers to repair the eaves, put in a ceiling, paint the walls, and refurbish its facade, and within a few days the compound was fixed up very tastefully. When the remodeling was complete, (REMODELING)

(10) he moved in with his wife. (MOVE)

(11) And Tiesuo? The barn into which he had moved was crammed full with hoes, plows, rakes, pottery ware, cooking and eating utensils, bamboo baskets.... These things filled up two of the three rooms. In the middle of the remaining room was a manger, in front of which he built a cooking stove and on top of which he set up a bed. It was so crowded that there was nowhere to set even a water jug. "Living in such conditions, (CRAMPED)

(12) Tiesuo each day upon arising would look across the way at (LOOK)

(13) the newly painted gate with its gold character inscription hanging above. (SEE)

(14) How could he be anything but angry? (ANGER)

(15) Within a few days he succumbed to an illness (ILL)

(16) that no medicine he took could cure, and he languished like this for several months. As a popular saying goes, 'It takes a heart medicine to cure a heart sickness.' (DEPRESSION)

(17) Later San Ye went to Taiyuan, and Xiaoxi and Chunxi went with him. (DEPART)

(18) Someone said, (HEAR)

(19) 'In the county seat over a hundred families got together and sued him, and the provincial authorities arrested them all.' Someone else said, 'San Ye's big brother is Yan Xishan's Secretary General, the second most powerful man in the province. It's said that he behaved so scandalously at home that he was called to the capital and jailed.' Whatever the implications, it bore no good for San Ye. (MISFORTUNE)

(20) Tiesuo heard this news with elation (SATISFACTION)

(21) - (22) and gradually he recovered from his illness." (RECOVERY) (ACCEPTANCE)
At times a specific string of words may embody more than one function, as in the case of the last item in the passage, no. 21-22. At one level it is situative, informing ("telling") of the fact that Tiesuo recovered. This recovery, however, "shows" his acceptance of his new situation: he has developed a renewed willingness to live. Herein lies the existence of a second function, which is emotive.

As the stressful transition in Tiesuo's life progresses, Tiesuo passes through various stages of psychological reaction to his tragedy: anticipatory fear, immediate pain, impotent and unrequited anger, debilitating depression, satisfaction through vicarious revenge, eventual acceptance of his changed status. Each of these manifests itself through a different combination of the binary oppositions noted earlier. Thus, when the narrator mentions Tiesuo's "delayed fear," he is speaking out of the consciousness of the character to reveal the anxiety and sense of helplessness he felt at the inevitability of the impending disaster (see Table 1). Another excursion into Tiesuo's interior discloses that "gritting of teeth" accompanied his obligatory property disposal, a dramatization of the pain inherent in his action. It is through Tiesuo's eyes that we see the mocking facade of his former house's remodeled exterior, but it is only through an external rhetorical question that his anger is disclosed. The direct external report of Tiesuo's illness is an indirect illustration of his depression, his period of mourning for an irretrievable loss. Tiesuo's perception becomes ours as we hear through his ears of San Ye's alleged misfortune in Taiyuan and feel with his heart the satisfaction of vicarious revenge. However, it is the external report of his resultant recovery that indicates final acceptance of his new economic position and thus completion of the slow psychological transition that necessarily had to accompany it.

Table 1 below summarizes the expression of the emotive function through the interweaving of the point-of-view and modal oppositions:
Table 1: The Emotive Function Related to Binary Oppositions in Point of View and Narrative Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotive Function</th>
<th>Point of View</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Direct (Telling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Indirect (Showing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Direct (Telling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Indirect (Showing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Direct (Telling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Indirect (Showing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The inclusion of the situative functions in an expanded table would illustrate that while the largest portion of the passage's situational development is done from an external point of view and in the direct "telling" mode, the internal and the indirect also play a role (see Table 2 on p. 242). For instance the advancement of the situation to Tiesuo's rational DECISION to liquidate his assets occurs through the quotation of Tiesuo's internal thought. Furthermore, his thought only reveals his realization that he must divest himself of his assets immediately to avoid the total destruction that would result from interest rates run rampant. Thus, the actual decision is only implied - shown indirectly - through the combination of this quoted thought and the subsequent report of the actual divestment process. Later in the passage, the narrator directly tells of the situation in which Tiesuo is on the outside LOOKing over to the grounds of his former home.

This is an external observation on the part of the narrator. But the actual visual impression is Tiesuo's own internal experience. The fact that he is SEEing it is shown indirectly by detailing the visual. Finally, the narrator indirectly shows that Tiesuo HEARs of San Ye's (and by implication Chunxi's and Xiaoxi's) misfortune by quoting the exact words that entered into Tiesuo's internal awareness from the outside world.
Table 2: Expanded Table of Binary Opposites Relating Functions to their
Class, to Point of View and to Narrative Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Functional Class</th>
<th>Point of View</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Situative</td>
<td>Emotive</td>
<td>External</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debt</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Move (T)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remodel</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Move (C)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cramped</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Look</td>
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<td>See</td>
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<td>Anger</td>
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<td>Ill</td>
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<td>Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hear</td>
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<td>Misfortune</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The complex interaction of the narrative functions, point of view, and the showing-telling mode produces a complex narrative web which may be visually rendered (see Fig. 1). The figure shows a balanced distribution of each of the binarily opposed elements throughout the passage's temporal progression. This distribution combines

Figure 1: Interweaving of Binary Oppositions

with the high number of functions to produce a narrative density that allows the expeditious dispatch of the extended time period without diminishing the significance of Tiesuo's personal tribulations. The practice of interweaving multiple sets of narrative binary oppositions within narrative sequences marked by brevity may be an aspect of the hidden density said to inform Zhao's writing.
While the "telling" mode and the external point of view dominate this sequence to push the passage of time along with rapidity, the periodic shift into the "showing" mode and the internal point of view emphasizes Tiesuo's individuality within the flow of events. "Showing" in particular allows the audience to feel first-hand Tiesuo's experience by inducing independent realization of his predicament, sensations, and reactions. The internal point of view - narration emanating from the affective, thinking, sentient center which is Tiesuo - in evincing the palpable reality of the character, draws out sympathy and personal interest in him, an effect which bears thematic implications. For "the function of sympathy is primarily to direct interest and maintain attention - to call forth, as it were, the personal interest of the reader in the development of the theme." 23

The role point of view plays, however, is two-fold. Beyond the primary capture and maintenance of interest in the character and secondary outgrowth from it of interest in the theme, the manipulation of point of view enters into the realm of "thematic definition." 24 N. Friedman interprets this to mean that since a particular point of view, whether "omniscient," "limited," "camera eye," etc., is limited in the "probable range of functions it can perform," then choice of point of view becomes crucial to the achievement of a particular desired effect through which the writer can convey the values and attitudes of his created world. 25 Thus, an analysis of technique will reveal "the basic structure of values which [the author] has embodied by means of that technique." 26

It would appear that what Mr. Friedman is saying here is that since the author chooses a certain point of view to convey the values embodied in the work, then a reader can analyze this point of view to discover these values. The title of his paper, after all, is "Point of View in Fiction," not "Technique in Fiction." 27 He clouds the issue by proposing a discussion concerning the relationship of point of view to "thematic definition" and then switching his terminology to "attitudes and values," which
are quite different from theme, and "technique," which is not synonymous with point of view. I would suggest that, rather, the idea of "thematic definition" be discussed with its literal meaning in mind. That is, that theme can be defined or discovered through analyzing point of view.

Although this is neither the time nor the place to build and delineate a comprehensive argument to prove or disprove this concept in relation to a whole work, the passage excerpted from Li Village above lends itself well to such an analysis. As noted earlier, the theme of the entire work is "emancipation." As Boris Tomashevsky has pointed out, "A theme has a certain unity and is composed of small thematic elements arranged in a definite order. ... The work as a whole may have a theme, and at the same time each part of a work may have its own theme." 56

An intuitive interpretation of the theme upon which the excerpted passage is founded might lead one to think of it as paralleling that of the entire work: the passage encapsulates a mini-emancipation. In the beginning Tiesuo is imprisoned by the concept of property ownership and shackled to the desire to maintain ownership of what he has acquired. So deeply ingrained is his dependency upon material goods as a source of identity that he succumbs to illness when he loses them. His recovery signals a newfound liberation from materialism, which means that he has achieved emancipation on the mental plane, a first step towards achieving emancipation on other planes as well. However, analysis based upon point of view, especially point of view in its sentient aspect, leads to a different conclusion.

Those narrative functions which have been conveyed through the internal point of view fall into three categories, the affective (fear, pain, satisfaction), the thinking (decision), and the sentient (see, hear). A focus upon these three categories provides the grounds for thematic analysis.

Throughout the narrative, each glimpse into Tiesuo's interior reveals a mentality governed by passivity. His reaction to envisioned consequences of debt is fear, the
emotion inherent to the dominated and the passive reaction that defines weakness. Fear inspires his decision to disperse his holdings earlier rather than later in a move that projects a surface appearance of decisiveness, action, and courage. A subsurface probe, however, flushes out the capitulatory nature of this action: his solution to his problem is nothing more than passive replication of a predetermined scenario planned and staged by his subjugators. Consideration of alternatives to the one amplified thought in the text underscores his passivity: revealed is a thought that runs approximately, “Better to sell now than accumulate additional debt.” This contrasts with a possible, “I will sell something and secretly go into town to bring suit as originally planned”; or even, “Since I stand to lose everything anyway, I will burn it all to the ground so they will get nothing.” The actual viability of such plans is immaterial. The point is that the absence of option-making thought patterns reveals Tiesuo’s lack of spirit and initiative, a characteristic that the Power Class relies heavily upon. This is a function of a tightly controlled point of view that excises extraneous material: the real-life Tiesuo may indeed have considered other options and rejected them as unworkable. To include them in this instance of internal point of view, however, would not only upset the narrative rhythm, it would also distract the audience from what is turning out to be the basic theme of the passage: Tiesuo’s total and utter helplessness both in relation to the onslaught of forces exterior to himself and in relation to his own internal weaknesses. His entire being typifies the classic victim who is vulnerable to his own unproductive emotions, such as that revealed in the narrator’s subsequent extraction from his inner life: the pain which the process of property transfer inflicts upon him. This emotion is unproductive because although emotional pain of loss is universally endured, the pain he in particular feels is not merely the pain of loss. It is the pain of someone who has been maneuvered into destroying himself. Furthermore, this pain does not motivate him to seek retribution for injustice, but rather turns inward and translates itself into an impotent rage that erodes his already
enervated spirit and plunges him into the depths of depression.

Of all the narrative functions conveyed through the internal point of view, the sentient functions most vivify Tiesuo's passivity, for they progressively set him up as an inactive receiver of outside stimuli. The image of his newly decorated old house foists itself upon his senses, and Tiesuo becomes as a man trapped in a room fully lined with mirrors: he has no choice but to absorb the image that assails his eyes. He does not seek to control or channel the rage that the sight precipitates in him, but rather allows it to control him. Rendered literally inert by his illness, the action mode ceases to function altogether for him, and he becomes an involuntary receptor of audio messages. The news of San Ye’s misfortunes enters his consciousness through various anonymous voices all identified only as “someone”: “Someone said [approximately], 'A hundred families sued him and he was arrested,'” and “Someone said, ‘San Ye’s brother has been thrown in jail.’” This impersonalization of the speaker removes any sign of active interplay with others on Tiesuo’s part as well as transforms the speaker’s message into just another of the many external forces that constantly assault Tiesuo. Implicitly symbolized is a supine susceptibility to shaping by those external forces, and, germanely, a lack of control over his own life. The feeling of satisfaction that triggers his gradual recovery comes through the passive absorption of a message, not from action on his part.

Although the constraint of limited narration time requires the compression of events that characterizes this sequence, it does not uniquely motivate this compression. Governing the sequence is a narrational paradox which calls for the creation of an individual character with whom the audience can identify and sympathize, while simultaneously restricting that character’s importance for the sake of casting the entire village into the role of protagonist. By casting Tiesuo’s emotive experiences into a compressed sequence of events, he receives the necessary individuation, but not stardom. In retrospect he represents all of the peasants, and the delineation of his
existence is the delineation of all their existences. Later in the novel he takes on a more peripheral role, is cast heartlessly, as it were, into the dehumanizing cosmic flow of events. As such he virtually illustrates the futility of placing a premium on the individual in the context of overwhelming inhuman forces and, concomitantly, the necessity for grouping together to effect control over these forces. A nameless, faceless group, however, undermines the enterprise of holding audience attention. Yet, here, the fate of that group becomes a point of vital interest because existing within is the intimately known representative of all the peasants (including, perhaps, the audience), Tiesuo, the man with a face and a name.

A short, two-paragraph transitional sequence has accomplished a great deal in the realm of character and situational delineation, thematic development, audience attraction, and the backgrounding (or foregrounding) for the slow evolution of the villagers toward a motivated mentality. Rich density and complication underlie the surface simplicity of this "summary" narrative.

Point of View and the Progression of Story

The following selection taken from chapter 13 handles the horrifying violence that terrified the villagers over a four or five day period after KMT troops and two Yan Xishan contingents led by Xiaoxi and Chunxi moved in for occupation. As our multifarious narrator had spent this time accompanying Tiesuo and the other young men who had fled the village upon the soldiers' arrival, the point of view is not his but rather that of a character who had lived through it. The primary narrator, except in one instance when he knows the motivation behind a question Tiesuo asks, restricts himself to only what he sees and hears when the group of self-styled "guerillas" finds that Erniu had also fled the village. He has no control (except through excision) over Erniu's rendition of the events in the village and can only report verbatim what she said. Structurally the passage consists of a secondary narrator's (Erniu's) summary
narrative imbedded in the primary narrator's presentation of an immediate scene, that of Tiesuo and his friends listening to her description.

"They wandered for four or five days until they came to a little mountain village. There they discovered Erniu with the eleven-year-old child begging for food. They took her to a sunny hillside and asked her of news of the village. Erniu waved her hand and said, "Say no more! It's hell! They grabbed more than 100 people and accused them of being communists. Some of them had their hands chopped off, and some of them had their eyes gouged out, and others had to hand over all their money.... The courtyard of the Dragon King Temple is covered with blood. There is even blood all over the road." Then she named all the people who had been killed. Everyone could only shake their heads as they listened. Lengyuan said, 'We would only say that apart from the ten or so of us, nobody else was involved. Who'd have imagined that even people like Cui Heixiao, who couldn't speak a word, would get it. They're really devils!"

"Tiesuo noted that Erniu hadn't included Wang Anfu among the names of those who had been killed and so asked about his fate. Erniu said, 'They arrested the old gentleman and took him to the temple and ordered him to confess all his crimes. The old gentleman said, "Since you're going to kill me anyway, just go ahead and do it! You ask what crimes I committed? I shouldn't have helped out poor people! I shouldn't have not been a traitor! [referring to collaboration with the Japanese] I can't think of anything else! So whatever crime you say that'll be my crime!"

Li Ruzhen has become mayor again, and Xiao Mao is the deputy mayor. They were both for killing him, but then some elders of the Li clan begged them on their knees, "Please have mercy! He is over sixty years old!" Then they demanded $500 in cash from him. Only then was his life spared.'

"Then everyone wanted to know about Baigou, and Erniu started to cry. She said, 'They've worked him over so you can hardly recognize him! It's not known whether he'll live or die. That day when they went to arrest everybody, Xiaoxi himself went to grab Baigou. He told Baigou to walk, but Baigou's leg still hasn't healed from the injury he got from the Japanese, and he couldn't walk for anything. So Xiaoxi stabbed his good leg a couple of times with his knife and the blood just ran everywhere, on his pants, his socks, the bed, the floor, everywhere. Afterwards he sent two men to carry him still bloody to the temple and had my grandfather and father tied up. The next day while he was having some other people put to death he sent someone to tell Qiaoqiao [Baigou's young wife] that he would spare the lives of the family if only she would sleep with him for a month. Qiaoqiao couldn't hide anywhere and in the end was snatched away. He browbeat the child into sleeping with him for one night and then, fortunately, his wife made a big row about it - his wife is Li Ruzhen's wife's family's niece, right? He just couldn't afford to provoke them and so he didn't go back to Qiaoqiao.'"
In comparison with the previous selection, this passage is much more loosely structured as befitting the narrative abilities of an untutored villager. It lacks the tight interweaving of alternating points of view, modes, and functional classes. That is, the mode is always that of telling; except in the case noted above, the point of view is always external, the narrative functions are all situative (or, more specifically, action or story oriented). It presents through the simple, naive point of view of a peasant eyewitness a stark and shocking picture of wholesale violence committed by Chinese against Chinese, neighbor against neighbor. The choice of point of view has a great deal to do with the impact of the picture presented: whereas a presentation from the point of view of a sophisticated and impersonal narrator may be subject to accusations of calculatedly biased hyperbole, this spontaneous report coming from a potential victim of the violence is credible in its very simplicity and naivety. Erniu's testimony has the effect of corroborating the narrator's previous sketches of Power Class iniquity and even suggests that these sketches were perhaps not drawn harshly enough.

Whether an authenticity effect figured in the author's calculations or not, the introduction of the direct peasant perspective on the narrated events pertains to more basic, technical pursuits. Zhao had drawn discriminately from the May Fourth heritage he had acquired during his school days in Changzhi. Like the May Fourth writers, he had repudiated antiquated literature of backward consciousness, literature that wallowed in sentimentalism, superstition, preternaturalism, sensationalism, and pointless propriety. He had rejected the petrified conventions hindering the narrative form handed down over the centuries and emulated instead the May Fourth writers in his choice of serious themes that were socially and politically oriented. Unlike the May Fourth writers, however, he had not completely jettisoned tradition. As the literary elite pursued modernism and Westernization, the rest of the population - urban and rural alike - had retained its traditional aesthetic sensibilities, molded since the Song dynasty upon the framework of oral storytelling. This fact pressed
upon Zhao's consciousness when he discovered the necessity of explaining and defending the merits of the May Fourth literature to his father, and he realized the futility of contravening basic artistic concepts that had been cultivated for centuries. His intimate experience in the art of storytelling placed him in the unique position (that is, unique among the progressive, politically conscious writers) of knowing precisely which of the anciently proven narrational elements retained their potency in the power to attract and which had outlived their usefulness. It may be hypothesized that these two types of elements found their differences respectively in universality and peculiarity. The elements that comprise Li Vilisga, then, must be regarded in terms of the author's choice to adhere to the principles of storytelling while yet applying himself to the form of the modern novel. Turning situative narrative temporarily over to a character is a manifestation of this choice and is a device ensconced within the larger storytelling principle of story priority.

The character-narrator, of course, frequents the pages of world literature, appearing in countless works that are more often than not unassociated with the storytelling tradition. Distinction must be made, however, between character imparted episodes that comprise the relatively independent texts of framed narrative - the story within a story - and the non-autonomous summarizations produced by Zhao's characters. The former are complete, internally integrated stories that may hold their own when excerpted from the central story, as for example, Scheherazade's tales in the Thousand and One Nights, the narratives in the Decameron, Ivan Ivanych's story of his brother in Checkov's "Gooseberries," or Katerina Ivanova's narrative in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment. In length and complexity they contrast sharply with Erniu's prosaic and brief outline of village violence: she capsulizes the events around familiar characters, extracts the most horrific details to convey the essence of the terror she witnessed. This further contrasts with character narration in traditional Chinese colloquial fiction in which it serves as a recapitulatory device. Unlike the
traditional character-narrator, who would, often meticulously, repeat for the benefit of a newly introduced character everything that had occurred up to that point in the story. Erniu discloses new information to both other characters and to the audience as well.

The demand set forth by the storytelling paradigm for continuous situative development, that is, for a concatenation of rapidly occurring events, combined with a demand for thematic concentration, motivate Erniu's truncated account as well as the very placement of the narrational burden upon the shoulders of the character. To understand the connection of the former of these two phenomena (i.e., Erniu's brevity) with story priority, it is necessary to first examine its relation to the question of variegated textual density in Chinese folk literature. A storytelling guideline states that finesse in detail should appear only when necessary, i.e., to impart a sense of reality to the reader or listener (Barth's "reality effect") or to leave a long lasting impression (Sternberg's "quantitative indicator"). A qualification or restriction is that the object of the detailing be directly related to the central theme. Under all other circumstances fine detailing impedes story progression and should be excluded for the sake of allowing the reader to finish the story in as short a time as possible.

Historically this compositional rule may be of relatively recent origin, for Zhao noted the tendency of professional storytellers in the past to frequently embellish trivialities with minute and lengthy descriptive detailing. He gave as example a case in which a storyteller, in his rendition of Xi xiang ji (西厢记) spent an entire week describing Yingying's attempt to enter through a series of doors. Hectic modern times, however, have abolished the prodigious amounts of leisure time required to sit through to the end of such lengthy performances. The modern consumers of oral tales, expressing their discontent over this style, have lost their taste for minutiae, just as the mass audience in the West no longer enjoys or has patience for the frequent and complicated digressions of a Laurence Sterne (Tristram Shandy).
This compositional rule indicates a selective popular abhorrence for detail that partially explains the peasant aversion to much of the May Fourth literature and Western translations. These "ultra-modern" works proved to be a source of irritation to peasant readers, who found their long passages of static referential narrative, background, scenery, external appearances, and psychological portraiture to be onerous and irrelevant. Incomprehensibility, too, entered the picture, especially when a work introduced itself with such passages, making it difficult if not impossible for the unsophisticated and time-pressed reader to pick up the story line. Peasant readers complained that the complicated nature of these works prevented them from committing the story to memory and lucidly organizing the traits and dispositions of the characters for the purpose of orally presenting them to their illiterate compatriots. What they regarded as tediousness produced a reluctance to return to a book once reading was interrupted, for to do so often meant the necessity to backtrack or even start over again for the sake of continuity.

Underneath these complaints reverberates the exasperated plea of the malcontent: "Skip the details and get on with the story!" Indeed, narrative aesthetic taste among the rural mass audience is grounded in the preponderance of story, which, being "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence," is the element that entices an audience by inciting the desire to find out what happens next. Although story is the base component common to all imaginative literature, the constraints applied to it in modern Western works of reputation spotlights its particular strength in the Chinese rural context, where it receives express emphasis. Because of their dominating story element, certain episodes in certain Chinese classical novels have always held an exceptional attraction for the peasant audience: the story of Jiang Gan stealing the letter (chap. 45), the conflagration at Red Cliff that destroys Cao Cao's war machine, and the "borrowing" of the enemy's arrows on straw laden boats, all episodes in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*; and the story of Wu Song killing the tiger and Song Jiang's
three attacks on Zhu Village (chaps 47–50) in Water Margin, remain ever popular.

It is this desire for story that inspires the selective application of detail and its converse, capsulized narration or "sketchiness," such as that seen in Erniu's account. "Storyness" requires a certain portion of "sketchiness," for a focus upon details results in temporal deceleration and a delay in the forward progression of the story. The introduction of such a delay may prove fatal to the further transference of the work from writer to reader. According to Zhao's own concept of narrative effect, the impression that remains after reading a literary piece resembles that which remains after viewing a painting rich in realistic detail. The viewer, especially the non-discriminating viewer, will not recall individual blades of grass, but rather will retain an impression of the work's outstanding features. A painting, though, is a visual event; viewed however cursorily, it can be taken in at a glance in its entirety, and the viewer will be left with a certain impression however deep or superficial. Narrative, being a temporal art, depends upon the reader's or listener's tenacity in following it through to the end before it can similarly impress him. A reader lost to frustration or boredom, then, will not gain even the advantage that the most cursory of glances at a painting would afford him. "Sketchiness" is designed to forestall the loss of an audience, to ensure that events continue to occur with relative rapidity, thereby seducing the audience into continuing through to the end. Its usage in conjunction with selective detailing may explain the perception that some have of "marked variations in narrative density" in Zhao's writing.

Difficult to overlook is the fact that the situation Erniu described inherently contains material suitable for extended narration. From appealing to the basest animal instincts by capitalizing upon the wholesale violence, to presenting a contained socio-historical panorama, to creating complex psychological studies of individual participants, the potential for expansion is unlimited. In the context of consumer demands, far from destroying "storyness," manipulation of the intrigues and atrocities that the
villagers suffered would by virtue of its shock value alone have contributed to its perpetration. In the context of political demands, such a treatment would have appropriately contributed to the vilification of the local landlord clique. Consumer and political considerations, however, defer to the compositional demand that elaboration—detailing—not overpower or wander away from the central theme. The focus being upon emancipation, there remains little room for a lengthy elaboration upon the sufferings of the villagers (which would rely upon morbid fascination for its strength) or of the wickedness of the landlords (which would play upon a sense of moral superiority), both of which fill the role of subordinate themes in the work as a whole. Here, quantity of narration has been manipulated specifically to reinforce the supportive nature of these essential but secondary themes.

Through relinquishing responsibility for the account of village terrorism to Erniu, the narrator achieves the required brevity while avoiding accusations of withholding information. To the role of narrator is attached a duty to uphold the confidence of the audience. A narrator is bound by his own integrity as a narrator to relate all facts known to him that concern the object of his narration. Deliberate suppression of facts violates audience trust, vitiates his own credibility, and amounts to an abrogation of narrative obligation. Even the most restricted “camera-eye” narrator bears the same responsibility as does the completely unlimited omniscient narrator, who “has no right to exploit his superior position by keeping back from us whatever he likes simply because it happens to suit his artistic purposes that we should not know it for the time being or at all.”

A narrator who owns that he has witnessed a bloodbath—and this he does by virtue of imparting his own point of view to his narration of it—cannot expect to satisfy his audience with an abridged reiteration of its largest details. The shock and curiosity that tend to dominate an audience confronted with a large scale disaster require for their diffusion a cathartic treatment of relative length and detail. The ab-
sence of such treatment may leave the audience murmuring with reproach as the narrator prematurely moves on to another subject. On the other hand, lack of an eyewitness experience provides immunity from such audience disapprobation. The narrator in such a case is as dependent upon secondary sources as is the audience, which has no choice but to gratefully accept whatever amount and kind of information he has been able to glean. In order to maneuver himself into just such a blameless position, the narrator of *Li Village* renounces much of the power that comes with multifariousness by accepting the restrictions that result from physically attaching himself to select characters. He places upon himself physical restraints which prevent him from flitting unfettered from place to place disobeying the physical laws of movement and spatial occupation: he moves along with his characters and is subject to the same temporal limitations as they. In accompanying the young men who flee the village he removes himself from the subsequent scene of terror, thereby circumventing the responsibility of reporting it. Erniu substitutes for him as the eyewitness, and as an ordinary person with no particularly outstanding articulatory abilities, she can deliver the brevity the narrator requires but which he dare not personally pursue. This compositional machination reveals itself in the narrator’s application of the ultimate in “sketchiness” in his treatment of the actual period of wandering: one line, which states, “They wandered for four or five days until they came to a little mountain village.” Thus, the decision to accompany the fugitives yields no significant events or turns in the plot other than the receipt of news of Xiao Chang’s death and the chance meeting with Erniu. Indeed, following her report, the narrator declines to continue on with the young men, choosing instead to remain with Erniu when they depart for further travels.

“Sketchiness,” then, serves as a preventative; it harnesses a situation which if developed would digress too far from the central theme and block continuous story progression. At the same time it allows the situation in question to be introduced into
the body of the work rather than eliminated, thereby contributing to the rapidly moving panorama of events that story thrives upon. In tandem with the contrastive technique of detailing, it carries on a symbiotic relationship that ensures that the narrative becomes neither a superficial string of events nor a pedantically plodding discourse. The interest to be found in a passage featuring "sketchiness" derives as much from *previous detailing* as it does from the content of the passage itself. The characters depicted in detailed passages in the past become the vital points of interest in the present, a principle that governs a great portion of the success of sketchy passages that convey the events subsequent to those characters' introductions.

**Immediate Scene**

The performance of the detailing vital to the individuation of characters most often involves concentration upon objectively observable actions. The observations may be strictly through the point of view of the narrator or through the eyes of another character. In the former of these strategies, the narrator takes up a crucial position at a crucial time as an invisible observer and selectively relates only what is immediately apparent to his eye. When characters act as observers, their perceptions serve not only to build an image of the character under observation but also to foster the characterization of the observer. In Zhao's writings that which is immediately apparent almost always has to do with human activity, rarely with environment. Thus, the "dramatic mode" dominates the unfolding of immediate scene.

The ability of the "dramatic mode" to "reproduce in the reader's mind a moment of revelation" combines with Zhao's colorful and vivid interpretations to generate the memorable hearing (trial) scene of chapter one, excerpted as follows:

After the pancakes were eaten and the tables pushed together, the mayor took up his position in the main seat. The mediator, who was the owner of the Fushunchang Store, Wang Anfu, sat next to the mayor, while all the others seated themselves according to rank. Xiao Mao said, "Let's begin! Sir, as the plaintiff, you speak first!"
Chunxi said, "Alright, I'll speak first!" Saying this he moved his seat forward a bit, rolled up the sleeves on both arms, sat very erect, and said, "Outside of Zhang Tiesuo's south wall is an old outhouse of mine...."

"Yours?!" Tiesuo interjected.

Li Ruzhen scolded, "What are you doing? You don't understand a bit about rules and order! You speak when it's your turn!" He turned toward Chunxi again and motioned to him with his lips, "Continue!"

Chunxi continued, "There is a small mulberry tree beside the outhouse. There hasn't been a single year when I've been able to lay my hands on the mulberry leaves. As soon as the new leaves appear someone comes along and picks them. Yesterday, just before sundown, my wife went to gather the leaves from this mulberry tree. Zhang Tiesuo's woman said that she was stealing their mulberry leaves and blocked her way, refusing to let her go. Just as I was on my way home from school I ran into them. Only after I scolded her did she let go. Just as I was on my way home from school I ran into them. Only after I scolded her did she let go. At first I was going to go look up Zhang Tiesuo and tell him to control his woman, but afterwards I thought it wasn't worth the trouble to pursue such a trifle. What's the point of lowering myself to her level for the sake of argument? So I didn't go see him after all. This morning as soon as I went out the door, I saw that the mulberry tree was gone, so I went to go find Tiesuo. When I got to his place I said, 'Tiesuo! Who chopped down the small mulberry tree by the outhouse?' His wife said, 'I did!' And I said, 'Why did you chop down my mulberry tree?' She said, 'Yours? You go ask around whose it is?' I thought, why should I ask anybody about what belongs to me? It's because of this that I went to ring the [temple] bell, to ask everyone to ask him on my behalf. That's all I have to say. Let him speak now and explain why he chopped down the tree!"

Li Ruzhen motioned to Tiesuo with his lips, "Zhang Tiesuo! It's your turn. Why did you chop down his tree?"

Tiesuo said, "How come you are saying that it's his tree, too?"

Li Ruzhen said, "I'm the one who asks questions around here, not you! You outsiders really have no sense of propriety! You've been here for three generations and still haven't been socialized!"

Xiao Mao instructed Tiesuo, "Just go ahead and tell your side of the story. Why should you want to start out by conducting a verbal duel with the mayor?"

Tiesuo said, "Right, right. I'll tell my side: I did not plant this mulberry tree, it just came up by itself. But since it's growing beside my outhouse, doesn't that make it mine? But I never get a chance to gather the leaves because somebody always steals them first...."

Li Ruzhen said, "Keep it simple! You're getting way off the track!"

Tiesuo said, "Well, he didn't exactly stay on the track himself!"

Xiao Mao said, "There you go again! Did you come here to tell your side of the story or to fight with the mayor?"

Tiesuo said, "Why won't you let me say anything?"

The owner of the Fushunchang Store, Wang Anfu, said, "Alright! Alright! We're not getting anywhere like this. The way I see it, the matter at dispute is the ownership of the outhouse. I think we should do it like
this: Yaatang! [Formal name of Chunxi] You say the outhouse is yours - 
what proof do you have?"

Chunxi said, "It’s part of my ancestral estate - what more proof do I 
need than that?"

Wang Anfu directed the question to Tiesuo, "And you, Tiesuo, what 
proof do you have?"

Tiesuo said, "His grandfather sold both the courtyard and the outhouse 
to my grandfather. I have a deed." He pulled the document out from his 
shirt and handed it to Wang Anfu.

Everyone gathered around to look at the document, but all Li Ruzhen 
did was to look at Chunxi.

A work that excludes the inner or hidden life leaves as the only avenue of charac­
terization the reader’s own deductions based upon the characters’ actions. Although 
the exposure accorded to Zhao’s characters relies not upon exclusive exteriority, the 
outer life does indeed dominate. Where it is exclusive, as in the above scene, is where 
both successful and irreprovable use of Barthe’s “hermeneutic code” may occur: 
limited to the outer life of his characters the narrator lacks the competence to expound 
upon a character’s motivations and machinations. Restricted to the objectively observ­
able, he can only present a picture imperfectly formed in its incipient stage. In its 
incompleteness it may veil the truth just as a camera may ingenuously picture a lie. If 
in the beginning the above passage circumstantially projects an image of impartial 
justice at work, Li Ruzhen’s inappropriate stare at Chunxi completes the picture and 
finally draws out from the reader the realization that Tiesuo is the victim of an in­
trigue.

Here, besides the more prosaic ploy of animating audience sympathies and re­
sentments through the weight of its own conclusions, the narrator has also embarked 
upon a systemic expression of an attitude toward those whose personal agendas impose 
a diminished existence upon others. The technical rendition of this attitude will soon 
become clear. As the narrative proceeds, the reader compiles his list of anti-social 
schemers. By the end of the above passage, it only contains two names, those of Li 
Ruzhen and Chunxi. Xiao Mao, whose earlier gentle reproof to Tiesuo not to aggravate
the mayor seemed to characterize him as Tiesuo's friend and sympathizer, inflates the list when a surprised Tiesuo calls him up on a lie. Xiaoxi's post-hearing activities—celebration and further plotting—place him definitively upon the list, that is, if his beating of Erniu and his rude words to Tiesuo during the hearing had not already made his position obvious.

The image eventually conjured up by this assemblage of characters is that of a clique of rapacious connivers who reduce others to objects of expediency. It is an image that recurs repeatedly throughout the work in the style of a "theme and variations": the setting and circumstances may change but the image remains almost identical to that which arises out of the first one and a half chapters, even up to the moment of Li Ruzhen's gruesome death. Only Xiao Mao's cowardice emerges along the way to distinguish him somewhat from the others. This points to a fundamental difference in the presentations of the good and bad characters. While the narrator repeats and reinforces the original noxious image of the collective anti-hero whenever its representatives appear on stage, his handling of the collective hero involves moderate character development of individuals beyond the initial image they project and/or the simple invocation of their names as various new situations arise.

The characters that comprise the collective anti-hero, however, appear on the surface at least to maintain greater individuality. For although they too are dealt with in "sketchy" passages, they are more likely to appear in detailed scenes employing the dramatic mode. Long after Tiesuo has been absorbed into the mold of the collective hero and is no longer a major subject for detailing, these characters still star in dramatic scenes; for example, when the Self Defense Corps bursts into Li Ruzhen's house searching for Xiaoxi; or when the inspector, Li Ruzhen, and Xiao Mao connive to have Xiao Mao's confession retracted. Nevertheless, in spite of the greater amount of exposure accorded to them, they actually remain as truncated in personality as a Leng Yuan, an occasionally appearing populace character who is typed by his fearless but rash
remarks and actions.

Here the dramatic mode, a device suitable to the expression of multifaceted personalities, is confined to accentuating the one-dimensional. The imposition of this limitation declares a pointed lack of interest in the humanity of those who disturb the social welfare and specifically conveys the message that transgression upon the human rights of others can never be tolerated under any circumstance. To study all the facets of, say Li Ruzhen's personality, would be to discover his humanity and the truth that he like all humans is a conglomeration of good and evil. However, precluding the necessity for seeking the deep reasons for his undesirable behaviour is a philosophy that exalts self-regulatory responsibility and denies the validity of extenuating circumstance. In his manifestation of self-serving conduct, a Li Ruzhen can only personify evil, otherwise he would not assault other members of his society, and the only option, therefore, is to regard him in the wrapps of caricature.

Awareness of the diffusion of good and evil in actual human beings may also explain Zhao's avoidance of further characterization of individual members of the populace. Zhao's "good" characters, including the charismatic cadre Xiao Chang, are not the idealistic epitomes of goodness that often populate revolutionary romances. The audience simply is not permitted to get to know them well enough to discover their shortcomings. Even the caricatures of the collective anti-hero are not complete caricatures. We see these characters only while they are plotting in favor of themselves, never in any other circumstances such as home life with parents, children, wives, and perhaps concubines. It may be assumed that their familial interactions are mutually satisfactory, in which case depiction of it would run counter to and weaken the necessary caricature of evil. The unspoken or hidden assumption of such contradictory attributes in both the "good" and the "bad" characters means that Zhao's novel must be regarded as abstractly realistic.
Immediate scene emerges when the focus is upon the details ensconced within a moment or within a definite and relatively short period of time. Zhao renders immediate scene through a variety of ways just as variety characterizes his summary narration. In the above example of the “dramatic mode” type of immediate scene, a full account is given of every passing moment, primarily through dialogue. In the following excerpt, the narrator continues to restrict himself to reporting only the external aspects of all the events discernible to himself, but retains the privilege of knowing some background information, such as the past military experience of the newly hired guards. Again, a full account of all the events that filled the time involved is given, although dialogue does not play the dominant role it did in the example above. Instead, the narrator often gives an indirect account of what was said and describes the actions of the characters. The scene depicts Xiaoxi, now an officer in Yan Xishan’s army, and his chief of staff preparing to impress another more highly ranked officer who is about to arrive at their office:

“The next morning the chief of staff arrived before even having had breakfast. The first thing he did was to ask how the preparations were coming along, and then afterwards he ate at headquarters. With breakfast finished, he lay on the bed as before with Xiaoxi to smoke opium while planning out the means of dealing with this Robin Hood. Xiaoxi held forth on the handling of such people — how you had to combine so much pomp with so much politeness, so much generosity with so much self-interest. The chief of staff was in complete agreement with him. With their deliberations on this matter settled, their conversation turned to small-talk as they awaited the calling card that the guards posted outside would bring in to them.

“Outside, the two guards, who were new to the military, were reveling in the novelty of wearing uniforms and carrying rifles, and they couldn’t resist playing around. First they practiced saluting each other, then they took turns pretending to be the chief of staff entering while the other saluted. Once, when one of them saluted, the other who was the chief of staff did not return the salute, and an argument ensued. The one playing chief of staff said, ‘I’m the chief of staff, so naturally whether I salute or not is up to me!’ The other one rejoined with, ‘You don’t even know to return a salute — what kind of a mother-fucking chief of staff are you?!’

“Just at that moment a rickshaw with one passenger pulled up and stopped in front of the guild hall and the passenger jumped off. When the two guards saw that someone was coming, they hastily put an end to their noise and once again took up their positions, but before they could ask for
identification from the guest, he asked of them, 'Is your superior in?' One of the guards answered, 'Yes! The chief of staff is in!' But before he could ask the guest where he was from, the guest, dispensing with all protocol, pushed right past them, shoulders thrown back and boots clattering.

"Xiaoxi had just tamped down his opium and was lighting it with a match when he heard the sound of someone entering the outer office. Thinking it was one of the guards, he paid no attention and kept on inhaling. Just when his throat was full of smoke, the guest lifted the door curtain. Xiaoxi saw that the person who came in was wearing a plain silk gown and a short mustache, and he knew that something was up. He hastily threw both his cigarette paper and his opium into the ashtray while silently cursing the guards. The chief of staff raised himself to a sitting position. As the guest entered he said, 'Which of you is in charge?' Xiaoxi noted his arrogance and hastily pointed to the chief of staff, calling upon the officiality of high title to deflate him a bit: 'This is the Chief of Staff of Division Headquarters!' Little did he know that this guest would not be in the least intimidated. With his lips the guest motioned to the chief of staff and asked, 'So you're the chief of staff?' And the chief of staff replied, 'Yes, I am. What can I do for you?' Without even waiting for an invitation to sit, the guest grabbed a chair beside the table, turned it around and sat down facing the chief of staff and said, 'I've come from Henan. Lao Huo has finished consultation with our boss and has sent me here with this requisition!' As he spoke he took out from his briefcase a letter more than a foot long and handed it to Xiaoxi. Xiaoxi handed it over to the chief of staff and ordered Tiesuo to pour tea. (Chapter 3)

The nature of this type of narrative may perhaps best be characterized by the label "summary immediate scene," for while it incites the visualization of specific images in the manner of immediate scene, it also contains certain aspects of summary narration, i.e., the summarized report of the conversation between Xiaoxi and the chief of staff in the first paragraph, and the domination of the narrator's attitudinal voice.

The narrator clearly enjoys depicting the actions and aspirations of all the actors as supremely silly and particularly relishes ridiculizing Xiaoxi. The point of view is strictly that of the narrator, even in the one instance when he uses his multifarious privilege to inform the audience of Xiaoxi's internal cursing. Since the narrator's underlying ideological point of view clashes with that of the actors, the exposure of Xiaoxi's internal reaction has the effect of further ridiculizing him rather than of inducing sympathy.
This excerpt also illustrates Zhao's striking excision of what Barthes calls "l'effet de réel," the pure representation of reality. The "reality effect" is the attempt to mirror a recognizable world through invocation of objects, actions, and dialogue which are neither integrated symbolically or thematically into the text, nor have any bearing on the plot. The selected passage reflects a general tendency throughout Zhao's works to exclude any item which plays no role other than to represent itself, for in relation to his intended audience, the nature of the environment is assumed. This explains the lack of "thematic emptiness" in his works. "Thematic emptiness" is a state brought about by descriptions which produce an objectively real world but which nonetheless are devoid of any apprehensible meaning, i.e., description which could conceivably induce a reader to ask the question, "Why is the author describing all this?" Zhao instead eliminates adjunctive description to produce a world where the meaning is clearly delineated and immediately graspable. Nothing is described or mentioned that does not relate to the furthering of the story or to the development of a character. If the narrator mentions a chair, it is to point out the disdain the guest feels toward Xiaoxi and the chief of staff when he unceremoniously moves it, symbolizing his arrogance, avowed superiority, and unaccountability (foreshadowed by the incompetent guard who refused to salute). If a bed appears in the text, it is to illustrate the sloth and decadence of Xiaoxi and the chief of staff; and the mention of the foot-long requisition list is to serve as a contrastive reference to the illusion of power and pomposity the two of them had hoped to create.

Zhao applies this principle of "compositional motivation" to the paragraphs which open the novel:

"In Li Village there is a Dragon King Temple, the keeper of which is called 'Lao Song.' Lao Song, of course, originally had a given name, but because of his advanced years, no one used it to address him. Furthermore, because of his low station in life, no one referred to him with any formal kind of address, and so everyone, from white-bearded old men to children who had just learned to talk, had always called him 'Lao Song.'"
"Eight or nine years before the Anti-Japanese War, the Dragon King Temple came to double as the village office building in addition to its use as a temple for offering sacrifices. Since the owner of the Xiudetang [family shrine], Li Ruzhen, was both the mayor of the village and a clan head, Lao Song also was assigned two jobs, that of village policeman and that of temple keeper.

"In the temple there hung a bell, of which Lao Song derived the greatest enjoyment out of hearing ring. For the ringing of this bell had two purposes: if it sounded only three times — that was always Lao Song himself ringing it, and it meant that someone was offering sacrifices. If it rang with an incessant clamor, that meant that someone was calling for the settlement of a dispute. Whenever someone offered sacrifices, Lao Song could get a meal out of the offerings; and whenever someone wanted a dispute settled, Lao Song could eat a pancake."

In setting the stage with a mere outline of the village Dragon King Temple, the narrator already reveals the nature of his inscribed audience: it is comprised of individuals who through their intimate acquaintance with their own version of that structure are eminently capable of perceiving its detailed lineaments without benefit of description. As the only prop necessary to the action, this spare adumbration establishes the tone for a focus upon human activity. It declares the minimal importance of the physical environment, the ascendancy of the human environment. Indeed, following upon the first line is an immediate metonymic progression from the temple to the temple keeper. In leaving his physical attributes undefined except for the fact that his is the mien of a man advanced in years, the terse introduction to Lao Song not only again affirms the insider status of the inscribed audience, but also proclaims the narrative’s exclusive concern with the essence of his humanity. Though declining to expatiate upon appearance, it yet succeeds in amplifying the visual through select facts about the old man. For instance, that his given name has been forgotten, that an honorific title eludes him, that the origin of his moniker is low social status rather than affectionate familiarity: these serve to modulate his image with the lineaments of the downtrodden and the disdained. The subsequent revelation of his refined sense of appreciation for the tintinnabulation of the temple bell further embellishes that image with
the expectant look of one dependent upon erratically forthcoming handouts (one almost expects him to salivate!). With almost no direct description, the passage has conjured up an impressionistic image of a temple with a bell and an old man, thin and pathetic in his waiting for the ringing sound that would bring him a meal. The technique may be likened to the bare outline props that characterize the state play *Equus*, or to the suggestion of riding a horse through the stylized motion of a riding crop in Peking Opera, or, in drawing, to a few deftly curved lines which capture not only the physical form of a cat, but the very essence of "catness." The lines filling the canvas are generalized, abstractly realistic, uncluttered with detail: this could be a picture of any temple and any temple-keeper in any village of China.

The following passage, excerpted from chapter three, exemplifies one of the few instances in which Zhao does undertake detailed description of a character's environment. The scene unfolds after Tiesuo, on an opium-buying mission for his employer, Xiaoxi, arrives at Wu Ye's mansion:

"... Since the person whom he had come to see was not there, Tiesuo could only wait. He sat down on a small stool behind the door and idly watched the people in the room.

Pushed into the southwest corner of the room was a bed, in the center of which was placed a lamp. Two people were lying on the bed, one short with the sharp mouth of a monkey, the other with caved-in eye sockets. On the edge of the bed sat another person whose neck extended outwards like that of a duck; he was leaning an elbow against Monkey Mouth's leg and looking at Cave Eyes. In Cave Eyes' hand was a sheet of gold foil from the inside of a cigarette box and also a rolled cardboard tube about the thickness of a finger. He pushed a little of the opium onto the gold foil and then clambered up to put it on top the lamp to roast, and holding the little paper tube in his mouth, he approached the roasting opium and inhaled. The three of them passed it from one to the other. The room was not large and to the east of the bed were a tea table and two small stools, all pushed up against the base of the east wall. On the table was a brass bowl filled with chunks of sliced watermelon. On the stool to the east side was sitting big fat square-faced fellow with a white gown draped over his shoulders and an unbottoned undershirt that exposed a blubbery belly. On the bench to the west side sat a youth with parted hair, wearing a gown of imported cotton cloth. His waist was pinched in tightly and he sat straight as a ramrod. Seated facing one another, they were eating watermelon. Fatty was gulping in big bites, Slurp! Slurp! He chomped and sucked it in, chin and nose
drilling into the melon and seeds endlessly dropping off his chest. Ramrod chose a different style of eating. He had cut the large chunks up into little half-moons, and picking one up he arched his neck over it and ate from one corner to the other, like a mouse eating a peanut."

The overall rarity of detailed environmental description accentuates those instances of it which do occur: deviation from the general pattern of ignoring contextual minutiae signifies meaning beyond the simple provision of a setting or the pursuit of verisimilitude ("reality effect"). Unlike the above examples of immediate scene, this instance reaches the audience through the character's point of view, not the narrator's, transforming it into a rendition of Tiesuo's startled consciousness. Normally unobservant and oblivious of his surroundings, Tiesuo has been confronted with a sight so drastically contrastive to what he is accustomed that he can only surrender his mind and senses to the impact of the scene. Environmental representation has become reflective of the character's perceptions, inner state, intrinsic nature. His naive sensibility has been initiated into the ways of the sophisticated world. Undoubtedly the narrator also calculates the naivety of an inscribed audience which, having never seen the inside of an opium den, cannot help but be fascinated by the exotic if repulsive nature of self-degradation.

The excerpted passages, requisitioned for close examination from among the novel's most tenaciously memorable, display mechanisms of a singular poetics (Steinbeck's "psychological tricks"\textsuperscript{55} ) that contribute to the constellation of attributes that define the "Zhao Shuli style":

- The storyteller as multifarious narrator who ranges from omniscience to strict objectivity, ingeniously validating each gradation through shifts in point of view.
- Revelation of character traits and sometimes even physical appearance through objective observation, subtle modulations in point of view, or selected facts in the fictional public domain.
- Pressing narrative elements into a kind of double duty that produces visuals without the use of description.

- Presentation of characters in a way that reflects the values, attitudes, and prejudices of those around them, revealing thereby a society unconcerned with the whole truth about them or with fairness in assessment.

- Character development through incorporating fragments of sentient experiences into the objective unfolding of event.

- The compression of a complex of event and human response to it into passages of terse vivid density.

- The use of structural allegory to reflect social truths.

- Restrained treatment of the evils perpetrated by negative characters that approaches the level of understatement.

- Shunning of the prolix and the Baroque in favor of succinct, cleanly drawn representations.

- Concentration upon traits which comprise the *sine qua non* of each character that thrust him or her into the narrative.

- Limitation of description to the function of character development.

- Counterpointing summary narrative with immediate scene.

The analyses pursued in previous chapters, while revealing some of these attributes, have also clarified yet others which complete the picture:

- Vivifying summary narrative with fragments of immediate scene.

- A tone of naivety that conceals tabooed insights.

- Showcasing in dialogue the idiom of Shanxi peasants and incorporating dialect terms in the narrative while maintaining the all-encompassing communicability of standard *putonghua*.

- Exploiting regional imprints while delineating a social milieu of nationwide implications.

It was apparently highly appreciated in the Soviet Union, where in the early 1950's one could find it displayed in the foreign literature bookshop alongside Ding Ling's award winning novel, The Sun Shines Over the Sanggan River, both in Russian and covered in fine red binding with gilt edging. (Zhu Ziqi朱子奇, "Mosike tongxun"莫斯科通讯, quoted in Ding Miao, 1971.)

It also found popularity in Japanese villages. The Japanese writer, Sugiura Mimpei (杉浦道明), once noted: "It is not only young people who are attracted by Li Village. I saw with my own eyes sixty year old women as well as elementary school students in [Japanese] villages impatiently waiting in the evenings for someone to read it aloud to them chapter by chapter.” (Quoted in Chen Jiaguans陈嘉冠, "Zhao Shuli de xiaoshuo zai Riben," Fenshui, 1980, no. 9, pp. 60-62 (see p. 60).)

This discussion has intentionally abandoned the terms protagonist and antagonist because of the multiplicity of both good and bad characters of equal import. The term "protagonist" assumes a major character who is both good and unique, while "antagonist" refers to the second most important character, who opposes the protagonist. In the novel neither are the good characters unique nor are the bad characters secondary. The term "hero," bearing the qualities of "protagonist," and the term "anti-hero," which is generally applied to a main character of undesirable and even wicked qualities, are readily available terms which are appropriate for adaptation to the contrastive juxtaposition of the numerous characters in this novel.


Quan Lin (Shao Quanlin) and Ge Qin桂琴, "Lijiazhuang de bianqian," Wenxue zuopin xuandu文学作品选读, Sanlian shudian, 1949, pp. 304-310.

"Ibid., p. 266.

10 Ibid., p. 263.

11 Ibid., p. 274.

12 Ibid., p. 275.


14 Norman Friedman, “Point of View in Fiction, the Development of a Critical Concept,” *PMLA* 70, 1955, pp. 1160-1184 (see p. 1169).

15 Zhao has almost nothing to say on the subject of Japanese atrocities committed against Chinese. All atrocities that take place in Li Village are perpetrated by other Chinese. When Erniu finally comes down from the mountain to visit her parents still in the village, she does so knowing that the Japanese hold the surrounding territory, making passage much safer than when the KMT or Yan Xishan’s troops were in control.


18 A.W. Friedman, pp. 3-4.
Wm. Hinton’s *Fenshen*, an account of land reform in a southeastern Shanxi village, documents that those peasants identified as “middle peasants” held on the average 6.4 mou of land per capita. Tiesuo owned 15 mou while his family consisted only of himself, his wife, and their infant son. This means an average of five to seven and one half mou of land per family member depending on whether or not the infant is figured in the calculations. A “Longbow” Village poor peasant in Fenshen owned on the average three mou of land, which is to be compared with Tiesuo’s total of five mou (an average of 1 2/3 to 2 1/2 mou per person) that remained to him after he payed off his debts. (See William Hinton, *Fenshen*, New York, Vintage Books, 1966, p. 592)

There exist a number of parallels between Tiesuo’s life and that of his creator that suggest that Zhao modeled Tiesuo to some extent upon his own experiences. Zhao’s family is known to have owned 16 mou of land, a great deal of which was lost when the family was required to take out a number of usurious loans. According to the official view, this dropped the family status from middle peasant to poor peasant (Huang Xiuji, p. 180). Zhao further resembles his character in that he spent a period of homeless wandering in pursuit of economic stability, although Zhao’s peripatetic experience lasted seven years while Tiesuo remained only one year in Taiyuan. A further parallel is seen in the fact that the first person to join the communist party branch in Changzhi was surnamed Chang (黃姓)，(Huang Xiuji, p. 182), which suggests that he exerted certain influence upon Zhao, who also joined later. The man who introduces Tiesuo to communism is also named Chang.


25 N. Friedman, pp. 1167-1180.

26 Ibid., p. 1182.

27 One might question the usefulness of going through an elaborate analysis of technique or point of view to discover the values and attitudes of a work in which they are self-evident, as they are in *Li Village*. However, such an approach might be fruitful when applied to a work in which the author seems to be at war with himself, as Zhao’s “Mutual Validation.”

28 Tomashevsky, pp. 66-67; italics added.

W.L. Idema, Chinese Vernacular Fiction, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1974, p. xii.

Uspensky, pp. 151-155.


The "quantitative indicator" refers to the tendency of an audience "to be impressed by length - to give most importance to, and remember best, what takes longest to tell" (see Ann Moore, "Review of Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction, by Meir Sternberg," Comparative Literature 31, Fall 1979, pp. 426-428.) The notion contrasts with Zhao’s use of "vivification" to achieve the same effect.

Zhao Shuli, "Sanliwan xiezuo qianhou," in Zhao Shuli wenji, vol. 4, pp. 1481-1492 (see pp. 1489-1490); Feng Jiannan, p. 19.

Zhao Shuli, "Sanliwan xiezuo qianhou," p. 1490.

Sternberg (p. 285), taking the cue from Henry James, comments upon expository narrative: "As both the form and the introductory mode of the expository material lay bare its 'merely referential,' purely informational function, its assimilation is rendered excessively irritating and arduous. To be forced to digest a mass of antecedents is unpleasant enough, even when its intercalation is realistically motivated; but to have it thrust down one's throat for no other purpose than the purely expository is even worse." See Meir Sternberg, Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Ba Ren, "Lüe lun Zhao Shuli tongzhi de chuangzuo" (The Analysis of Zhao Shuli’s Creative Works), Wen yi bao, 1958, no. 11, pp. 10-13 (see p. 11); Liu Panxi, "Zhao Shuli de chuangzuo zai wenxueshi shang de yi yi" (The Significance of Zhao Shuli’s Creative Works in Cultural History), in Zhao Shuli zhu jia (1979), pp. 177-188 (see pp. 185-186); Quan Lin and Ge Qin, p. 309.
39 Hou Jinjing, "Xiaoshuo de minzu xingshi, pingshu he Liehuojing" 小说的民族形式，评论和“烈火金刚”; in Hou Jinjing wenyi pinglun xuanji 侯金镜文艺评论选集, Beijing, Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1979, pp. 135-145 (see p. 135).


42 Chen Qingshan.


46 Sternberg, p. 283.

47 N. Friedman, p. 1178.

48 Ibid., p. 1182.

49 Forster, p. 45.

50 The “hermeneutic code,” as proposed by Roland Barthes, includes those components of fictional narrative which promote enigma and/or suspense and lead to resolution of this enigma and/or suspense. Barthes own application of this code to literary analysis indicates that it also includes the intention to create surprise. See Barthes’ S/Z, translated by Richard Miller, New York, Hill and Wang, 1974, pp. 17-19.

51 N. Friedman, p. 1170.

52 Culler, p. 193.

53 Ibid., p. 194.

54 Tomashevsky, p. 78.

CHAPTER VIII
Overview of the Fictional World, Part I:
The New Society and Its Legacy of Tyranny

Alazon Women

The most conspicuous of Zhao's literary achievements, outside his inscription of rustic colloquial prose, has been his amplification of the comic peasant figure. San Xiangu (三仙姑), Er Zhuge (诸葛), Changyouli (常有理), Nengbugou (能不短), Hututu (胡涂涂), Xiaotuiteng (小糊涂), and Chibubao (吃不饱) are all characters who found a facile route into the literate popular consciousness. Judged, classified, and appropriately nicknamed by the other members of their respective fictional village societies, their eccentricities have made them the most memorable, if not always the most important, of all Zhao's characters.

Sanxiangu, or Third Fairy, the character who must be granted the status of protagonist in "Xiao Erhei Gets Married," received her colorful sobriquet when at the age of 15 she embraced the career of "channeling," that branch of spiritualism in which the medium summons up at will a specific spirit of the long-dead which purportedly strives to transmit its messages to the living. In the same story Er Zhuge, or Zhuge the Second, also known in early versions of the story as Er Kongming (二孔明), acquired his nickname because his constant consultation of such revelational devices as tossed coins and the Book of Changes reminded fellow villagers of the famous character, Zhuge Liang (a.k.a. Kongming), in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, whose success at warfare derived from his following the advice of oracles. The nickname was an ironic reference, for Er Zhuge's adherence to the results of his divinations tended to
yield debacles as much as they did successes.

Changyouli, or Always Right; Nengbugou, or Audacious; and Hututu, or Muddlehead, are all familially related characters in the novel *Sanlian*. Always Right’s nickname stems from her vehement and articulate claims to righteousness and propriety even when truth lay in precisely the opposite direction. Her younger sister, Audacious, received her nickname because of her active defiance of the duties and demeanours expected of wives and daughters-in-law, as well as her habit of manipulating others for personal gain, at times provoking unanticipated results detrimental to herself. Muddlehead, who is Always Right’s husband and whose real name is Ma Duoshou (麻多手), first became associated with the word “muddlehead” because of a song containing it which he used to sing constantly. The word later gelled into a nickname when he once, through nervousness and ignorance, botched the term “mutual aid team” at a crowded village meeting, uttering instead a series of nonsense syllables.

Xiaotuiteng, or Leg Pains, and Chibubao, or Hunger Pangs, characters in the short story “Tempering,” came to be so known because they cited with obvious falsity health reasons for not participating in field labour for the agricultural cooperative on which they live. The former feigns pain and affects a limp as the supposed legacy of an old injury to her lower leg, and the latter claims to be weakened from malnutrition as a result of a starvation-level personal grain allotment.

All of these characters may be regarded in terms of the classic *a/azon*, the obstructing character of the comic mythos. Third Fairy, Er Zhuge, Always Right, and Muddlehead all scheme to prevent their respective children from marrying the person of their choice, which was the typical role of the *a/azon* in the classical comedy of western culture. Audacious, Always Right’s sister, plays a variation on this theme by instigating her daughter’s divorce. And although Leg Pains and Hunger Pangs are not involved in a marriage intrigue, they play the role of obstructionists to a smooth transition to a new society, one in which people organize themselves into collective labor.
arrangements. As Northrup Frye points out, all classic comedy involves a movement from an old society to a new one (see note 1).

In terms of the traits of “braggart” or “imposter” that are associated with the alazon, the women here fit the classic role more perfectly than do the men. All of them make themselves conspicuous in their society by talking or behaving in a manner inconsistent with society’s expectations. Third Fairy, Leg Pains, and Hunger Pangs are all obvious imposters that the other members of their society can see through clearly. Always Right publicly personates the shrewish wife while her husband, Muddlehead, cultivates the image of the henpecked husband to escape social involvement. In private, however, it is he for the most part who dominates her. Audacious presents herself as the master manipulator while in actuality her machinations are often not well thought out and result in disaster.

In their role as imposters, the women are often unabashedly vocal, employing a decible level that draws to them a concentration of attention greater than that normally encountered in small village life. Third Fairy, for instance, loudly weeps and wails one evening as she treks over to Er Zhuge’s house on the other side of the village. She tops off her performance by bursting through his door and physically assaulting him, demanding to know what he has done with her daughter (he has done nothing with her). Leg Pains suddenly barges in upon an informal meeting of cadres in the village office, shouting at and nearly attacking the one who had criticised her falsified medical problem in a satiric kueibei he had posted in public. Always Right publicly displays her displeasure with her son in a loud fit of uncoiled anger and shamelessly employs her rhetorical skills to deny in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary her daughter-in-law’s accusations of abuse. Audacious, who is the real termigent in contrast to Always Right’s pretense, harangues her husband in the field for supposedly slandering her, while Hunger Pangs so obviously mistreats her husband that he becomes the butt of the joke among his friends.
In other words, the nicknamed women impress the observer as overbearing and 
calculatedly, even vulgarly, self-centered, wreaking havoc in their homes as well as 
disturbing the peace in their society. The nicknamed men, by contrast, are ingenuous-
ly droll in their eccentricities and express their self-centeredness in more subdued, if 
tenacious, manners. While the women are virulent, the men are merely deluded. 
While the women exhibit repugnant personality flaws, the men manifest quaint recal-
citrance. Er Zhuge, whose superstition and ardent belief in the oracle drives him to 
interfere in his son’s choice of a bride, amuses the audience through his display of ex-
aggerated fear. The villagers deride him but do not think ill of him. Muddlehead, who is 
charmed with the traditional ideal of a large, wealthy, and self-sufficient multi-genera-
tional family under one roof, strives to keep his property holdings intact and his four sons under his control. This becomes increasingly difficult for him in 
the face of mounting social pressure to join the agricultural cooperative and allow, at 
the very least, his sons to be socially engaged even if he himself is not. His willingness 
to second his wife in forcing his son to marry the daughter of Audacious originates in 
his ambition to realize the traditional ideal (for the proposed daughter-in-law is more 
concerned with personal grooming than with social causes). He amuses the audience 
primarily by virtue of his onomatopoetically comic nickname, his occasional absent-
mindedness and puzzlement over the shenanigans of his wife and first daughter-in-law 
(nicknamed Rebuqi, Spitfire), and his inability to function smoothly and effect-
tively in a changing society which continually confounds him with the unexpected. The 
women, by contrast, amuse the audience by contradicting society’s presumption of fe-
male docility and quiet reserve through graceless, rampageous conduct that is ulti-
mately ineffectual and self-defeating.

That only women should be cast into the role of the comic curmudgeon raises the 
specter of authorial anti-feminism; yet Zhao’s varied repertoire of female characters, 
including those exhibiting graceful heroism, provides exonerating evidence to the
contrary. Instead, the feminization of the 
_alazon_ role underscores the inferior status of Chinese rural women, at least at the time when Zhao wrote the stories, a fact that rendered the ridicule of them both effective and acceptable from the viewpoint of the intended audience. The effectiveness of such characterization derives from the humor in role-reversal: the comedy in a woman's making a fool of a man lies in the perception of a reality that supposedly only rarely admits its possibility. Its acceptability derives from the safety in ridiculing the social nonentity, for the lowly creature in actuality poses no threat while at the same time affirming the audience's sense of superiority in its distance from those who make themselves ridiculous as well as those who submit to their domination.

But the greater significance of this comedic portraiture is that, buoyed by an undercurrent of inescapable painful realities, it reveals the anxieties that plagued women's actual existence. These female characters must deal with, as they have throughout their lives, a system which predetermined their status as victims. They therefore really occupy a midpoint between comic figures and embodiers of serious social problems. Even though much of the humor comes at their expense, the real import of their roles lies in their identities as strong personalities struggling for improved social leverage and economic security.

In Always Right's glib tongue and stubborn certitude lies evidence of her dissatisfaction with the role of virtuous obscurity allotted to women. In a modern, enlightened, urban setting, her rhetorical ability could have brought her success and respectable visibility in the pursuit of a profession; but relegated to a mountain village, with no education or opportunities for creative outlet, she can only apply her natural, untutored talent to the achievement of notoriety. Her display of individuality, however, cannot erase the conventions that restrict women's pursuit of status and security to the production of sons. Having been blessed with a felicitous fecundity that granted to her not merely one, but four, sons, she is disinclined to forego the meager prizes
allowed her under this conservative system of awards for women. Education, social activism, the infectious idealism of the era have become her rival and enemy as they siphon her accumulated “wealth” off into distant government and military service. Her socially conscious, independent minded, yet invertebrate youngest son (whose name ironically is Youyi, “Having Wings”) consequently bears the brunt of her accumulated fear and resentment, its manifestation inevitably unleashed in the concentrated and exaggerated form that provides a major source of the novel’s comic material. Though actively seeking her own self-interest in a society which demands women’s self-sacrifice, it is a self-interest that remains in thrall to the conservative precepts regarding women’s position and comportment. As a champion of conservatism, then, Always Right stands apart from her sisters, who are in contrast isolated, un-politicized rebels within the system.

It is probably not the result of coincidence that Third Fairy and Audacious have no sons. They passed their formative years in a pre-revolutionary rural society, when women’s greatest fear was epitomized in the life and death of Lu Xun’s character, Li Xiang’s wife (“The New Year’s Sacrifice”), a woman grossly mistreated before the birth of her son and again after his unexpected death. In this light, the behaviour of Zhao’s women must be seen as originating in the desire to protect themselves from victimization.

Third Fairy was the most resourceful of these women. By embracing the profession of channeling she secured for herself privileges and possibilities denied other women. It allowed her to escape the life of isolation that her husband and father-in-law sought to impose upon her. As a channeler, her connection with the nether world gave her power over these men who normally would have determined the tenor of her life. It allowed her regular and frequent social contacts especially with other men (she probably had a variegated sex life, although this is not overtly dealt with), and it gave her an independent income. She was a strong woman who refused to allow social
concensus to deny her enjoyment in life or to force her into being submissive to others. It was only after she inadvertently revealed that the spirit or spirits she regularly entertained were strictly of her own creation, and time as well had destroyed her physical allure, that she became an object of derision with her community. Prior to these events, she had been quite successful in realizing her chosen lifestyle.

Audacious, being also a woman conscious of her self-interest and not embarrassed to pursue it, took steps at the very beginning of her marriage to secure control over her life rather than let her husband and in-laws dictate to her or allow herself to be used or abused in any way. This she accomplished by inducing exasperation in the three of them through scolding, pestering, exhibiting anger, pretending to cry, and feigning hunger strikes. Her tactics procured for her a docile husband whom she was fond of manipulating. That she instructed her daughter in the same tactics, while inappropriate to her daughter’s particular circumstances, ironically produces an endearing effect, for the attempt is grounded in her maternal affection. This motherly solicitude contrasts sharply with the attitude of the matriarch in *Hong Lou Meng*, who callously abandoned her daughter to spousal abuse which eventually killed her. It also contrasts with the behaviour of Third Fairy, who tried to marry off her daughter to an unsavory out-of-town merchant to eliminate competition from her on the social scene.

Leg Pains and Hunger Pangs echo these thematic characterizations in a later era. Audacious foreshadows the character Hunger Pangs, who, as a newly married young woman living on an agricultural cooperative, manipulates the marriage relationship with “policies” that ensure her husband is overworked and underfed, a reversal of the “keep ‘em barefoot and pregnant” ploy. The lip service paid to the notion of women’s equality in the post-revolutionary society is belied by her very concept of the necessity of such tactics. Leg Pains, like Always Right, demands her traditional reward for producing a son, that is, deferential and unrelenting personal service from her daughter-in-law. This is her primary motivation for feigning pain, as it
was in previous years, when her husband was alive to minister to the "invalid." Hunger Pangs amuses the audience, again, by virtue of role reversal (woman oppresses man), but with Leg Pains there occurs a unique shift away from the family as the focal point of comedy and into the realm of community and the ideology of cooperative effort. Her dominance in the familial relationship recedes as background to her role in the story. The genial comedy of Zhao's previous works does not survive this shift into the broader social arena, for the foil to the comic figure's antics—a husband or parent-in-law who is made a fool of—is absent. The comic effect depends not upon the farcical possibilities of circumstance, as is the case with Hunger Pangs and the other *aizang* women, but solely upon her mode of self-presentation (physical comedy): bold inconsistency in manifesting her pain according to the advantage of the moment, and an exaggerated and vociferously declaimed sense of self-importance. Instead of having to outsmart a familial authority figure (the success story of her past life), the challenge to her ingenuity now exists in the persons of commune cadres who personify the imposition of unprecedented social obligations she is not willing to accept.

In Zhao's other works the pliant reaction of the ineffectual familial authority figure complements the refractory behaviour of the *aizang* female, producing thereby a genial comedy that eventually resolves to the satisfaction of all parties. "Tempering," however, replaces the ineffectual authority figure with an implacable enforcer, a young cadre particularly unsympathetic to Leg Pains' personal interests and who translates his idealism into a righteous pigheadedness equal in degree to her obstreperousness. He casts a shadow of gravity over her increasingly intensified efforts at self-assertion in the face of his disciplinary tactics, thereby magnifying her absurdity and darkening the humour. An element of criminality appended to her character—she seeks opportunities to steal cotton out of the co-op's fields during unauthorized picking hours—finally transforms her absurdity into villainy, with the story's resolution consequently made dependent upon the threat of formal sanctions.
As Frye (p. 165) points out, the movement of comedy is toward the formation of a new and more reasonable society that strives to include as many individuals as possible by showing the conversion or reconciliation of recalcitrant characters. In "Temper-ing," although Leg Pains is not ejected from the society, neither is she converted or reconciled but rather bludgeoned into cooperating through a quite ungentle threat of legal punishment. This pushes the story into the mode of ironic comedy bordering on melodrama with its "moral judgement against the wicked" as opposed to comedy's "social judgement against the absurd" (p. 168).

This modal shift is only one of a number of disturbing elements that inform the story. Initially posing as entertainment, by the time it concludes the story has generated an unease in the reader that issues from seeming authorial ambivalence as well as images and situations incongruent with a universal sense of essential personal autonomy. Its plot revolves around the fact that a large contingent of difficult women (of whom Leg Pains and Hunger Pangs are only exaggerated representatives), refuse to comply with the co-op's expectations that they work in the fields. Their uncooperativeness sabotages the co-op's goals, while the cadres argue over how best to handle the problem. When Wang Juhai, the older, more conservative cadre who enforces a leadership style of accommodation, is called away on business, the younger cadres take advantage of his absence to craftily harness the energies of the reluctant women — if only momentarily — to the enhancement of co-op integrity. The moral triumph attached to this victory, however, exists only as a thin and fragile veneer easily scratched to expose society's inhospitality toward women's interests: that thieving and so-called indolence are the exclusive domain of women in this fictional society (no man is shown to be a practitioner) provides significant commentary upon their perception of the would-be communal society's treatment of them.

A light-heartedness emanating from the story, particularly in its ending, clashes with this underlying assertion of women's disaffection with the newly arranged
society in which they find themselves. An upbeat atmosphere of creative, practical problem-solving on the part of the young cadres collides with the glaring evidence of dictatorial coercion, entrapment, ridicule, and scapegoating. A political entity (the Communist Party) and a social organization (the co-op) which deliberately broadcast a rhetoric of commitment to the welfare of the common people shockingly end up parties to the counterventlon of common people's wills. Even discounting the punishment of petty criminality, which might be seen as perfectly legitimate, individual freedom of choice as to participation in co-op activities has been virtually legislated out of existence.

Awareness of the author's ideological position through familiarity with his past works, commentary upon those works, and publicity focussing upon his person could easily generate expectations of his sympathies for the consolidators of socialism and his presumption of impropriety on the part of those who dissent. The story, in fact, through exploiting these expectations as well as probable reader concurrence (active or passive) with that stance, demonstrates the danger of reflective dormancy and of complacently accepting the judgement, wisdom, and personal beliefs of those elevated to positions of moral or political leadership. It is the ironic conclusion that spotlights the disturbing contradictions between tone and event, drawing them up from the depths of subliminal apprehension to conscious realization where they might force the reader to reassess what it is the author is trying to convey. A happy ending in the style of his past works (in which recalcitrant characters come to realize the benefits that would accrue to them by changing their attitudes and behaviour) would pronounce the desirability of the individual's unqualified subordination to the proclaimed interests of society; for the vehemence with which Leg Pains rejects the new society and its attempts to organize her life precludes her ever embracing it with credibility. The ironic ending, however, with its tendency to make the obstructing character "look less involved in guilt and the society more so" (Frye, p. 45), demonstrates a need for ideology to
adapt to the circumstances of the individuals it purports to serve.

Since that which prompted the denunciation of Leg Pains was an activity in which many other women regularly engaged, that is, stealing from the co-op, to chastise her was to serve her up as an example, and the threat against her was a threat against them all. Just as the attack on her cast a light of culpability on society, so does the second-hand threat against all the other women suggest something inappropriate about society's attitude toward them. In actuality the stealing comprises only a minor issue in comparison with the even greater tendency for them to regularly fabricate excuses to avoid doing the fieldwork expected of them. Both of these behaviours can only be symptomatic of their dissatisfaction with their assigned roles in the new society, a situation which calls not for censure but for re-evaluation of their treatment. In essence the story depicts a society that pits the success of formal collectivism against women's self-interest, exacting from them a disproportionate price to fulfill its agenda.

The treatment meted out to Leg Pains, however, goes beyond the implications for a generic political inequality that extends from traditional gender-based exploitation. The threat to formally prosecute Leg Pains is gleefully abetted and encouraged by "the masses" at the meeting where she is called to task (one wonders if the other women who regularly steal out of the fields are present among these "masses" and what their opinion of this development is). Even though the overt reason for so assaulting her is her criminal behaviour, the impression conveyed through her being singled out is that the real underlying reason is her aggressive personality, her irreverent bashing of authority figures, and her refusal to yield to intimidation. The fact that she was caught doing something technically illegal merely provided an excuse to denounce her and mount a retroactive execration that made up for an earlier failed attempt. Significantly, on the previous day she had mounted a noisy and tenacious rebuke against the cadre who had posted his satiric kuaibei ridiculing her. In this moment of high
dudgeon she revealed the deepness of her alienation from the governing powers: “What
I want to know is if your government gives you the right to ridicule people!” (empha­sis added); “You are the deputy head and you know how to write: how can I as an illit­erate commoner survive with that?” “You government officials all protect each other, so how am I going to get justice from you?” (p. 768).? Her refusal to retreat from her position had provoked a threat of a fine and a jail term. Five or six self-righteous bystanders responding to the cadre’s request for help had stepped forward with eagerness and dispatch to surround and lay hands on her in preparation to carry her off to the township government office (xiang zhengfu). Wang Juhai, the older, more sympa­thetic cadre, put a stop to it by pointing out that such a petty case was not worth the time of the township government; but he might also have noted that mere obstreper­ousness was insufficient grounds for legal prosecution. This jolting scene of what amounts to no less than a cowardly gang attack upon a fifty year old woman who needed “silencing” provides an unvarnished glimpse of societal intolerance for conspicuous self-assertion and the community’s desire to suppress the expression of the non-con­ventional individual will.

Aspects of Tyranny

Howsoever the alazon women were regarded by their societies, they had all, in fact, engineered the successful realization of their respective quests for relative au­tonomy and a life free of the usual abuses heaped upon women. It is this very success that preordained the possibility of their existence as characters, just as Falstaff was Falstaff by virtue of his many (undramatized) years of gaining advantage through un­challenged bragadocio. But while Falstaff capitalized upon a pre-existing set of fa­vorable circumstances (independent wealth, military glory) to maneuver himself into a still more favorable position where he could indulge in a hedonistic lifestyle, these women were burdened at the outset with anti-female bias as well as personal poverty
and psychological isolation. Their accomplishment was to combine an inborn rebelliousness with cunning to devise highly individualistic ways of circumventing social forces inherently detrimental to them. As individuals waging a necessarily solitary battle, they were more successful throughout their lives than any of Zhao's other characters similarly engaged.

In the portrayal of these women and in the underlying forces which molded their penchant for tactical planning we see a double-edged sword at work honing a fictional world that embraces paradox in the relationship between reality and values. One blade sculpts the surface form of persons whose comportment clashes with the projected vision of a perfected society while concomitantly blazing a path that directs the narrative movement toward the remodelling of these obstacles to sustained communal harmony. The other blade cuts deeper, fashioning skeletal and muscular structures that are hidden from immediate view but nonetheless implacably insistent upon recognition as the determinants of surface conformation. These internal structures are comprised of endemic abuse of a social ethos which values submission to the demands of others. For the one factor that comes closest to unifying Zhao's body of fiction is that it most often focusses upon people who have been forced into situations they do not want. Such characters span a range from the abject victim of greed and bigotry in the old society to those suffocated by the ethos of required social engagement in the new.

The case of Fugui (福贵) in the story which bears his name epitomizes the ease with which avarice exploits the altruistic, self-righteousness damns the disadvantaged, and how combining authority with both unleashes a formidable destructive force few of its victims can withstand. Fugui was a man whose virtue and sense of decency propelled him into the path of debasement and social exile. Regarding him in his youth, one might have envisioned for him a future of accomplishment and material acquisition, but the possibility of such a future evaporated with the premature imposition of responsibility. Standing on the threshold of adult life, unestablished in the
world, devoid of assets other than the family’s small parcel of land and the house, he
was suddenly faced with the evidence of his mother’s imminent death. This widowed
parent, impelled by her irrevocable fate, advanced by several years the date of his
marriage to the girl she had raised to be his bride. The precipitous marriage, initiated
with a wedding replete with the requisite trappings, was followed upon in close succes­
sion by an appropriately elaborate funeral. The two events flung Fugui deep into debt
even before he had embarked upon his career as husband and household head.

Ironically, had he declined to fulfill society’s expectations, had he run off to
seek his fortune, ignoring his mother, spurning marriage, shoving aside his filial re­
 sponsibilities, he might have avoided society’s reprobation. For in embracing the role
laid out for him, he contracted a debt programmed to spiral beyond his control. Five
years of assiduous labor succeeded only in transforming grinding poverty into utter
destitution and taught him a lesson in the futility of conscientiousness. His incentive to
cultivate the earth disintegrated in an inculpable collision with insolvency until the
imperative of starvation drew him into the disesteemed professions. Few activities of­
fered an immediately payable, ungarnishable wage as did those connected with death,
such as delivering deceased children to their final resting place or singing at wakes.
Persons performing such services were universally in demand yet, strangely, re­
soundingly reviled, treated as vermin, regarded as the epitome of degradation. Fugui,
having been stripped of all the grain he grew as well as the land upon which he grew it,
surrendered his pride and took up the onus of ostracism for the sake of sustaining his
family’s life. As an object of revulsion, a man divested of all human dignity not be­
cause of personal depravity but because of the perverse tropism of society, he no
longer felt bound by the rules of the society that persecuted him, and consequently his
honesty abandoned him to a reputation for stealing.

If society cast him into the role of pariah, the blame for his descent into the pit
of ignominy lay squarely at the foot of one man, Wang Laowan (王先生), a kinsman
who demanded decorous behaviour - read: slave mentality - from those in the most abject of circumstances while at the same time feeling no compunction about driving them to impoverishment. The ingenious method by which Wang Laowan acquired Fugui’s property consisted of supplying him with goods - including a coffin - on credit with the agreement that Fugui would work it off. The original thirty kuaǐ debt, however, was immediately swollen with an additional loan of grain made necessary when Fugui’s own supply was depleted from serving wedding and funeral guests. By the autumn harvest Fugui discovered that the credit he received for his labor was sufficient only to pay back the grain loan while nothing could go toward the monetary loan, which then increased to forty kuaǐ. From there his indebtedness increased exponentially with each passing year until by the end of the fifth year it was equivalent to the value of Fugui’s land and all the grain he could grow on it combined.

Being more than incidentally instrumental in Fugui’s ruination did not prevent Wang Laowan from appointing himself guardian of his victim’s morality. While he “legally” robbed Fugui of his property, he reacted with righteous indignation to Fugui’s petty larceny and general lapse into turpitude. When Fugui was jailed for stealing carrots, Wang Laowan “magnanimously” interceded on his behalf, negotiating his release in return for the deeds to his house and land (the latter Fugui had already turned over to him to cultivate free of rental charges), only to seize Fugui upon his return home to administer a public flogging as punishment for his profligacy. On a second occasion Wang Laowan organized a lynch mob to execute Fugui for the crime of besmirching the name of the Wang clan by singing at a wake in a neighboring village. Fugui caught wind of the plot and fled.

Zhao Shuli was a man encompassed by mountains, extremely limited peripetically at the time he wrote “Fugui.” He was a man for whom the images of poverty and injustice slugged head-on with a weighted glove. From his youth he was impressed
with the considerable impact that the local accumulators of relative massive wealth had upon the general welfare. Therefore it is not surprising that his portraits of impoverishment almost always flow around individual oppressors as opposed to such things as economic forces or the vagaries of the weather. He rejected the idea of anonymous forces taking precedence over individual culpability and castigated the failure of the powerful to embrace a philosophy of benevolence and generosity. This story more than simply chronicles the process of impoverishment to the point at which self-esteem can no longer operate as a factor in the quest for basic survival. It holds that for a good man to abandon his virtue and engage in “all kinds of bad things,” as Fugui confessed he had (though the nature of his immorality is not revealed), signifies that man’s resentment at unwarranted attack upon him on the part of society. It is the victim’s means of retaliating against a society which not only condones the oppression that infects it, but also allows community attitudes to conspire with selective abuse to totally crush a certain number of individuals. The story “Fugui” is a concentrated tale of avarice and persecution that starkly presents a tacit social conspiracy to offer up sacrificial victims in the interest of its preservation.

Sometime after the threat of arbitrary execution has been eliminated through communist reforms, Fugui returns to his village to fetch his wife and children, whom he has not seen for eight years. He has carved out a new life for himself by farming reclaimed land in an area that has been under communist influence for a number of years. The reaction of the villagers when they encounter him recalls fifth grade monolithic prejudice directed against one hapless classmate who has arbitrarily been declared untouchable. In the end, at a village meeting, he makes a plea—a ostensibly directed at the now chastened Wang Laowan—for the return of what he had lost: it is not property or goods or money, but his good name, as well as the right to exist as a free man with all the rights and privileges normally accorded to members of the human race. His speech is a prosaic distillation of indignation at having been hounded into
assuming an alien form, at having been forcibly moulded into an identity inconsistent with his self-concept.

"Fugui" is the only one of Zhao's stories to overtly employ the theme of societal despotism. As a rule in his works the blame for things gone awry is traced, at the level of surface meaning at least, solely to the weakness or malignancy of specific persons involved rather than to the system in which they function. By contrast "Fugui" austerely enacts the contradiction between cultural values and the individual's access to the material and psychological resources necessary to observe them. This is a fictional world of general social barbarism, and Wang Laowan as tyrant is a function of the system, both drawing nurture from it and in return helping to perpetuate it. This symbiotic relationship between a tyrannous system and the tyrannical individual is validated through the existence of the Fugui's in its realm - its manufactured pariahs, whose infamy confirms its moral rightness and justifies its continuation.

Since the system values submission to the demands of others, there must exist the "others" to whom people can submit. Thus it not only perpetuates tyrants but in fact needs them as a prerequisite for its own existence. As the "other," the tyrant is sometimes writ large, assuming power over entire communities, but more often functions on a petty scale within the family. The tyrant may be invested with his authority through inheritance or through default (as in the case of the stereotypically heartless mother-in-law), but can also easily invent himself (or herself) if he possesses the necessary resources. Third Fairy, Audacious, and the other women similar to them are examples of at-home tyrants who invented themselves through the dint of their superior psychological strength; who, in fact, found it essential to invent themselves as a means of self-defense against the system. The surface narration, however, ignores their origins as potential victims of thralldom and focusses only upon their current identities as disruptives in the home or community. They are the aberrations that confirm the rule.
Family tyranny runs as theme or motif in a number of Zhao’s works, and some of the cases are not so amusing as those involving comic situations. In “Registration” (登记), a reluctant bride (Xiao Fei’s 飞蛾, Lovely Moth) secretly in love with a hometown boy is beaten severely by her miffed husband because she asserts her right to emotional sovereignty. Her young husband, yearning for romance and impatient for prerogative and goaded on by his mother, though he gains “prestige” as the dominant partner in the marriage, destroys forever the possibility of having that which he wants most: a wife lovingly devoted to him and not merely obedient.

In “The Emancipation of Meng Xiangying” (解放), the protagonist is a young woman every bit as spirited and determined to assert herself as was Third Fairy, but unfortunately lacks Third Fairy’s cunning. Instead of artfully exploiting the loopholes in the system, she meets tyranny in the fashion of a ram butting its head against a wall or of redcoats deliberately marching head on into enemy fire. She fights back against her hostile mother-in-law with vehement sarcasm and fearlessly snatches out of her husband’s hand the stick with which he seeks to assert his authority. This latter act provokes him to wield a sickle against her, leaving a deep gash over her eye and a festering wound in her heart that drains away her spirit and eventually leads to two suicide attempts. In “The Rhymes of Li Youcai,” a character named Lao Qin (老秦), who is very faint-hearted when dealing with the powerful, dominates his wife and children with verbal and physical intimidation.

Within these families the dynamic of dominance and suppression replicates in microcosm society’s macrostructural conflicts, which in Zhao’s fictional world invariably revolve around the ordinary citizens of the community and the holders of political power. Though the provocative wielders of authority in the society at large sometimes advance the cause of their dominion through altruistic impulses (as do the young cadres in “Tempering” who discipline Leg Pains in the interest of realizing the ideal of collective society), their motivations most commonly lie in self-serving goals.
Here, in these conflicted families and in the community, a dichotomous hierarchy composed of the dominator and the dominated exists solely for the benefit of the former. The dominator acts not in the interest of the people who belong to the social unit of which he or she has control, but for the pursuit of personal prestige and happiness. A successful pursuit is incumbent upon the control of those in his or her sphere of influence, and the happiness sought is enhanced by the very act of suppression itself.

The difference between the family dominator and the dominator of the community is that the former suffers the limited vision of the frog in the well: uneducated, he or she sees no alternative arrangements and is not merely content but actually obliged through ignorance to follow the bent of tradition. The latter in his relative sophistication and enjoying the advantage of education, capitalizes upon the world-view gripping the minds of his benighted “constituents” to promote his own interest. It is thus that Wang Laowan as wealthy landowner can hurl a decent hardworking man into poverty and immorality while Wang Laowan as revered clan leader can exploit the general belief that the victim’s fall was the result of his own turpitude, thus absolving himself of guilt and enhancing his own position.

Wang Laowan is actually an exception among Zhao’s oppressors in that only he lays claim to higher moral pretensions and uses them, like numerous of Charles Dickens’ characters, such as Mrs. Pardiggle in Bleak House, to camouflage his self-oriented tropism.

The Interplay of Morality and Corruption

One of Zhao’s major preoccupations, especially in his works dating before 1949, was the commonplace subjection of local rural populations to the brutality of the unscrupulous among them. Historical and sociological accounts, as well as works of literature, tell of the pervasiveness of criminality perpetrated by racketeers, gangs, and secret societies which preyed upon innocent people. Zhao Shuli himself was once
pursued in his youth by what he believed to be members of a secret society. These shadowy criminal types, however, remain in the periphery of Zhao's concerns, becoming an object of scrutiny only when they become invested with official political power or have close relationships with political figures.

In "Xiao Erhei Gets Married," the Cousins Wang, who have inherited a criminal legacy, inflict themselves upon community consciousness, turning themselves into irritants in the eye of the villagers by visiting upon them blackmail, extortion, robbery, rape, and tactics that drove people to suicide (p. 16). They legitimized their terrorism by taking on political office (the opportunity being provided by apathy and fear among the villagers), with one becoming the Chair of the Military Committee and the other a political committee member, while the wife of one headed the Women's Association. In these positions they "sent militiamen out to cut their firewood, ordered villagers to hoe their fields, confiscated grain, imposed taxes, used the militia as their private police" (p. 16). In deploying their power for even the most petty cause of self-gratification - they level spurious accusations of adultery against Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin and manhandle them in an episode of false arrest as a means of revenging against Xiao Qin's rejection of their purient attentions - they epitomize the malignant personalization of political office.

Zhao peopled his stories with a number of characters similar to the Cousins Wang. In "The Rhymes of Li Youcai," for instance, Yan Xifu (闫锡福), a man with a reputation for dealing in narcotics and for abducting girls and women, becomes the mayor of the village "by taking advantage of the upset conditions" brought on by the anti-Japanese war (p. 24). Significantly, his offensive behaviour escalates upon his taking office. Villagers complain of extortion, bribery, intimidation, beatings, property takeovers, unfair taxation, misappropriation of public funds, and forced labor for private ends (pp. 24-25, 29).
However, the salient issue that informs the story is not his nefarious conduct per se, but two notions that contribute to the moral bankruptcy among the political privileged: 1) the notion that political office inherently confers special prerogative, which, though ordinary people resent the abuse they suffer from it, nonetheless are not loathe to embrace for themselves given the opportunity; 2) the notion that personal ascendency once attained becomes a prescriptive right of permanent validity.

Both of these premises find expression directly or indirectly in the case of Yan Xifu. The first - special prerogative - is seen in his considering the mayoral post a license to expand the range of his self-serving exploitations. The second - permanent personal ascendancy - involves a logistic complication: Yan Xifu’s power is actually second-hand, deriving from his uncle, Yan Hengyuan (){\text{[ interpolation]}}), who, a number of years after having been relieved of the title of mayor, continues to dominate village politics. By handpicking his successors and rigging the elections ordered by the county government, Yan Hengyuan asserts his undiminished political primacy. Even as evidence of a coming sea-change in political fortunes mounts, he devises various devious plans to maintain dominion, innocent of the concept of his own superannuation. His confidence in his staying-power derives from what he knows to be the eminent corruptability of his adversaries, those on the east end of town who would rejoice to see him deposed.

That Xiao Yuan (){\text{[ interpolation]}}), an east-ender, forsakes the cause of achieving political parity on behalf of his impoverished and victimized associates to enjoy the amenities of unexpected officialdom comes as a shock and a surprise to his constituency, but confirms the calculated expectations of Yan Hengyuan, who engineered the young man’s defection with remarkable facility. Yan Hengyuan just as easily terminated Ma Fengming’s (){\text{[ interpolation]}}) representation of peasant demands for the remunerations the county government decreed due them by assuring him of satisfaction on his own personal claims. Indeed, Yan had once before defused Ma’s angry activism by appointing
him to a minor official post, which status he now cites in offering to Ma grounds for rationalizing away his political obligations.

Xiao Yuan's and Ma Fengming's rapid slide from social advocacy into complacency and the private exploitation of public office symptomizes the banality of corruption that Zhao would eloquently depict later in his story "The Tax Collector." Their transfiguration into the very identity they originally reviled, in fact, indicates a state of affairs of greater profundity than the mere confirmation of the truism "power corrupts." As noted in the discussion of "The Tax Collector," the privatization of public office was a societal expectation. Zhao dilated further upon this phenomenon in his story "Venerable Gentleman Yang" ( 楊老太爷 ), in which the eponymous character turns this expectation into a virtual demand: he badgers his office-holding son to bestow upon him some of the "fruits" inherent to his position — of which he had none, he being an idealist who deplored the exploitation of public office for private gain.

Yan Hengyuan, well aware of the societal ethos, took advantage of it to further his ends, but also by his very sanction of such corruption did he ensure its perpetuation. That is, Yuan's and Ma's original goals were so easily subverted not merely because of this ethos, but because a "superior man" legitimized it. The "superior man" ( junzi ) that Confucius often spoke of can only have been as subject to distorting vulgarization as have lofty religious tenets tended to degenerate into vulgar superstition. To the educated, the superior man was a rarity, easily distinguishable among all those who masqueraded as such; while to the average citizen, especially the uneducated peasant, he was rather more common: he was every man with power, whatever the source. For whether a power holder were revered or reviled, he ultimately possessed psychological ascendancy over those who fell under his jurisdiction, such that even when people felt the hand of tyranny, they failed to conceive of its illegitimacy. In Liu E's Travels of Lao Can, for instance, guests at an inn speak of a cruel official, "Flay-the-Skin" Chang, whose ruthless tactics in curbing crime inspired among the populace
dread and detestation, but, significantly, not doubts as to his ethical prerogative."

Similarly, because of limited vision and experience as well as vulnerability, a child who suffers at the hand of an abusive parent still perceives that parent as one whom he can or must look up to, and in spite of such emotions as fear and hate, still revels in that parent's approval. It is just such a dynamic that emerges out of the picture of Yuan's and Ma's repudiation of their previous commitments.

Yan Hengyuan, a man of undoubted preeminence in the village, who in the past scorned and oppressed them, suddenly indulges them with his consideration, insinuating their own inherent superiority as a source of entitlement both to his personal attention and to privilege. His esteem evaporates their resentment, while the resentment of their (now former) confreres becomes irrelevant: the prerogative that his preeminence implies gives primacy to his opinions as to the nature of morality and propriety over the opinions of all others.

Thus, the impulse to revolt is tempered or even neutralized by an underlying conscious or unconscious presumption of the power-holder's naturally ordained sovereignty in the political and ethical realms and of the essential invalidity of challenging that sovereignty. In other words, what Zhao illustrates here is that the "feudal" system in the fictional world is fueled on more than simply the clever manipulation of innate self-interest and the inducement of paralyzing fear on the part of the overlords. That Xiao Yuan and Ma Fengming were never uncognizant of their own self-interest is obvious; but equally obvious is that initially they were clearly sincerely concerned about their neighbors' welfare as well and were dedicated to its improvement. In light of this latter fact, the speed and degree to which they sold out is not explainable in terms of crass self-interest alone.

Similarly, in the absence of forces other than fear, the intrepid few who inevitably appear in any population can always be a source of inspiration to overcome it. The bold dissident who casts all caution to the wind and fearlessly articulates his
disaffection with current authority so as to encourage his neighbors to join forces
against oppression is a character-type important as a plot-turning device in a number
of Zhao's stories. But significantly, the success of such characters in getting "the
masses" to overcome their inhibitions and to challenge their oppressors occurs only in
the presence of personages who have impressed the people as being politically stronger
– and therefore superior – to the one who has been oppressing them. What is occurring
in such scenarios is a shift of allegiance and not a revolt.

In spite of the ideological disparity that obscures the fact, the "masses" of the
various stories, who eventually embrace the communist cause, and characters like Xiao
Yuan and Ma Fengming, "mass men" who advance themselves under the aegis of op­
pressors, exhibit wholly coterminous behaviour. Both, in fact, are paying deference to
"superior" men who happen into their lives and who instruct them and supervise
their every step. Both display an extension and a confirmation of the habits of mind
and heart that gave rise to the silent acquiescence to tyranny that marked their past
(see discussion of "Xiao Erhei Gets Married," chap. 6). In regard to the issue of self­
determination, both are guilty of the uncontemplated abdication of responsibility for
their own fate.

Impotent Men: The Psychology of Servility

Paralysis of will in the face of unpleasantness often arises as an overt theme or
motif or incidental character trait in portraits of both individuals and entire village
societies. Its victims or representatives for the most part are men, a device, inten­
tional perhaps, which stresses the dispositional nature of the affliction, as opposed to
the societally cultivated supineness associated with the female (though the docile,
servile female is not a hallmark of Zhao's portraiture). Passivity or fatalistic, though
possibly agitated, immobility mark reactions to both domestic disappointments and po­
litical outrage.
In a society supposedly dominated by men, self-possessed women find it surprisingly easy to gain the upper hand over the men whom they have been married off to. Overwhelmed by their stronger personalities, the husbands of Third Fairy, Audacious, and Hunger Pangs all freeze into nearly fetal dependence upon their wives' decision-making. They retreat into a shell of inaction and accept with docility—even servility—not only mere domination but also even that which they know to be detrimental to themselves and to the welfare of their family. Yuan Tiancheng (Audacious' husband), for instance, views himself as his wife's old ox (p. 505),

exhausted from futile and solitary labor on a surfeit of land retained at her behest but unworked by her hand. Enough time has passed for their daughter to grow up and marry and divorce before he acts upon his resentment at her self-centeredness.

When the husband of Lovely Moth (Xiao Fei'e, in "Registration") realizes her aversion to him, he accepts with barely a whimper the deflation of his expectations for marriage. Though not confounded by a self-centered, domineering spouse, he nonetheless ends up living a life no less distressed than those who are, devoid just as they are of the comforts of a loving wife. Instead of pursuing his ideal of a tender wedded relationship, he embraces despair and withdraws limply from the arena in which Fate has challenged him: by conceding without a fight he creates the very fate he perceived and feared. By erecting a facade of indifference to Lovely Moth, he conceals from himself the fact of his capitulation to a mere segment of a fluid and influenceable reality. His is an unconstructive despair in which through assuming the truth of his own impotence he absolves himself of the responsibility of affecting change; in which through deferring to the situational demiurge he refuses to mobilize his resources to create a new reality.

Nowhere does the theme of self-imposed impotence emerge more recognizably than in the character of Ma Youyi (马有理, in Sanliwan). The youngest son of Always Right and Muddleshead, Youyi is a social idealist both on the family and on the
community levels. His inability to act decisively, however, elicits misunderstanding from both family and community members: his parents regard him as a potential traitor to their interests, while his colleagues regard him as opportunistic and spineless. In his attempt to avoid offending anyone, his idealism becomes obscured to everyone.

Like two of his brothers before him he was caught up in the excitement of changing times that promised a new and prosperous future for the village and inspired the enthusiasm and selflessness of young people who wanted to hasten its achievement. One brother had gone off to serve in the government, another to serve in the army. By the time Youyi came of age, agricultural collectivism had emerged as the dominant theme in the youthful idealists’ search for effective means to serve society. To Youyi’s parents, however, the time and resources their sons devoted to such projects represented a direct and equal deprivation imposed upon them.

To Youyi, the resolution of the problem posed by their opposition to his extra-familial activities required more than simply breaking the bonds of parental tyranny. For his two brothers, society’s needs overrode their sonly allegiances, but their example held no meaning for Youyi. Despite Always Right’s injured allegations to the contrary, he was as deeply committed to his parents as he was to the ideal of serving society. His problem, thus, lay not so much in an overweening fear of a parental authority actually made invalid by its unreasonableness (although fear did indeed play a role in his psychology), but rather in an existential dilemma that pitted his sincere filial impulses against a generational gap in personal convictions.

What Youyi wanted was not to defy his parents but to elicit from them if not their blessing and participation, then at least their acquiescence to his community involvement. It was his taboo against outright defiance of his parents’ wishes that incurred for him a reputation of reluctance and unreliability among his colleagues. He could not in good conscience attend meetings and participate in other activities without
parental permission. When permission was not forthcoming, his excuses for declining the call of community duty provoked contempt from his cohorts. On the other side of the coin, if his parents demanded action from him that contradicted the village's social agenda, he contrived to evade it in a way that minimized any appearance of deliberate disobedience. While fear of evoking parental displeasure played a role in formulating his behaviour patterns, it was more a fear of violating the proprieties of the parent-child relationship than a fear of punishment that informed his thinking.

Fulfilling his moral obligation to all those to whom he had made commitments—whether by accident of birth or by voluntary declaration—was his primary concern. It was a priority fraught with paralyzing paradox arising from the inherent antithesis of those commitments. While his parents pressured him to conform to their vision of life, his co-workers and companions condemned him for his compulsive loyalty to his parents. As in a scenario in which two men vie over one woman who loves them both, Youyi was caught in a situation in which neither side was willing to concede his right to devote his attention to the other. Youyi, having not even conceived of the necessity of making a choice, hung enervated, incapacitated, suspended between the two, begging for both parties' permission to fulfill the expectations of their respective rivals. In the following excerpt, Youyi agonizes over his parents' order to go to the next village to fetch his uncle, a man whose engagement in the tabooed occupation of broker puts him in the position to offer advice in the family's fight against the forces of cooperativization. To obey his parents' order, he must ask for leave from the Communist Youth League, of which he is a member, for the errand would force him to absent himself from a meeting he is supposed to attend. Furthermore, fetching back the man who would help his parents resist cooperativization would be to offend the sensibilities (not to mention the policies) of the youth organization:

"When the meeting ended...Yumel and Youyi walked out of the Flagpole Courtyard together. Youyi felt that with the meeting's having adjourned so early, the amount of time that had passed was about the same as that needed for asking for leave, so he could still tell his father that
he had indeed asked. However, according to the spirit of this meeting, he shouldn't go to fetch that middleman uncle of his. He felt that since he had made a mistake yesterday and was just in the midst of writing a self-confession, and since today he had clearly indicated that he wouldn't go for his uncle, then if he turned around and went anyway, wouldn't he be committing another mistake? But it was not that he wasn't willing to commit a mistake, but rather that he feared that after committing it the League would not give its permission. He particularly feared offending Lingzhi and Yumei. He wanted to first get Yumei's approval, so he said to her, 'I'm going back home. My father still wants me to go get my uncle. What should I say?' He wanted Yumei to say, 'If he really insists you go, then you'd best go.' But what she did reply was beyond his anticipation. Yumei said, 'My God! Your third sister-in-law has already gotten her independence; how long's it going to be before you do too? You have to think of how to handle it! I can't do it for you!' Then she left Youyi by himself at the gate of the Flagpole Courtyard." (Ch. 20, p. 449)

Here Youyi is facing ever intensifying pressure from both sides to make a categorical choice. In spite of the anxiety and distress he suffers, however, the fact that he has a choice puts him in a more favorable position than that of a number of other characters in the fictional world. We shall leave Youyi to his dilemma for a moment to look at three of these other characters, their circumstances, and finally their reaction.

In *Changes in Li Village*, the protagonist, Zhang Tiesuo (张铁锁), owns his own house and a modest amount of land which he has always worked with his own hand. One day his wife cuts down a young mulberry tree growing on that land. The result is that they find themselves challenged by none other than Li Chunxi (李春西), the nephew of the mayor Li Ruzhen (李如珍), who claims the tree to have been his as it was growing on his family property. Tiesuo asserts the property in question is part of his patrimony, as Chunxi's grandfather had sold it to his grandfather. The transaction, however, occurred so many years ago that hardly a man alive remembers it, except for lowly Old Song (老宋), the keeper of the village temple, who knows that Chunxi is lying but doesn't dare to speak out. Chunxi brings suit against Tiesuo, and with his uncle, Li Ruzhen, occupying the seat as judge, Tiesuo is found guilty of willful property destruction and is ordered to pay restitution. Not only does Tiesuo forfeit the land that
Chunxi falsely claims as his own, he also must sell his house to pay the restitution and move his family and belongings into an animal shed. Here the overwhelming force of orchestrated injustice leaves him no room for a dilemma to fret over.

In "The Just Prevail," Wang Jucai (王子材) is a self-made man who by dint of persistence and hard work has ended up in his later years with his own spacious house, surplus grain, and a strong multi-generational family complete with daughter-in-law and male grandchild. His achievement of society's proclaimed ideal, in fact, has made his eligible daughter a very valuable commodity in the marriage market, a value which he intends to exploit fully - until the village's most powerful man, Liu Xiyuan (刘锡 元), virtually requisitions her for his widower son for debased wedding gifts. (Not only is this unacceptable to Wang Jucai, who stands to get nothing of value in exchange for his daughter, it is also a horror for the young woman in that she has been matched to an older "used" man, not to mention her having to give up the idea of marrying her sweetheart.) Wang Jucai's options are severely limited as Liu Xiyuan's range of power renders even the consideration of refusal superfluous.

As it happens, a series of events prevents the marriage from actually taking place: the communist Eighth Route Army sweeps through the village and turns the local power structure upside down, and Liu Xiyuan dies from a fit of anger during a "struggle" meeting against him. His death imposes a three-year postponement of the wedding upon the bereved son, the prescribed period of mourning. Though Wang Jucai is not unhappy at this postponement, he is acutely aware that probability will likely eventually force him to honor his agreement and turn his daughter over to the son of his old enemy.

During the protracted period of mourning, the previously humble villagers who took over the positions of leadership become increasingly forgetful of their original goal to substantially narrow the gap between rich and poor and instead allow their self-serving motivations to gain greater and greater dominance in their administrative
actions. Having allocated themselves an excess of land and property during the land reform movement, they are now under pressure to acquire more land for distribution to the impoverished who failed to gain any benefit from the program. They begin to scrutinize the political purity of average, self-sufficient farmers and to find pretexts for confiscating their land. It is under these circumstances that Wang Jucai becomes compromised by his tenuous tie with the Liu's. He is accused of seeking to amass illegitimate power by aligning himself with an exploitative landlord family. To forestall the imminent punishment known as “to sweep out of house and home,” he hastily renounces the engagement and — in an unavoidable move fraught with emotional devastation — voluntarily relinquishes the land upon which he depended for his family’s self-sufficiency.\textsuperscript{15}

To add to his troubles, he is immediately thereafter stunned to find himself the victim of blackmail at the hands of none other than the new village head, who covets his now dis-engaged daughter for marriage to his 14-year old son. The terms are that if Wang Jucai agrees to the “proposal” he will get a portion of his land back, but if he does not he will be accused of withholding from public requisition a solid gold bracelet (which never existed) and turned over for discipline to the “masses.”

Though the village leaders, hiding their corruption behind a screen of ideological purity, insist that Wang Jucai chose with ulterior motives to become and to remain connected to the Liu family, the “choice” was in fact determined by a fear which categorically eliminated the exercise of free will. His unhappy experiences with the Liu family dated from his childhood and had convinced him of their possession of a power that approached omnipotence: in other words, their loss of power at the hands of the communists was to his mind merely a temporary aberration. This debilitating fear pervaded his entire psyche, creating in him the mentality of the impotent and rendering him eminently manipulable, a prime target for anyone in the position to exploit it. As the victim of malignant individuals who betray the trust their power demands to
fulfill their own personal desires, Wang Jucai was boxed into a corner from which he could not escape.

Finally, we note the case of Wang Yongfu (王永富), the protagonist of “Take a Stand” (Bloomng taizu 聞明态度). Unlike Wang Jucai and Zhang Tiesuo, victims of unrestrained political abuse, he himself is a village leader. Yet he, too, feels boxed-in, stifled, his desires unfulfilled and unobtainable. The source of his frustration, ironically, lies in his very privilege: far from regarding his official position as a mother-lode of personal enrichment, he resents the unwanted obligations and onerous, irrelevant duties attendant to the office, for they interfere with the autonomous lifestyle he wishes to lead. Wang Yongfu, in fact, personifies the contradiction between the embrace of communism during periods of crisis as the most viable option for personal survival or even material gain, and the essential tenet of communism that places serving others above self-interest.

The crisis of war had brought out in Wang Yongfu a reputation for “progressiveness” precisely because the whole point (for him) of wartime collectivism was to defeat the enemies who stood in the way of achieving the traditional ideals. To eliminate these enemies - whether Japanese invaders or Chinese abusers of wealth and power - was, to his mind, to create for the victors the freedom to pursue their personal routes to happiness according to the age-old concepts that gave priority to the individual family. He had not anticipated the profound changes that would occur by the time this victory was achieved: the rooting of the notions of public altruism and the sharing of wealth that captured the sentiments of a significant cadre of people dedicated to promoting them; and the rise within himself of the self-contradictory desire to revert back to an insular private life while at the same time retaining the public respect and influence to which he had become accustomed.

The interrelationship of these social and personal characteristics and transformations meant that the very act of pursuing his happiness would destroy all the
elements necessary to it. His intimate involvement with the communist movement - even though it had represented for him a mere temporary deferral of his true interests - had eroded his own personal base upon which he planned to build a traditional life. Surrounding himself with friends and associates who, unlike him, turned out to be fully committed to the communist cause, left him with the prospect of political and social isolation should he walk away from it. Furthermore, his son had embraced the communist agenda with all the eagerness of idealistic youth and had married the daughter of the village's most overtly zealous communist leader. This daughter-in-law was herself rapidly developing into the stereotypical righteous female enthusiast, cloyingly virtuous and passionately resolved to lead and proselytize the entire village into a model community.

His plan to retreat into exclusive family life back-fires when after having deliberately behaved with outrageous negligence in office, thereby provoking dismissal from his post, he is shocked to discover that his son's political zealotry overrides his filial sentiments. The young couple's commitment to collective life effectively abrogates the family solidarity necessary to fulfill his dream of immersing himself in family self-sufficiency. For them to remain in the household would mean degeneration of the parent-child relationship into endless conflict and actual if not openly apparent family disintegration. For them to move out would constitute a public announcement of that disintegration and would be the source of public humiliation. To his chagrin and profound disappointment they vacate his household, leaving him with greater solitude than he bargained for. To his mortal embarrassment when he goes about his chores he notices people looking at him oddly and he overhears them saying of him, "The chickens have flown and the eggs are broken" (an oblique reference to his son and daughter-in-law moving out and to the fact that he had been relieved of his duties as Arms Commissar), and "The earth god has sequestered himself deep in the mountain: he has his freedom but no one sacrifices to him" (meaning that from now on
people would ignore him) (p. 340).14

At this point he becomes painfully aware that his standing in the village has begun a precipitous descent. The impact of the villagers' changed attitude toward him expresses itself in physical symptoms reminiscent of Third Fairy's distress when she realized that she had become an object of ridicule. Like Third Fairy, he has reached an impasse, a turning point at which he must change something in himself and accommodate his social environment. Whatever society's actual political composition, his perception is of a monolith that would accept him as he wanted to be accepted only on its terms and not on his. Since his society refuses to give him permission to follow his individualistic bent, he finds himself poised between the impossible choice of vainly pursuing a traditional ideal forever closed to him and continuing to pretend enthusiasm for a social system he does not believe in.

Whether violated by malicious individuals or entrapped by sociopolitical circumstances, these three characters - Zhang Tiesuo, Wang Jucai, and Wang Yongfu - all experienced categorical nullification of personal sovereignty. As much as the narration accentuates the process of this nullification, so it amplifies the magnitude of their despair as reflected in the ensuing physical debilitation that afflicted them all. Significantly, their reactions to this personalized adversity were identical: they all took to their beds and fell ill.

Through its repetitious occurrence, this inwardly tropistic response to adversity establishes itself in Zhao's fictional world as the most salient symbol of man's utter defeat. The reference here to man's defeat intentionally exploits its latent ambiguity, for in this fictional world only men display despair in such a response. To be sure, Meng Xiangying's ultimate reaction to her maltreatment was also inwardly tropistic, but it was qualitatively different in that it took the form of suicide and, failing that, a resentfully continuing existence that approached the level of autism. In
other words, while the men responded with psychomatic illness, she suffered a straightforward, clearly recognizable (even to the most unsophisticated villager) mental breakdown. She, in effect, consciously shifted to another plane of existence, thoroughly rejecting humanity and even life itself. The men, though also deeply disturbed, remained within the world of sentient experience.

As a profound gesture of submission, their prostration parallels the instinctive self-abnegation of the vanquished wolf, who lies inert and vulnerable, throat deliberately exposed to its conqueror in a plea for clemency through the concession of defeat. The appropriateness of this metaphor emerges more vividly in a continued consideration of the character Ma Youyi, the beleaguered son of Always Right and Muddlehead. Shortly after the scene in which he delays going home to avoid having to fetch his uncle, he learns that his mother’s talk of marrying him to his cousin has been upgraded into a certainty. His taboo against defying his parents had up to this point been feeding his paralysis in the tug-of-war between filial duty and community obligation. It now became the source of greater anguish. The newfangled social and legal infrastructure that supported children’s independent decision in marriage matters was powerless to breach the personal moral code which demanded his deference to father and mother. But the suddenly crystalline prospect of this dreaded marriage abruptly rammed home to him the notion of his own long-term futurity. The vision of his future self living in thrall to his aggravating, insufferable cousin propelled him toward drastically expressing his discontent: the form which this expression took was none other than the act of taking to his bed with a headache, and there he remained for at least two weeks.

Now, Ma Youyi was never subjected to the ruthless usurpations of unscrupulous power holders, nor did he suffer under the impoverished options of a real or perceived social monolith. His life was free of remorseless impositions from irrepressible forces. Modern society had even decreed that acquiescence to parental dominion was a matter of voluntary deference rather than of ineluctable fate. Yet in spite of the rather
hospitable circumstances that cradled him, he declined into the same ritual of despair as did those who faced the unmitigated constraints of choicelessness.

Ma Youyi's characterization, of course, is the product of the constraints of storytelling - i.e., it is necessarily simplified and concentrated. But like many of Zhao's other characters, his portrayal projects a hidden density that alludes to ambiguities of personality left unrelated. By his very nature in wrestling with the clashing mores of two different moral eras bumped up against each other (he could well have ignored one set of moral imperatives or the other as did all of his brothers), we can know that the impetus behind his taking to his bed in this instance must have been multifaceted. His immaturity - especially as seen in his flirtatious interactions with young women - is suggestive of a mentality suffused with romanticism: he may well have rhapsodically imagined himself a tragic figure akin to Jia Baoyu in *Dream of Red Mansions* (*Hong Lou Meng*). The scene of him lying despondent in bed, his mother engaging all the prescriptive for driving out the evil spirits possessing him, certainly evokes Baoyu's journey beyond sanity and the consternation it caused in the Jia household - also provoked by an unsatisfactory arranged marriage.

Furthermore, the populating of the fictional world with a number of male characters who reacted in this same way to adversity points to a society in which such a reaction was a commonplace. Youyi, undoubtedly witnessing it more than once, would naturally have incorporated it into his cultural repertoire. However, whether or not he was emulating literary fictional figures or molding himself upon the example of real people in his environment, it in no way diminished the sincerity of the emotional distress he endured: the headache that tormented him and the tears that he cried were genuine. His anguish, however, instead of carrying him into the depths of oblivion, converted his paralysis, strangely enough, into pragmatic impulse: the more he retreated into a state of immobile misery, the more he was convinced he had obtained a means to influence events in his favor. Calculating that his parents would relent and
rescind the engagement, he was at once fulfilling his cohorts’ demand for action while yet continuing his campaign to wrench from his parents their permission to disappoint their wishes. Ironically, he was seeking a victory by invoking the symbol of utter defeat.

Indeed, in behaving like the vanquished wolf, Ma Youyi was placing a premium upon passivity, infusing it with multiple ironies: passivity as a weapon of defense (rather than a sign of powerlessness or defeat), passivity as a tool of coercion, passivity as an attribute deserving of reward.

By endowing passivity with the status of an active operational strategy, he denied to himself the truth of his own impotence. By adopting passivity as his policy, he dissociated himself from willfulness and placed responsibility for the anticipated realization of his desire upon the shoulders of others. By embracing passivity as his philosophy, he paid tribute to his parents, asserted his conviction of their rights over him even as he tried to manipulate their sentiments in a direction more appealing to him. Through this muddled mixture of impotence, emulation, machination, filiality, and a generous even if misguided judgement of his, in truth, abusive parents, he proclaimed passivity an indicator of moral rectitude. Howsoever the rest of the world regarded his options, any action designed to strengthen his position vis à vis his parents other than withdrawal into despondent passivity was in his mind equal to an unbecoming assault upon those two who had given him life.

What Ma Youyi shows is that the impulsion behind taking to one’s bed in a crisis is fueled by a multitude of factors, not the least of which is virtue, or at the very least a rationalized illusion of virtue. The unlikelihood that an unexceptional youth such as he extemporized this mind-set on his own paves the way to understanding why so many of Zhao’s men engage in this behaviour and do so without the smallest twinge of shame or self-contempt. Being trapped under the necessity of submitting to circumstance does not preclude the mind’s creative exonerations of the weaknesses these
circumstances expose: the soul-cleansing rigor of self-immolation, for instance, or the disciplinarie suppression of one's own selfish impulses, the possible existence of which becomes apparent through others' bad example, are attractive alternative images with which to interpret oneself. The precise nature of the self-images Zhang Tiesuo, Wang Jucai, and Wang Yongfu harbored of themselves, Zhao again leaves to deductive speculation, but the manner in which they conduct their lives suggests absolute repudiation of the arrogance displayed by the practitioners of impositional politics. Their rise from impoverishment into middle-class security, whether the effort spanned one, two, or three generations, occurred in every case through perseverance in hard work, constancy in self-discipline, and dedication to honest reward. Neither were they daunted by the slings and arrows of Nature, usurers, or war, nor did they ever stoop to avarice or unsalutary shortcuts to self-enrichment. Only when it came to the kind of adversity that involved contention over material wealth did they lose the audacity to stand up to their opponents. Zhang Tiesuo and Wang Jucai, despite their stores of fortitude, had not the audacity to challenge the criminal intents of their politically empowered antagonists; Wang Yongfu could not withstand the withering judgment of a public opinion that insisted he share his good fortune against his inclinations. Even with the evidence of their crushed spirits, the retreat into passivity of those attacked by political strongmen admits almost of a concerted determination to stand in contradistinction to the vulgarity of their tormentors' self-aggrandizement. Wang Yongfu, of course, had no specific enemy to whom he could have flaunted moral superiority. His "enemy," like the enemy of Babbitt in Sinclair Lewis' novel, was an idea, and therefore his bout with depression bears closest resemblance to the Western notion of the mid-life crisis.

Though Zhao stints upon the facts of each individual's psyche and frame of reference, by exclusively portraying only virtuous men as turning to passive withdrawal, he has constructed a fictional world that overtly affirms an association between virtue
and the act of admitting utter defeat. The consistency of this fictional world is seen in his portrayal of Fugui, the man who became a social pariah in his community but to whom Zhao himself ascribed virtue obliterated wholly by circumstance and social prejudice. Though Fugui's misfortune outstripped anything that these other men suffered, he did not beat a retreat to his bed but simply continued to muddle on through life as best he could. While this may show Fugui to be a man of greater courage and tenacity than that of the other suffering men, it also serves to undergird a fictional world which conceptually reserves passive retreat for those untempted by what it deems to be avarice - a world which asserts that one mind cannot simultaneously accommodate both obsession with illegitimate gain and the consideration of defeat. Fugui, though not impotent, bore the greater sin of asserting independence from the conventions society demanded.

However these men perceived their impotence - whether as a natural extension of their probity or as a pragmatic strategy to minimize loss by eliminating provocation (the prime consideration, after all, of the vanquished wolf) - if indeed they thought of it at all - their gesture of inaction in the face of impositional crises stands as a testimony to their detachment from the exigencies of autonomy.

Ma Youyi, for instance, in trying to extract from parents and cohorts positions correspondent with his own inclinations, was tossing the ball back into their court - placing the overt responsibility for the outcome in their hands. The main statement that a victory in this endeavour would make would not be about his ingenuity in psychological manipulation, but about his dependence upon the existence of superiors to give him a victory. What he needed above all else was the sanction of a superior to legitimate his aspirations. Only through an act of bestowal could his acquisition receive validation, while to obtain his desire through his own concerted action would be to flaunt the licentiousness of free will. In short, Ma Youyi's gesture of inaction was a conscious disavowal of individualism.
This evasion of manifest autonomy on the part of Youyi sets him apart from Zhang Tiesuo, Wang Jucai and Wang Yongfu, whose distress arose from having been dispossessed of what Youyi rejects. The distinction between Youyi in his endeavour to deflect autonomy from his person and them in their longing to have it back, however, is eventually obliterated by the latters' insensible lapse into resignation. Zhang Tiesuo's one attempt to repulse the usurpation of his outhouse property - a plan to avail himself of the prosecutorial machinery deployed in the county seat - met with the village head's tactical intervention even before he set out on his journey to the county courthouse. False accusations of an assassination conspiracy brought down on his head additional penalties that decimated his resources and forced his removal to the family stable. Impoverished, shocked into submission, he rose up no more in challenge. He descended, rather, into a state of helplessness unanimated by even the vaguest considerations of countermeasures or entertainments of vengeance. Physical subjugation had extinguished as well even the imagined execution of redress. This early demise of his inner assertiveness reveals a weak identification with the idea of autonomy - an identification that yields up its vital impulse in the face of politically empowered brutality.

For Wang Jucai, this phenomenon occurs immediately upon his encounter with the authoritarian demand of his old nemesis, Liu Xiyuan, concerning the disposition of Wang's daughter. Here Jucai's strength of will - amply demonstrated by his impressive triumph over obstacles to transform poverty into economic security - expires before a breath of intimidation. At the very opening of the story, he is already abed, facing the wall, in an introduction that foreshadows the trajectory of his life over the next several years as his ordeal unfolds. From the "proposal" of marriage imposed by Liu to his final receipt of compensation for land unjustly confiscated by land reformers, Wang Jucai makes no decisions on his own volition, save for his resolution to adamantly cling to old oppressions. He resembles a piece of deadwood whose progress
downstream is determined by the obstacles and eddies it randomly strikes. Even Justice has to track him down. The final end to his misfortune occurs solely because a task force from the outside takes the initiative to seek him out and effect restitution. For him it is an encounter akin to an accidental bump into a brick wall suddenly appearing where none stood before. Whatever the reason for which his courage in facing impersonal forces (economic straits, whims of nature, etc.) abandoned him when it came to dealing with human impingement, this enervation of valor was accompanied by a loss of will to actively control his own life.

The protagonist of “Take a Stand,” Wang Yongfu, of course, suffered from a different kind of human impingement, that of social expectations. No corrupt wielder of inordinate power coveted his material accumulations. Rather, the new set of standards which he had inadvertently helped to implant had delegitimized his concept of individualism and his desire for detachment from community concerns. Here, the anguish of a man submerged in an environment antagonistic to his individual aspirations intensifies as he gradually perceives the state of imprisonment in which he abides. His resolve to assert his drive for independence finally falters with his realization that not only has his society withdrawn its approbation of commitment to self-interest, but that it also has no intention of granting an exception for his eccentricity. That is, while he was not threatened with violence or otherwise intimidated, and while no formal prohibitions obstructed the individual’s retreat from collectivist society, he nonetheless clung to a philosophy essentially identical to that of Ma Youyi: that the pursuit of autonomy is invalid without the sanction of the entity he would have to defy to achieve it.

Youyi, in fleeing the responsibility of self-management; Tiesuo, with the abrupt extinction of his identity with personal entitlement; Jucai, with his insensible deference to the capriciousness of Fate; and Yongfu, with his ultimate enslavement to public opinion – all of these characters adopted an attitude that ranged from willingness to downright insistence that others hold the reins of their destinies. Their
Impotence lies not in ineffectuality in repulsing an adversary (a question of valor duly tested and honorably defeated), but rather in their inability to mentally transcend claims of authority over them (a case of valor untested and therefore defunct). All were shackled to the assumption of their ordained servility to the will of others. All exposed their innate subservience by their failure to even conceive of the act of thinking about alternative reactions to their situations.
A number of Zhao's characters have entered the mainstream of life as casual points of reference. "Third Fairy" has become a euphemism for those whom people regard as "dishonest women;" "Spitfire" (Rebuqi 烟火气) has come to represent those seen to be argumentative and unreasonable; "Middlehead" is bestowed upon those who apparently don't know their own mind; "Turned Over High" (Fandegao 翻得高) refers to those who have forgotten their origins; "Jack of All Trades" (Wanbaoquan 万宝全), the father of the Wang brothers, also generally known by his real name Wang Baquan 王宝全) complements those who are inventive and creative; and "Audacious," "Always Right," "Leg Pains," and "Hunger Pangs" are all used to deprecate those whom society deems to be selfish, "difficult women." See: Xiao Quan and Tai Long, Zhao Shuli chuanpian xi-xiaoshuo xinshang, p. 34; Anon., "Xiangze minzuhua, qunzhonghua de fangxiang null, Dajiafan lai gaozongshu" (see p. 60); Yang Zhijie, Zhao Shuli xiaoshuo renwu lun, Taiyuan, Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1983, pp. 51-193.

The application of the term elazon here is based upon Northrop Frye's discussion of the characteristics and the role of this character type in classical drama (comedy) and in the fiction which derived therefrom. See Frye's Anatomy of Criticism, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957 (1973), pp. 39-40; 163-185. According to Frye's description we may summarize the role of the elazon as that of a blocking or obstructing character who exerts himself to prevent the eiron from having his way. Classically this conflict revolves around a father (the elazon) who tries to prevent a young man (the eiron and hero) from possessing the young woman of his choice. The triumph of the hero in the end involves much more than his realization of personal happiness in achieving union with his previously forbidden object of love: it signals the formation of a new society in which the older generation wielding unreasonable laws submits to the reasonable and therefore legitimate power of the younger generation. (See Frye, pp. 163-166.)

kuai\-ban 快板, clapper talk, rhymed narrative or commentary recited dramatically to the accompaniment of clappers rhythmically deployed by the performer. The Western form it most closely resembles is American "rap." Here the kuai\-ban has become a written form posted on the wall in the style of the "big character poster." Li Youcai's rhymes in "The Rhymes of Li Youcai" were also kuai\-ban. Li Youcai and his intended audience were all illiterate, so there was no question of writing them down. One imagines that in their use as a means to spread political messages, the luxury of the clapper had to be foregone.
The portrayal of difficult women represents another area in which Zhao both
borrowed from and flouted the conventions of "national form." The typical female
figure of the traditional folk tale was that of the "ingenious woman" (巧女), who amazed
and even pleased her often unreasonable parents-in-law and stymied the evil machina-
tions of swindlers and cruel overlords with her exceptional cleverness and extraordi-
nary intelligence. The existence of this character type is also attributed to women's
low status in traditional society: people gravitated to stories that intrigued through
their presentation of a world that was the opposite of reality. See Zhang Zichen 詹
 Ches Kennedy, *Minjian wenxue iben zhishi 民间文学基本知识*, Shanghai, Shanghai wenyi
chubanshe, 1979, p. 51.

Writers who sympathize with such characters attribute their outlandish be-
haviour to the stresses that came of their underprivileged status in the old society. See
for instance Xu Junxi 徐俊西, "Cong Zhao Shuli de chuanguo tan wenyi zuopin ruhe
fanying renmin neibu maodun wenti" 从赵树理的创作谈文艺作品如何反映人民内部
矛盾问题, *Wenyi yuebao*, 1959, no. 8, pp. 53-57 (see p. 56).

It is perhaps no coincidence that Zhao should have written a story depicting the
unhappiness of rural women not long after three works by Ding Ling which showed "a
deep concern for the plight of women" were singled out "as targets for the most fero-
cious condemnation," suggesting "an antifeminist bias on the part of the critics." See
Yi-tsi Mei Feuwerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press,
1982, p. 113. It was also at around this time that he contributed to the foundation of
the tailor shop and the day-care center in his home village to reduce the burdens of the
village women (see Chap. 2, p. 60).

Zhao Shuli, "Duanlian duanlian" 锻炼锻炼, in *Zhao Shuli wenji*, vol. 2, pp.
763-785.

Gao Jie, et. al., p. 33; Jack Beldan, *China Shakes the World*, New York and

Zhao Shuli, "Xiao Erhei jiehun," in Zhao Shuli, *Li Youcai banhua*, Beijing,
Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1979, pp. 1-17. Translated in Zhao Shuli, *Rhymes of Li
Youcai and Other Stories*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1950, 1980, pp. 86-
109.

Translated in Zhao Shuli, *Rhymes of Li Youcai and Other Stories*, pp. 1-66.

Liu E 刘鵾, *Lao Can youji 老残游记*, Beijing, Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1982,
p. 27.

Zhao Shuli, “Xie bu ya zheng,” in *Zhao Shuli xiaoshuo xuan*, Taiyuan, Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1979, pp. 231-271. There is a discrepancy in the text which has Wang Jucai relinquishing ten *mou* during the mass meeting but later bemoaning his loss of fifteen *mou*.


Yet another Zhao Shuli character, Tian Yongsheng 田永盛, father of Jinhu 金虎 in *Spirit Spring Caves*, took to his bed and fell ill when Jinhu’s younger brother was arrested by the KMT. Since he shortly thereafter suffered a stroke and died (beginning of chap. 2), he has not been included in the discussion. Third Fairy, of course, also took to her bed and fell ill as an adolescent, but there the similarity between her and these men ends, for her “bout with illness” instead of denoting despair was merely her pretense of a process whereby she became “possessed” by a spirit.

Two of Ma Youyi’s brothers left home to serve their country; one, “Tiesuanpan” 铁算盘 (“Iron Abacus” or “Skinflint”), stayed home to exclusively and faithfully serve his parents.
CHAPTER IX

Overview of the Fictional World, Part 2:
The Authoritarian Construct and Structural Criticism

As Zhao's fictional world unfolds, there emerge four dispositional patterns which dominate the tenor of its characters' lives. These are defiance, deference, idealism, and intolerance. The first of these, defiance, appears both in its defensive sense and in its narcissistic manifestation. The *alazon* women, Fugui, Meng Xiangying, Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin, to name a few, refuse to concede to a number of social codes of conduct in unapologetic attempts to deflect from themselves the ill effects of deindividuating forces that aspire to suffocate them. Their penchant to defy expectations, depending upon the skill or artifice with which they interpret it (and sometimes the degree of support they garner from sources of authority), either protects them from culturally anticipated abuse or intensifies the suffering they would ordinarily undergo. On the other hand, characters like the clan leader Wang Laowan (in “Fugui”), the mayor, Li Ruzhen (in *Changes in Li Village*), and the cadre Xiao Chang (in “The Just Prevail”) assert their self-proclaimed superiority not through cultivation of merit but through defiance of basic human decency.

Defere, or more precisely, the propensity to defer to other individuals or to society whether through reverence, habit, lack of imagination, conscious pliancy, or fear of reprisal or ostracism, serves both as a mainstay of political and social stability and conversely as an instrument of revolution and reform. He who defers, depending upon the person or force eliciting his concession, either acts as an accomplice to his own oppression, or, traveling across the spectrum of possibilities, contributes to the
perpetuation of a status quo of neutral personal impact, or even participates in a potentially self-benefiting process of social transformation. In “The Rhymes of Li Youcai,” for instance, Lao Qin, who fears even to hear negative innuendo against the policies of village strongman, Yan Hengyuan; Xiao Yuan and Ma Fengming, who under Yan’s seductive auspices metamorphose into facile imbibers of petty privilege; and Zhang Degui (张得贵), long a small “enemy of the people” as Yan’s lackey; are all equally both victims and abettors of the avarice that thrives upon their malleability. In Changes in Li Village, Wang Anfu (王安福), though sympathetic with Zhang Tiesuo’s plight, as mediator at his “trial” sustains in full knowledge of its spuriousness Mayor Li Ruzhen’s nephew’s claim to Tiesuo’s property, thereby reaffirming Li’s unsalutary precedence in the village. Tiesuo, on the other hand, the victim of his own limited imagination as well as the malicious greed of others, later becomes enthralled in Taiyuan with the charismatic communist agent, Xiao Chang (小常), not to be confused with the avaricious cadre Xiao Chang in “The Just Prevail”), absorbs the latter’s teachings, and under his influence returns to Li Village to help institute the changes to which the novel’s title refers.

It is this pliancy that tolerates or welcomes — even demands — the singularity of exclusive, morally definitive categorical imperatives. It assures stagnancy in the rule of tyranny, and, at the other end of the spectrum, feeds the dynamism of a revolution led by charisma. In Ma Youyi’s case, it is the sine qua non of his bifurcated loyalties. Confused in a transitional era, he is bereft of the sense of certainty that had comforted his forebears, for the rules and regulations defining morality and governing behaviour in his time conflict and contradict, leaving him stranded in his instinctive yearning to act with obedience. This drive to defer renders a plethora of effects: victim mentality, or the abasement of the sense of one’s own strength (example: instead of devising defenses against the abuses of local despots, the peasants of Li Village only dream of the day when the communists will come to kill their tormentors for them’); enthrallment
to superstition (Er Zhuge), transformation of private virtue into public parasitism (Xiao Yuan and Ma Fengming); acceptance of outrage upon property (Wang Jucai) and person (Lovely Moth); mob discipline of those who refuse to toe the line (Fugui, Leg Pains); flight from the brink of self-sufficiency and individualism (Wang Yongfu).

In this world in which deference holds sway as the behaviour of approbation while defiance rises to the surface like air bubbles escaping submerged depths, the introduction of a new ideology inevitably provokes devotion to idealism. Idealism, after all, is but opposition to a norm that visionaries point up as intolerable. By his very adherence to idealistic principles the idealist at once defies the conditions and habits that characterize society while deferring to a system of belief that projects an ethos inconsistent with actual current practice.

In Zhao's fictional world, the phenomenon of idealism refracts through three different character types: 1) Communist cadres, outsiders, who during brief organizational or trouble-shooting visits in the village represent the idealist stance or at least project its image. 2) Model workers or exemplars - original provincials - whose personal philosophy on social organization is not specifically revealed, but whose conduct coincides with the ideals espoused by the Communist Party. 3): Local peasants who self-consciously strive to perfect themselves and/or their society according to their understanding of communist principles.

The outsider cadres - Comrade Yang in "The Rhymes of Li Youcai," Xiao Chang in Changes in Li Village, and Secretary Wang in "Mutual Validation" - convey the countenance of idealism in part through their transient presence among the villagers. Sketchiness of characterization marks their portrayals, a phenomenon which in itself acts as an allegory of the villagers' personal acquaintance with them. How Xiao Chang in particular is perceived provides a case in point: the association of his physical appearance with perfection of spirit (p. 137) implies superficiality of observation on the part of his admirers. The villagers' brief encounter with these outsider cadres
enforces an unfamiliarity that prevents confirmation, or refutation, of their constancy to the principles of idealism they project. By animating the hope of the villagers for more hospitable living conditions and freedom from tyranny (in the era before the overthrow of the old order), or by reconfirming faith in the rectitude of the socialist path taken, the outsider cadres instill a conviction in their disinterested involvement, their consecration of self to altruistic precepts. The villagers, unaccustomed to displays of selflessness and noble pursuit, instinctively bestow upon them their respect and sometimes even awe. They regard these cadres not as models to emulate but as men whose idealism qualifies them to receive their trust and to serve as the benign regulators of their lives.

Among the group of exemplars abides a type of idealism that would perhaps better be termed “perfectionism.” The defiance of mediocrity, it is a non-culture-bound phenomenon, an impulse independent of ideology and unhelden to the forces of social transformation. Pan Yongfu (潘永福, in “Man of Action, Pan Yongfu”) and Chen Bingzheng (陈秉正, in “Unglovable Hands”) had been dedicated to a job well done from the time of their youth, long before communist paeans to industriousness entered their element. Being already well into or beyond middle age in the swaddling days of new China, it was their personal philosophy in striving for excellence that attracted the admiration of the communist leadership; and not the communist ideology that inspired their earnestness. Their achievements, however, are very much wedded to the dynamics of the age, for the ideology which adopted them and promoted their idealism enabled them to expand upon their native talents and to exert greater impact upon their environment than they could have otherwise. Whether or not they became emotionally swept up in the high tide of communist activism or personally aspired to help realize a specifically socialist transformation in their environment remains a task for the imagination. This is also true for Meng Xiangying, who, sometime after her attempts at suicide, was recruited to head up the Women’s Association in her village, a position
in which she distinguished herself as a retriever of squandered feminine talents and energies. For her, this was a chance to reassert her contempt for demeaning social conventions and old customs, a case in which idealism (or at least its image) emerged as the natural consequence of the dynamic interaction of innate defiance and an ideological movement. Whatever the underlying motivations driving these three exemplars, only one thing is for certain: that the social mobility they achieved by turning in exemplary performances occurred because their goal-oriented mentality coincided with the communist ideal. To infer from this that they also fervently dedicated themselves to launching an epochal transformation according to the tenets of communism would be to exceed the bounds of the presented reality.

The flavor of ideological idealism that informs these characterizations is a superimposed element, an imbrication of the imagination, derived in part from the fictional world’s affinity for lofty sentiments and in part from the contemporary reader’s inculcated expectations. On the other hand, there is no doubt that for characters like Fan Lingzhi in Sanliwan and Li Lamei (李腊梅) in “Take a Stand,” ideological idealism is the ruling passion of the soul. Fervently determined to live the exemplary life, both of these young women also make it their business to proselytize others. Lingzhi, a fully committed member of the Communist Youth League, vows to “cure” her father, Fan Denggao, of his “illness.” This reference to disease she uses to encapsulate a host of deficiencies on his part: his recalcitrant refusal to join Sanliwan’s fledgling agricultural cooperative; his running of a small retail business; his provocative display of wealth through ownership of two mules (when most people couldn’t even afford to keep one); his engagement of a mule driver in violation of Party rules against hiring laborers; his dereliction of official duties to attend to his private enterprise; and his preoccupation with money – i.e., a mass of “mistaken ways” that evokes disreputable “capitalism” and debases his Party membership. Charging herself with her father’s reform, she further enlists Ma Youyi to effect his father’s reform. As for Ma Youyi
himself, his degree of devotion to the communist cause also invokes her diligence, for
his education makes him a good marriage prospect. With the passage of time, however,
she becomes ever more irritated over his inability to renounce his parents' authority
in favor of the Party's exclusive guidance. She regiments her emotions to respond
to political fitness and consequently dispassionately rejects defective Youyi in favor
of the illiterate inventor, Wang Yusheng, whose qualifications lie in his single-minded
ambition to promote the Cooperative through his inventiveness.

In "Take a Stand," Li Lamei, the activist daughter-in-law of Wang Yongfu,
epitomizes the idealism of fired-up youth. Her enthusiasm for the communist cause
has not only propelled her into the position of Youth League Branch Secretary, it has
also made her the "model secretary of the whole district." Indeed, she states outright
that her status impels her to "strive to be a model in everything" (p. 320). The
quintessential proselytizer, she expects the members of her Mutual Aid Team to emu­
late her and to also "strive to be a model in everything" (p. 330). At a district
meeting she challenges her counterparts from other villages to up the ante in Party
goals; at home she zealously parrots district Party leaders ("Don't make the produc­tion concept too pure; it must be united with the study of politics, current events, cul­
ture, and technology!"); proclaims her plan for realizing the elevated Party expecta­tions (which she says can be achieved if the village women increase their work load),
and conducts League meetings with cheerful and unbounded enthusiasm that pointedly —
even cruelly — contrasts with her father-in-law's enervation and depleted conscien­
tiousness.

Her husband, Wang Xiao Chun (王小春, son of Wang Yongfu), though himself
unendowed with the talent for leadership, also imbibes the vision of epochal transfor­
mation and admires her endeavors to animate mass pursuit of ever higher goals.
Presented with the choice between the old world view as entertained by his father
(and mother as well), and the new movement emphasizing community interests, he
categorically repudiates the former. Unimpeded by the scruples that torment Ma Youyi, he regards his parents' loner mentality as cause for prematurely seizing his duly apportioned share of the family property and turning it, as well as his services, over to the exclusive use of the Mutual Aid Team.

Though this conflict is the product of a revolutionary movement, it actually continues the already established pattern of defiance in the fictional world, a defiance in which women and children challenge men and parents and oppressive social arrangements. The difference is that the involvement of idealism has intensified defiance into ruptured family, or would-be family, relations. Idealism enables defiance, either by primary motivation as in the case here, or by instigating a support system that inspires its expression where it otherwise might have been suppressed or sublimated. An example of the latter case is seen in Always Right and Muddlehead's third daughter-in-law Juying's actual formal separation from the family (as opposed to Li Lamei and her husband's precipitous ad hoc departure). Through the help of the community Juying takes the family land apportioned to her absent husband (who is in the army) and establishes a separate household, an arrangement which allows her to participate unimpeded in the village's formal cooperative efforts. This inspired defiance trickles down yet further to those who have no idealistic bents. Yuan Tiancheng, the husband of Audacious, observes the many breaches of the traditional social ethos and in emulation sets out to gain freedom from his own personal oppression: after years of stoic endurance of his wife's audaciousness he marches over to the village office to file for divorce.

But in its primary form the defiance that emanates from idealism involves the effort of the parties affected by it to nullify—or at the very least modify—one another's personal ideal (though the ideal does not necessarily entail idealism). Fan Lingzhi, for instance, demands a complete, no-holds-barred, renovation of her fathers' and Ma Youyi's conceptual base. These two, meanwhile, just as steadfastly insist
upon remaining true to their own conceptions of what the ideal life and what ideal behavior consist of. Ma Youyi for his part seeks for Lingzhi, contrary to her own idealism, to accommodate his principles of parental honor, risking and finally losing her favor in the process. Her father Fan Denggao's resistance to her efforts takes a more subtle form in which he tries deviously to devise arguments to subvert the successful formation of the Cooperative, thereby ensuring the status quo and making it impossible for her to realize her ideal.

In the case of Wang Yongfu and his wife versus their son and daughter-in-law, the conflict degenerates into acrimonious shouting matches and unabated anger. The parents demand that the children give up their public-spirited activities and live the isolated life with them. The children demand that the parents renounce the ideal of self-sufficiency they had worked a lifetime to achieve. In this clash of irreconcilable conceptions of life, there is no room for compromise or accommodation of one another's point of view or personal idiosyncrasies.

In "The Tobacco Leaf Caper," this clash of ideals - of idealism and, for want of a better term, self-indulgence - reverberates with unremitting resentment grounded in a tri-faceted betrayal: betrayal by a lover, betrayal of oneself, and betrayal of one's idealism. All of Zhao's idealists up to this last story of his find their idealism easily come by. They are strong, invincible, undisturbed by doubts and unplagued by weakness. They march on with ingenuous confidence, thoroughly absorbed in the goals that beckon them and unswervingly intent upon reaching them. In "The Tobacco Leaf Caper," however, the idealist Wang Lan (王兰) is more human, more frail, more subject to the inner forces of selfish desire - and therefore finally more vicious in her self-discipline and more emotionally intolerant of heretical aspirations in others.

Her lover - or by the time the story starts, her former lover - Jia Hongnian (家鸿年), is her opponent in a battle for personal philosophical transformation, she trying to educate him to a way of thinking more compatible with communist morality
and he trying to seduce her into a life of secluded if sophomoric intellectualism within an ivory tower of both proverbial and material design. Her eventual realization that any and all transformations have occurred in herself triggers a tedious and virulent repentance: she spends prodigious amounts of time poring over her diaries and copying out her remarks over time, classifying them according to their consistency or inconsistency with her original idealism - and finds herself sorely wanting in the latter pages of her recorded ruminations. In action more reminiscent of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face, she renounces her education (refusing to finish the last month or so of study necessary to gain her high school diploma) and vows to remain evermore in her home village and to marry a man with a verified "peasant tradition" (p. 536).

Her obsession with discovering and condemning every fault within herself and concomitantly in Jia Hongnian, indeed, borders on insanity - a state easily arising in a woman of social consciousness suddenly apprehending her entrapment in a pathological love affair. Her hypercritical rantings against Jia contain the essence of ideological hysteria. For instance, she excoriates him for his plan to retrieve a piece of original family property from the current owner who has been trying to sell it for some time; this, according to her, being an unscrupulous attempt to "gobble up other people's houses" and evidence of a "filthy spirit" and "stinky thought" (p. 523). This hysterical outburst betokens a salutary mechanism of ablation in action, a process of exorcising psychological and emotional dependence upon petty - and, it turns out, disingenuous - attentiveness. The vulgar rhetoric of ideology, on the other hand, reflects her attempt to retrieve her idealistic self from the rubble of lapsed self-discipline. The very virulence of her reaction, however, adumbrates the original intolerance that had initiated her noble project of fashioning Jia into an exemplary communist youth. Strategically subsuming this intolerance under a facade of pedagogical forbearance had proven, to her shock and dismay, to be useless and dangerous as well: discovering in herself evidence of the very egregiousness she had sought to excise from Jia's
character, she reverts to overt intolerance as anodyne, an assuager of guilt and a protector from further contamination.

That Wang Lan was trying to extricate herself from an undesirable relationship mitigates somewhat the odious nature of the intolerance she subscribed to; and yet it was partly due to this same intolerance that she sought to sever her ties with Jia. The decision to break with him was one not imbued with the pluralistic sense of futility at trying to marry two opposing philosophical outlooks, but rather a bigoted sense of righteousness that condemns the opposing outlook as execrable and denies its right to exist.

In the story "Venerable Gentleman Yang," the sentiments of the idealist, Yang Tiedan (杨殿基), have petrified into just such a case of ideological righteousness. No process of deliverance from emotional and psychological fetters, however, extenuates the unreason of his intolerance. Like what we may imagine that emotionally regimented Fan Lingzhi and Wang Lan may eventually become, he reserves his empathy for those who lavish their energies on fulfilling Party policies. This means that his father, a man immersed in the compelling attraction of his traditional aspirations, forfeits his son's affection and consideration while reaping his contempt.

Tiedan's father, Yang Dayong (杨大勇), bears the nickname "Venerable Gentleman" presumably because he has, in the Dickensian sense, "expectations." Tiedan, having left home as a youth, has been absent for six years, during which time he has acquired an education and become an "official" (actually a cadre), events which have surpassed the illiterate Yang Dayong's wildest dreams. For Yang Dayong's concept of the public servant is that notion which pervaded pre-revolutionary society as portrayed by Zhao in his story "The Tax Collector." He imagines that Tiedan has access to a large cash flow and will turn a goodly portion of his gains over to him in the manner of a traditional filial son. When he learns that Tiedan's position in the Communist Border Region Government gives him no access to money whatsoever, not even a salary,
Yang Dayong expects his son to alternatively fulfill his filial duty by remaining in the village and farming the land for him. For his part, Tiedan wants his father to emulate those villagers who exhibit communist progressiveness by regularly attending meetings, working for the common good, and cheerfully sending their sons off to the front. He is more than merely disappointed in his father’s obsession with achieving old-style success: he passes judgement on him as might an unsympathetic priest disdain a sinner, categorizing him as inhabiting the undesirable side of a dichotomy between good and evil.

While both the older man and the younger equally endeavour to impose their world view each upon the other, Tiedan’s behaviour stands out as strikingly uncharitable given his advantage over his father in possessing education and position. His antipathetic regard for his father, benighted as the old man is and encumbered by compulsive, old-fashioned sentiments, bespeaks smugness in his own enlightenment. The rapid devolution (less than 24 hours) of his initial emotional barrenness into hostility and disgust (its precipitousness further enhanced by the brevity of the narrative) further distills his attitude of personal moral superiority that admits of even the facile disposal of the familial bond and disregard for the minimum of filial respect.

Repelled by his father’s desperate attempt to rejuvenate his patriarchal authority, and repulsed by his display of “dirty thinking” (p. 847), Tiedan absconds while a conspirator, a local cadre, artfully distracts the old man in his office. This insult is the final assertion of his conviction in the singular and categorical correctitude of the doctrine that fuels his idealism. We may recall that do-gooder Wang Lan had initially defined her relationship with Jia Hongnian in terms of conditional tolerance — that is, tolerance tactically granted in sanguine anticipation that Jia would eventually see the light and voluntarily reform. Tiedan, however — and his name, literally meaning “Iron Egg,” is remarkably appropriate to his emotional stinginess — displays a rigidity that binds his judgement to a Procrustian standard. His is a consciousness
trained only to mechanistically recognize and condemn theoretical negatives in a bankrupt society but destitute of the capacity to appreciate a living person's profound sense of loss and injustice as he views his life-long hopes recede irretrievably into the past. To indulge his father—who, after his long absence, is really a stranger to him—with conditional tolerance would have been a sign of weakness—as Wang Lan eventually came to decide about herself.

The story "Tempering" shifts the focal point for such intolerance from the theatre of domesticity and the interpersonal conflict to the public arena and the civil leader's repertoire of official conduct. Yang Xiaosi (杨小四), the Deputy Director of the Zhengxian Agricultural Cooperative (郑先社), is a zealous young man who yearns to eradicate the kind of weakness Wang Lan indulged and Yang Tiedan repudiated. It is not in himself that he seeks this cleansing but in others, specifically the co-op's director, Wang Juhai (王聚海). Frustrated by the elusiveness of perfection in the collective society he has a part in running, he blames his superior's devotion to compromise and politic pragmatism for the attitudinal mayhem flourishing among the co-op's women. Indeed, the story is as much about Yang's revolt against what he deems to be moral leniency in the leadership as it is about the manhandling of the co-op's women and the persecution of Leg Pains. When the director is called away from the village at the height of the cotton harvest, Yang Xiaosi, with the aid of several like-minded cohorts, cracks the whip, so to speak, and employs the cunning of petty Machiavellianism to coerce the co-op's refractory women into the public fields to carry out their imposed obligation to collectivism. This young man, in fact, is a Yang Tiedan who has gained an opportunity to act upon his disciplinarian cravings. Leg Pains, his target for specific cautionary discipline, he co-opts as the natural instrument of his reformist message, not merely because her notorious impudence attracts his attention with the efficacy of a beckoning magnet; but also because his design is to challenge what he regards as the director's effeminate reliance upon diplomacy and flattery to accomplish
the goals of the co-op. That is, believing that the director through his policy of forbearance has created the monster that is Leg Pains, he takes disciplinary action against her in his absence as a means of denouncing the director's moral leniency. In his zeal to realize his ideal, he ignores the innumerable variations upon the human spirit. He neglects to consider that hers perhaps is an irrepressible spirit not easily broken or shackled to imposed notions of propriety — a spirit bound sooner or later to resist any attempted impingements upon her independence (and therefore the director is not to be faulted).

Cloaked as it is in a provocative mantle of ideologicalism, such intolerance, by conjuring up a specific kind of Twentieth Century political agenda, obscures its cultural indebtedness. The very intensity of purpose of this ideologicalism, however, and the unbounded faith its embracers have in its efficacy, should signal its dependence upon a long-standing conceptual base, its nurturance, as it were, in traditionally sanctioned hostility toward deviance from purported norms. Zhao's fictional world, consistent with this conclusion, reaches back in time and into the lives of ordinary, apolitical people to show the original pervasiveness of the intolerant regard for others' idiosyncrasies — the inveterate, reform-oriented obsession with imposing standards of personal or institutional design.

Time and again do we see this: in "Fugui," there is Wang Leowan's compulsive desire to punish Fugui for violating the clan's standard of behavior; in "Tempering," there is the villagers' unmitigated impulse to ensure the chastisement of Leg Pains; in "The Heirloom," there is Li Cheng Niang's frustrated desire to compel her daughter-in-law's conformity to her image of proper feminine comportment; in "The Emancipation of Meng Xiangying," there is Popo's cruelty to her uncomprehending daughter-in-law in her attempt to eradicate the girl's innate individualism. In "Registration," Alai, Lovely Moth's daughter, is subjected to a general condemnatory attitude from her fellow villagers, who rankle at the notion of a girl's choosing
her own husband, and the coercive tactics of the civil clerk in charge of marriage reg-
istration, who demands her submission to the traditional practice of arranged mar-
riage. In both "Emancipation" and "Registration," husbands severely beat wives who
do not measure up to their expectations. In "Venerable Gentleman Yang," Tiedan's fa-
ther categorically closes his mind to new viewpoints and possibilities and imperiously
commands his son's unconditional submission to his will. In "Zhang Laixing" (张来兴),
a government official fires a yamen cook who refuses to recognize his claim to intrin-
sic superiority. In "The Rhymes of Li Youcai" and in "Liu Erhe and Wang Jisheng,"
outspoken men are driven away from their homes by mayors who do not countenance
criticism.

Thus, the salient issue at hand is not that ideo-idealism generated intolerance
(which, at any rate, is an unremarkable truism), but that the cultural banality of in-
tolerance rendered it an expected, acceptable, even appropriate measure for coping
with human differences, regardless of any political movement afoot. In its very com-
monality it contributed to the consolodation of an ideo-idealism, since the latter, in
providing an outlet for the former, finds a base for legitimacy through consistency
with ingrained habit. This linkage further means that such an ideo-idealistic intoler-
ance must necessarily also be subject to the same constrictions as its traditional coun-
terpart: that is, whatever the foundation upon which one justifies and constructs an
intolerant viewpoint, there is a difference between its personal indulgence and the
ability or advisability of openly expressing it.

For instance, Li Cheng Niang ("The Heirloom") harbors specific, uncompro-
mising notions of a daughter-in-law's requisite characteristics. But the source of her
unhappiness - her daughter-in-law's traditionally unorthodox involvement, along
with her husband, in Party/government affairs - is also the deterrent to her mother-
in-lawish disciplinary bent. As she cannot afford to risk alienating her son or to incur
the displeasure of his colleagues, she can only suppress her major criticisms and give
vent to her frustrations by carping over petty details and surreptitiously complaining to her own daughter. In “Xiao Erhei Gets Married,” youthful Third Fairy’s father-in-law is equally intolerant of her exuberant life-style, but her apparent liaison with the spirit world curbs his ability to act on his principles. In “The Rhymes of Li Youcai,” Lao Qin must compromise his confirmed taboo against references to the improbity of the villages’ power holders because of his sense of powerlessness before younger, more vital men who ignore his demand for silence.

In the era of ideological enthusiasm, when a vast political organization incites idealism and supports its implacability, the full expression of an intolerant attitude still depends upon the individual’s confidence in his or her own ability to survive the personal chaos it would create. A case in point is Fan Lingzhi, who sets before Ma Youyi a requirement to reform his father that is a prescription for chaos in the Ma family — a task fraught with unpleasantness that she does not consider for herself. For while she preaches quite convincingly about her plans to reform her father, she in fact does very little in the way of active proselytizing. Instead, she waits for the “Party” and the “masses” to educate him. The head-on confrontation she recommends for Ma Youyi, she does not advocate for herself. Rather, she presents before her father the mien of a sweet-tempered Socialist exemplar and obedient daughter, while hiding from him the true virulence of her intolerance (which she expresses behind his back at a joint Party–Youth League meeting he does not attend in which she reports upon his un–Socialistic behaviour (pp. 457–462)). Her differential treatment of her father and Ma Youyi (the former vastly more deficient in his Socialism than the latter) reflects the truth of her situation: the more her interest in Ma Youyi as a marriage prospect wanes, the more she can afford to mistreat him; meanwhile, she cannot afford to alienate her father, either because she loves him and would regret the loss of his fatherly affection, or because she herself cannot participate fully in collective activities without his cooperation (i.e., he is the owner of the property that would be the basis of her
participation).

A similar dynamic exists in the case of Wang Lan ("The Tobacco Leaf Caper"), who stifles the full expression of her rigid moral construct as long as Jia Hongnian remains desirable in her eyes, but demonstrates it vigorously upon realizing she has nothing to lose by it and everything to gain—specifically, extrication from an unwanted relationship.

Just as intolerance funds the era’s idio-idealism, so the idio-idealism re-requisites intolerance in its attempt to create unanimity, eradicate troublesome individuality, and stifle discontent. Leg Pains has only to deal with a few cadres who have as their task the coordination and discipline of a resentful and uncooperative labour force. She knows that there are plenty of people who agree with her in principle even if they dislike her personally. Other inveterate individualists in Zhao’s fictional world, however, find themselves faced with what at least appears to them as entire societies that have adopted the idio-idealistic mode. Wang Yongfu ("Take a Stand") is one of these. If he and his wife are not the only ones in the village to be disenchanted with collectivism, he at least perceives such to be the case, and he feels the profound isolation of his non-conformity.

Fan Denggao in Sanliwen is his kindred spirit. Like Wang Yongfu, Fan Denggao is a communist cadre of humble origins, having become enriched during the period of land reform. People grumble that he got more than his share and call him “Fandegao” (翻得高 “Turned Over High,” a play on the word fanshen). He counters with the argument that he was merely smart enough and enterprising enough to parlay his gains into greater wealth. Unlike Wang Yongfu, he does not wish to abandon his civic duties and political responsibilities, but rather to combine them with a part-time private enterprise (he buys goods on the wholesale market and resells them at retail in his house) that he runs in his spare time. Being an individualist, he does not want to join the co-op. He even devotes energy to subverting its formation so as to forestall
his eventual obligation as a Party leader to join it.

As with Wang Yongfu, all of Fan's associates are ardent believers in collectivism and intolerant of the individualist construct he wishes to place upon their Socialist dream. They demand that he conduct himself in the manner of a true communist, meaning that he should drop his capitalistic activities and join the co-op, bringing along his two mules as his property contribution. He cavils at their presumptuous and unrelenting attempts to reform him. They call him upon the carpet at a "rectification meeting" where he is made to speak in self-confession. They are dissatisfied with his confession, finding it to be full of false pride and insincerity. They preach at him eloquently about his obligations as a Party member and about how he should be grateful to the Party for all it has accomplished for society and for him. They threaten him with expulsion if he does not shape up, and finally opt to discipline him and put him on probation. He is then assailed with rounds of criticism.

The sting of this persecution endows him with sleepless, chain-smoking nights, but it is not guilt-ridden thoughts that occupy his mind but stratagems of escape. He is satisfied with the life he has achieved, wants to maintain it, resents their attempts to deprive him of his entitlement to it. The aggravation of their intense and unrelenting criticism, however, combines with worries over a bad investment to eventually convince him that running an independent business is more trouble than it is worth. He decides to abandon his enterprise and sell his mules (which he used to transport goods) to the first buyer he should find. Selling the mules has a dual purpose, the first pragmatic - to recoup losses he sustained from his bad investment - and the second symbolic - to send a message of avowed independence and to mount a reprisal against those who would shove the co-op down his throat and take his mules as payment for the privilege. Even though he knows that joining the co-op and turning the mules over to its collective efforts would bring him as much a return as selling them and banking the money, the satisfaction he would gain from choosing the latter course is
overwhelmingly attractive to him.

The problem of the individualist immersed in a society enamored of monolithic unanimity emerges in greater concentration in the story “Mutual Validation.” The protagonist, Liu Zheng, is an 18-year old re-ruralized educated youth. A graduate of junior high school, he is a poet who suffers a monumental discontent with his lot. Because of his habit of sitting around and writing poetry instead of doing the work assigned him by the Production Team, his classmates have bestowed upon him the nickname “Fractional Poet.” At first they simply called him “Poet” until one day he had done so little work that the Team could only reward him with 1/100th of a work point, an incident which resulted in the word “fractional” to be prefixed to the original sobriquet.

It is a nickname that infuriates him. In fact, there are many things that infuriate him, and one day he writes a graphic letter to Secretary Li of the County Committee asking for a transfer to a more hospitable environment.

Now, Liu Zheng is one of the most imperfect protagonists to drop from the pen of Zhao Shuli - that is, imperfect in the sense that all of us are imperfect and have good and bad points that alternately outweigh one another. Liu Zheng alternately evokes the sympathy of the reader and inspires contempt. One can legitimately feel sorry for him as a frustrated youth who has some knowledge of the outside world, harbors ambitions, and wants to expand his horizons and develop his talent, but for whom all routes to opportunity are closed off to him by a super-organized society that has inflexibly consigned him to a single niche unsuited to his temperament. We may sympathize with him even in our contempt for his faults, even rationalize those faults with a conviction that they are merely a superficial manifestation of frustrations that nobody should have to endure.

One might also attribute his acerbic nature to the temperament of the artist and even excuse him for indulging feelings of paranoia because of the artist’s
super-sensitivity. But one might not feel inclined to extend to him the benefit of the doubt when it becomes clear that the letter he wrote to Secretary Li of the County Committee is, though grounded in fact, full of embellishments and fabrications. On the other hand, desperation often pushes people into actions they would not ordinarily do. Furthermore, it was his very attempt to use his talent for novelizing real life as a means of securing a better position for himself that provides a plot for the story.

Sometime after Liu Zheng posts his letter, a Secretary Wang arrives from the county seat to investigate his case. The Secretary tours the Production Team's various projects and finds all the returned students (except Liu Zheng) to be well-adjusted, conscientious workers not in the least bit disturbed that their education has not extricated them from the village of their birth. He then sequesters himself with Liu Zheng, who is unaware that he has in hand his letter to Secretary Li. Liu Zheng, thinking that Secretary Wang might be sympathetic to his plight, tells him all his troubles in much the same way as he wrote them in the letter. To his momentary joy, Secretary Wang says there is a job opening elsewhere that he might apply for. To his immediate disappointment, he learns that the job consists of reviving a pottery kiln located in a remote, impoverished mountain village so tiny it consists of only eight families - a dead-end situation if he ever saw one. To his disgust, Secretary Wang does not sympathize with his frustrations but lectures him on the importance of putting his heart into his assigned work. To his chagrin, Secretary Wang tells him that he must participate in a "unity" meeting that evening in which he will be required to make a self-confession in the interest of resolving his differences with his fellow classmates.

At this meeting Liu Zheng receives a shock when Secretary Wang pulls out the letter he wrote to Secretary Li and proceeds to read it aloud. Liu Zheng had made some rather harsh remarks about each of his classmates in that letter (as well as about other members of the Production Team not present) which he naturally does not want them to hear. He protests saying that he wrote that letter personally to Secretary Li
and that its contents therefore shouldn't be revealed to anyone else. Secretary Wang justifies his violation of the young man's privacy by declaring the missive not to be a personal letter since Liu Zheng has no personal relationship with Secretary Li, and, furthermore, the problems he wrote about are not personal problems. Then in another neat twist of logic, he, referring to Liu Zheng's plea in the letter for rescue, says that he has come to "rescue" him as requested.

Eventually the letter is read. Liu Zheng's classmates are naturally incensed at what he wrote, for he, as he confesses, exaggerated the incidents he described to elicit Secretary Li's sympathy and thereby wrangle a transfer. Nonetheless, the picture he painted in the letter of persecution and unfairness, though not objectively entirely correct, is a subjectively truthful reflection of his profound distress and unhappiness at the situation in which he finds himself. That which upsets him the most—the human inhospitality of the environment—is that which his classmates most vehemently deny. They particularly cavil at descriptions of themselves that include phrases such as "give me the cold shoulder," "wink behind my back," "callous and unfeeling," "laugh at my misfortune;" and when they hear the line "the people around here are all like wasps. They devise all sorts of ways to dig at me and hurt my feelings," one of them leaps up and shouts at him that he has no conscience (p. 488).7

Now, Liu Zheng undoubtedly suffers from a certain degree of paranoia, and yet his sense of persecution is not inconsistent with reality. Being unhappy and resentful in his situation, he is typically uncooperative and often abrasive, and through his behaviour he has not exactly endeared himself to his colleagues. Those around him naturally react with the puerility generally associated with youth. In one instance when he asks to be excused from physical work because of a flare-up of arthritis (it is never clear whether he really has arthritis or whether it is a total fabrication like Leg Pains' leg pains) they make fun of him, demonstrate they don't believe him by pointing out that a certain old man over seventy years of age doesn't suffer so, and express their
wish that he be transferred elsewhere: "We can't keep such trash around here!" one of them exclaims. In another incident when Secretary Wang first descends from his car, one of them deliberately provokes Liu Zheng by pointing out to him the "country bumpkin" - a reference to a time two years previously when Liu Zheng got into trouble by extemporizing a satirical rhyme that cast aspersions upon Wang's qualifications: "The country bumpkin, living in a tiny world, lacking great ambitions, only knows how to farm" (p. 478). For this he had been publicly berated, accused of looking down upon labor and slandering a Party official.

In fact, the young people of the village, his classmates and otherwise, take every opportunity to poke fun at him, and the ring of raucous laughter at his expense is heard more than once.

Thus, when his classmates wonder, wide-eyed, at the beginning of the meeting what he could possibly hold against them (p. 487), they are being disingenuous. And by their very declaration that he has no conscience when he complains of their devising ways to ridicule him, they reveal not only their own illogicality - for there is never a reason not to believe someone who complains of hurt feelings - but also their want of sensitivity. For they did indeed tease him, often and relentlessly.

Though it was Liu Zheng's lies that fixed the attention of the County Committee upon his case (favoritism, nepotism, and prejudice among the local leadership were not charges to be taken lightly), it is easily enough resolved. He confesses, apologizes, and receives a lecture. His classmates, too, finally own up to a certain degree of opportunistic mischief in their treatment of Liu Zheng, admit their wrong, and receive an exhortation to extend to Liu a friendly helping hand. This is the expected outcome since Secretary Wang in mediating the discord among the students has invoked a formulaic procedure which he has probably quoted dozens of times: "Begin with the hope of unity, then go through criticism, and then arrive at new unity" (p. 483). Undoubtedly, the students, too, have heard it dozens of times, are acutely aware of the
mediator's expectations, and have devised their own formulaic ways of fulfilling them in the shortest time possible.

Liu Zheng politely thanks the Secretary for his guidance and then appends the loaded question: "Should not a young person embrace a great ideal and strive to achieve something spectacular and heroic?" This reaps for him another lecture, the gist of which focusses upon the concept of values: that is grand and spectacular and heroic which one holds to be so in the heart: one has only to realize that running a water pump or tilling the fields is as heroic a job as any because such work contributes to national construction.

"Mutual Validation" is a story that leaves the reader with a sense of deflation and dissatisfaction, for Secretary Wang's formulaic resolution of both the interpersonal conflict and the troubled youth's unhappiness, though an exercise in eloquence, is as superficial as it is facile. Furthermore, the protagonist is denied a return to the centrality of his role, a serious narrative defect. It is almost as if a defect in artistry were intentionally introduced to allegorically mirror Secretary Wang's dogmatically ungratifying handling of Liu Zheng's case. His solution to the youth's problems relies upon the suppression of the outward signs of inner discontent and the denial of creative energy's need for a uniquely appropriate and stimulating outlet.

Indeed, in Secretary Wang's promotion of "unity" is reflected society's arrival upon the threshold of control to which it had long gravitated: the power to finally impose conformity without recourse. Intolerance legitimized and consolidated by doctrinal sanction and institutional mandate complements and strengthens a super-organized society that has vitiated or eliminated the foundations of individualist resistance. That is, Zhao's works throughout are populated with characters who are victimized by social intolerance for their individualist ways. Since his works straddle both the pre-communist and the communist eras, we must conclude that the intolerance Zhao portrays is characteristic of Chinese society in general and not a phenomenon arising from
the adoption of a new political system. But the world in which Liu Zheng lives is very
different from the world in which Zhao's other characters lived. His other characters
could find some way to resist intolerance and maintain their individuality. For in-
stance, Fugui could run away and make a new life for himself, Zhang Laixing quit his
job and find another elsewhere, Third Fairy find refuge in the spirit world, Meng
Xiangying embrace ideological defiance, Leg Pains and Hunger Pangs devise ingenious
ways to circumvent the attempt to enslave them (one imagines that after the crisis has
blown over, Leg Pains will again be up to her old tricks). But the overregulated,
super-organized, homogenized society in which Liu Zheng lives has eliminated such
options for intractables and misfits in a stubborn refusal to recognize that some are
constitutionally unsuited to the singular type of sociability it demands. Restriction of
movement in terms of both geography and employment binds Liu Zheng to a single
place. His education makes Third Fairy's solution unthinkable; the ideology that once
fueled defiance in the past is now a jealous, self-perpetuating orthodoxy; and unlike
Leg Pains, he is totally alone in his discontent. Under these circumstances it becomes
apparent that his lying, his cultivation of a persecution complex, and his development
of a talent for drawing derision upon himself are little more than devices for releasing
the pressure of his innate individualist impulses — of creating some excitement to dis-
pel the ennui and aggravation of an overregulated and uninspiring life.

The comic mode, to which Zhao's fiction belongs, and its element of reconcilia-
tion renders narrative particularly vulnerable to the kind of manipulation that can
destroy a character's integrity in the end. The device of the *deus ex machina* stands
ever waiting in the wings seductively offering its services to any writer whose char-
acters turn out to be too independent-minded to voluntarily relinquish their stance for
the sake of fulfilling a requirement of aesthetic form. As Frye (p. 170) points out,
"comedy regularly illustrates a victory of arbitrary plot over consistency of charac-
ter." To succumb to this convention in a work committed to both verisimilitude and
instructiveness, however, is to actually vitiate—not strengthen—the validity of the new, harmonious society that is supposed to appear at the end. This is a principle that Zhao understood very well, as is evident in his handling of his elazon women.

Third Fairy’s reform, for instance, occurs as a natural progression of events: she undergoes a crushing personal humiliation which evokes in her a visceral realization of her lost allurements. This fact alone negates the rationale behind most of the behaviour that defines her role as a character. Dismantling the trappings of her pseudo-shamanism is the only logical outcome of her newly acquired awareness that men no longer find her attractive, since her fortune-telling enterprise came into existence primarily as a front to facilitate unorthodox liaisons. Giving up the idea that she can perpetuate a life-style founded upon a requirement of youth and beauty also prompts a change in attitude toward Xiao Qin, whom she can now regard as the daughter she is and not a competitor for the attentions of men.

In Saniwan Audacious finally embraces a demeanor more closely resembling that upheld as appropriately feminine. The impetus for this change lies in her own self-interest and is in response to circumstances impervious to her usual methods of control. The sudden arousal of her husband’s sleeping discontents means that the manipulation and aggressiveness she used in the past to govern the quality of her life have now become liabilities that threaten to destroy what she has built up for herself. The real prospect of losing him to a divorce that would evaporate her security and shroud her in permanent humiliation compels her to an unprecedented retreat into feminine orthodoxy for the sake of averting this catastrophe.

In similar fashion, fear also impels Always Right to a reassessment of her life and a remodeling of her behaviour. The fear that fueled her unbridled repression of her son Youyi’s attempts to extend himself beyond the walls of the Ma family compound is the same fear that animates her resolve to turn over a new leaf: the fear that he would abandon her. The first instance of this fear was founded upon her accumulation
of experience (two sons had already chosen social duty over her), while the second
arises upon a logical projection into the future: Youyi’s final achievement of psycho-
logical independence has opened her eyes to the sincerity of his filial impulses: she
comes to realize that any act of abandonment on his part would be the result solely of
alienation. In other words she is confronted with a choice between treating him with
common courtesy or living a diminished old age isolated from him. The process by
which she apprehends the necessity to reform herself suggests that “Venerable
Gentleman” Yang might also have eventually gone down a similar path had only his son
given him the chance.

Thus, consistently, such characters one after another modify their blatant dis-
regard for social propriety, not because of some arbitrary twist of plot, but because
they apprehend that it would be in their own self-interest to do so. What is more
startlingly apparent, though, given the ideological imperatives supposedly motivating
the very creation of the works encompassing these characters, is that each conversion
stands unrelated to the ideology that is supposed to be the celebratory object of the
writer’s efforts. The mellowing of each character, rather, turns upon personal en-
lightenment induced by sociological and psychological factors. Catching up with these
characters and brandishing before them the ultimatum of transformation or tragedy
are the age-old realities of human nature, human relationships, and the inexorable
forward march of the life cycle: maturation of children, their drive for independence,
the ramifications of marriage, divorce, aging, decline.

This ideological neutrality informs the transformations of other characters as
well. Muddlehead and Yuan Tiancheng (husband of Audacious) finally join the co-op
strictly for economic reasons. Xiao Ma (Changes in Li Village) apologizes for his sins
against society and pledges to make restitution because he wants to avert social isola-
tion. Fugui renounces gambling and his other unsalutary endeavors because he is given
an opportunity to make a reliable and honest living, which was his original ambition.
Er Zhuge gives up the open practice of divination to avoid his wife's reproval. Li Cheng Niang finally cheerfully defers to her daughter-in-law when she realizes the young woman is better equipped to handle the complications of modern life. Meng Xiangying works hard to carry out Party policies as an expression of defiance against a traditional ethos that injured her.

Each is a story of self-interest perceived and pursued. The propaganda value alone of this narrative logistic is inestimable, for it demonstrates that the emerging society of the end is founded upon voluntary, self-interested, relevant change that reaps high reward. Self-interest affirms its integral— even ascendant— position in the fictional world by emerging even from within the midst of the ideo-idealists. As noted earlier, Fan Lingzhi pursued her own political imperatives only when she could be reasonably assured that her actions would not disrupt the tranquillity of her own family life or interfere with her prospects for marriage. Similarly, Wang Lan ("The Tobacco Leaf Caper") alternately suppressed and redeployed her idealism according to the status of her relationship with her boyfriend. To these examples must be added the case of Ma Youyi. This young man merits placement among the ideo-idealists despite his cohorts' myopic belief to the contrary, for he is sincerely, dedicated to the realization of the socialist agenda. The difference between him and the others lies in his balanced, reasonable concept of this goal untainted by fanaticism. Toward the end of the story he finally indeed achieves that which his friends have been demanding of him: psychological emancipation from his parents' authority. This development in fact is perhaps the most memorable event of the novel, a climax toward which it suspensefully builds over a good proportion of its pages. Because of his natural idealism, Ma Youyi is a character who could have been enlisted (by the author) to demonstrate the potency of ideological inspiration in bringing about a desired change. A cerebral realization of the "right thing to do," however, would clash with his hyper-emotional nature. Instead, fittingly, that which brings about his transformation is none other than
madness.

While the recalcitrant character's reconciliation with the society that has de­
rided or detested him or her is a salient feature of Zhao's fiction, it rests upon a
paradigm that disallows its accomplishment through the arbitrary transformation of
the character's natural bent. In "Mutual Validation," Liu Zheng is no exception to the
pattern that Zhao established of maintaining his characters' integrity. Nonetheless, a
superficial reading of the story might incite the impression that he, in a scenario con­
sistent with the comic mode, reforms and becomes reconciled to the society that he has
heretofore despised. His apparent adoption at the end of an attitude of greater
amenability to society's demands is enhanced by Secretary Wang's final edifying
speech. The role of this speech is reminiscent of that played by the edifying endings of
the Han dynasty "fu," which strive to divert attention away from the supposedly unsalu­
tary but actually fully cherished sentiments expressed in the body of the work. With
similar adroitness, Secretary Wang's speech distracts from the fact that Liu Zheng's is
actually an ersatz reconciliation. But ersatz it is, and in this Zhao has slyly violated
the comic mode. Herein lies the essence of his meaningful artistic "defect": Liu
Zheng has not really joined the new society. His display of gratitude to Secretary Wang
for his wise counseling is merely a formulaic politesse animated by a motivation of
self-preservation and belied by his enduring notion of himself as latent hero of some as
yet unconceived spectacular accomplishment.

The story throughout depicts Liu Zheng as stubborn, independent-minded, and
possessed of unbounded ambition. At the end, despite the patina of courtesy he has as­
sumed, it is clear that he has not changed one whit, and we may look for him to either
overcome the odds and eventually succeed, or to one day down the road sink as a broken
middle-aged man into the mire of repression.

The theme of the troubled youth is essential to the portrayal of the completely
monolithic, ideo-idealistc society in a work that seeks to maintain a connection with
reality. Whether Zhao intended to or not, he has created a nearly surrealistic scenario: the misfit finds himself trapped in a “perfect” (but to him, plastic) society populated by “perfect” people (but to him, brainless automatons) who one moment test his moral fibre and laugh hysterically at his supposed moral ignorance and the next moment sit in grave judgement of his sins. It is only Liu Zheng’s identity as a misguided youth that prevents the story from crossing over into such surrealism - and thus into the realm of overt social criticism. For the unlikelihood of the perfectly unanimous society (except one) emerging in reality, as well as the, in reality, doubtful wisdom and ethicalness of forcing someone into an ill-fitting niche, are offset by the perennial legitimacy of correcting an errant youth. That is, to portray a unanimous society in which everyone remorselessly persecutes the one misfit, whose ambitions are really not in the least unreasonable, would be to produce a surrealistic picture of obvious critical intent (re. Kafka).

Zhao’s making the misfit a misguided youth who has to be disciplined for telling lies is a reflection of his own perspicacity in a society that routinely persecuted its writers for expressing things it did not wish to hear. For the legitimate discipline of a youth who tells lies has the effect of veiling the actual illegitimacy of the real intent of the discipline, that is, to punish him for his innate inability to accept the kind of life that a politically enforced collective society had imposed upon him, as well as his unwillingness to identify with the diminished personal ambitions of those around him. (Here we may recall Leg Pains, whose punishment was really prompted by her daring to challenge and criticize the commune’s leaders and by her refusal to conform to society’s demands, not for petty stealing). By veiling the illegitimacy of such discipline, the writer introduces a subtle criticism that resists conscious detection in a superficial reading - the reader is merely left with a sense of disappointment and unease - and the job of figuring out the criticism for himself. The writer hints at his critical intent, helping the reader to deduce it through the use of an artistically defective ending, made
effective by the fact that it is unique in his body of fiction.

This, of course, is not the first time that Zhao used such device to provoke his readers. "Tempering" also elicits a visceral unpleasantness through its shift into irony, making, as we have seen, its "obstructing character" (i.e., Leg Pains) "look less involved in guilt and the society more so." By subjecting his story to this shift and altering its expected structural design, Zhao introduced into it a wordless means of editorial comment upon certain phenomena in society. The result is an unmistakably clear statement that he felt society to be "involved in guilt," and the nature of that guilt, we must conclude, centered upon the authoritarian channeling of women into forced labor.

By choosing a structural means of criticizing a phenomenon, Zhao pointed to this societal guilt not through the honing of a straightforward statement (which would immediately attract the attention of political avengers), but by inducing in the reader a feeling of emotional disturbance which that reader had to interpret on his own. That he profoundly affected his readers can be seen in the debate the story provoked upon its publication. Many orthodox ideologues verified its emotional affectivity when they reacted with highly emotional statements accusing Zhao of "distorting reality." Though in the end he was exonerated of distortion, he was merely credited with fearlessly exposing "contradictions among the people" and the inappropriate conduct of mistaken cadres, while the larger and more serious question of his view on the forced progression of communist enshrouding of Chinese society was ignored.

In "Mutual Validation," the narrative defect of denying the protagonist a return to his central role, of sweeping him off to the side of the stage, as it were, in favor of the dramatic interloper, Secretary Wang, of denying him a voice and denying the audience knowledge of his reaction to Secretary Wang's final speech, illustrates very incisively a scene of authoritarian crudeness and insensitivity unmitigated by the secretary's fancy words and lofty sentiments. Here we see the arbitrary practice of
suppressing problems instead of solving them and the resulting dissatisfaction (sensu­ ally felt by the reader when he experiences the artistic defect) that arises from such a practice. That is, the artistic defect symbolizes allegorically the social defect. The ef­ fectiveness and validity of this ploy, of course, is dependent upon his consistent adher­ ence to the decorum demanded by the comic mode in his other works. It is this rela­ tionship that precludes the story’s being summarily dismissed as substandard. On the other hand, it is unlike the technique he employed in “Tempering,” which does not de­ pend upon familiarity with his other works, but only upon the universally felt signifi­ cance of a shift from the comic mode into irony, an artistically legitimate move which does not depend upon a deliberate compromise of artistic integrity.

It must be pointed out here that whether Zhao Shuli intended such an effect in “Mutual Validation” or not, it nonetheless occurs, and whether he liked his own pro­ tagonist or not, the problem of suppression rather than resolution as an element of the work still exists. Whatever critics and politicians think Zhao’s intention here was, the glaring question remains: why did he, after years of producing artistically “regu­ lar” stories, suddenly endow this one work with a defective ending? We also have to look at the significance of his casting his misfit into the role of a troubled youth. In addition to the fact that this artistic decision keeps the story from sliding into surreal­ ism and thus into direct social criticism, the character in his unemancipated state (i.e., he is a minor) provides grist for a subtle warning: if Liu Zheng does not delib­ erately symbolize, he certainly prefigures, the childlike vulnerability to and depen­ dency upon authority that must necessarily characterize all members of a totally con­ trolled society.

Thus, it seems overwhelmingly evident that Zhao Shuli deliberately “ruined” his ending here to make a point, and that point, not surprisingly, is felicitously con­ sistent with the point that emerges from his story of Leg Pains. That is, the use of au­ thoritarian force to compel ordinary people to comply with ideological principles they
cannot embrace is a practice that reflects an unsalutary social environment.

There is further evidence that Zhao used structural manipulation to make criticisms of social and political significance in his treatment of the character Fan Denggao in Sanliwen. Fan Denggao is a character to whom Zhao devoted a great deal of delineatory ink, which is probably why he is so memorable. He is also the character who "enjoys" the dubious distinction of being the only exception to Zhao's practice of maintaining character consistency through to the end. After spending a great deal of time and space portraying Fan's vigorously independent spirit, Zhao suddenly changes the course of the character's development. Inexplicably, Fan toward the end joyfully capitulates to the socialist readers and becomes a model communist cadre, flying in the face of all facts about his personality. Significantly, the author failed to take any measures at all to endow Fan's conversion with plausibility. For instance, it would have been consistent with Fan's character had he reluctantly capitulated to save his status in the Party, as did Wang Yongfu in "Take a Stand". The author could have very easily accomplished this, but instead he presents a totally unexplained transformation, depicting Fan's change as a "magical conversion."

This factor imparts to Sanliwen a certain measure of fairy-tale quality and shifts the story slightly away from its base of reality. However, as noted earlier, such a practice is very common to the comic mode. It wouldn't even be deserving of special attention except for the fact that it runs glaringly counter to the author's normal practice. Even within Sanliwen itself, all of the other characters who go through a change, from Fan Lingzhi to Muddlehead, do so within the bounds of their own personalities, and the process of change in each case is made clear to the reader. In the case of Fan Denggao, the author had previously granted the reader privileged access to the character's thoughts, either through direct description or through quotations of his speech, and those thoughts clearly indicated his vigorous opposition to joining the co-op (at one point he even says to his Party colleagues that they cannot force him
Then after the rectification meeting in chapter 25, the author suddenly withdraws this access. The reader is permitted to see Fan again only several days after the meeting, and it is obvious that in the interim a dramatic change has occurred. For not only, we are told, has Fan agreed to join the co-op and hand over his mules, he now sits around the house in great contentment shelling corn and smiling idiotically to himself at what is apparently his newly-found freedom from the drudgery of independence (chap. 27). From the distant outside angle from which the reader is now forced to observe Fan, his conversion is so complete as to be reminiscent of religious spiritual enlightenment. Indeed, the fact that he was assailed and criticized by everyone including his own daughter is not sufficient to explain such a thorough metamorphosis.

That the author declines to reveal Fan's contemplations in the several days following the rectification meeting is remarkably similar to Liu Zheng's removal from the center stage following Secretary Wang's edifying speech at the end of "Mutual Validation." In both cases the reader looks forward to hearing the characters' reaction to their discipline, and in both cases the reader is disappointed.

We may perhaps deduce Zhao's reason for doing this from the basic moral and ethical design of his fictional world as a whole. As noted earlier, all of his characters who change and become reconciled to the new emerging society do so because of their own self-interest and in a manner consistent with their own personalities. In other words, the emerging society of the end is founded upon voluntary self-initiated, logical change, and not upon some usurping, disconcertingly uncontrollable force that transforms people in spite of themselves. This is so in all cases except that of Fan Denggao. This shows that the new emerging society of Zhao's fictional world is in essence ontologically identical to the old one: that is, both the old and the new societies base their demands upon the individual upon moral or ethical claims, while the individual responds, within the exigencies imposed and the loopholes available, according to his or
her own self-interest. That is to say, the morally edifying force of ideology is not the prime—nor even the secondary—motivation behind the actions of Zhao's characters who change. In no single instance do those who modify their views and/or behaviour to accommodate the emergence of the new society, do so as the result of ideo-idealistic inspiration. This is true even for a character like Wang Yongfu ("Take a Stand"), whose original status as the paragon of communist progressiveness in his community made him a prime candidate (narratively speaking) for experiencing an eclat of inspirational enlightenment. Instead Zhao portrays him as fleeing back into the realm of superficial compliance with ideological expectations strictly to avoid social ostracism. In his role as "propagandist," then, Zhao "missed" or declined his opportunity to portray the edifying nature of communist ideology as the unifying factor binding together the diverse elements of the new society.

In the case of Fan Denggao, we see only superficial "evidence" of his possibly having experienced an eclat of ideological enlightenment—i.e., he sits around contentedly smiling. The most important and most convincing process by which he achieved this state of smiling contentedness has been left out. Concomitant with this crucial but missing piece of information is the fact that once Fan changes, his personality becomes insipid, and in this secondary but significant change we see a hint of the human consequences of the totally controlled society.

That Zhao should very vividly portray the process by which Fan Denggao was badgered and threatened by other Party members in their attempt to coerce his compliance with the Party agenda, that he should very vividly portray the mental suffering which their treatment imposed upon Fan, and then finally that he should leave out the process by which Fan achieved his supposed mental transformation suggests strongly that Zhao's treatment of him embodies more than just the facile application of a legitimate convention of the comic mode. He could easily have concocted a scenario in which Fan concertededly and consciously changed to maintain his own self-interest; or, on the
other hand, a scenario in which he consciously achieved ideological enlightenment. The question is: Why did he not do this? That Zhao made Fan Denggao the only character to violate his own nature can only be explained by authorial intention to make a between-the-lines point. Fan Denggao, Liu Zheng, and Leg Pains are all very different characters in very different situations; the fact that all three are involved in rare structural manipulations on the one hand, and that the author dwells at length upon their experiences with authoritarian force on the other, is, undoubtedly, no coincidence.
1. *Changes in Li Village*, chap. 6, p. 128.

2. Pan Yongfu, an historically real person, has been incorporated into the fictional world by the Chinese readership's consideration of "Man of Action" to be a part of Zhao's corpus of fiction.

3. Meng Xiangying was also a real person who has entered the realm of the fictional world in the same way as Pan Yongfu.


5. After a six year absence (1941-1947), what drew Tiedan to his home village one day when he had a day off from work was a mobilization meeting and not the fact that his parents lived there. To him, his parents were just a nuisance that distracted him from the official events he had come to attend (even though his presence was neither official nor necessary). Thus, he treated his parents as an afterthought.


Appendix

Third Fairy's Plot
   Likes to flirt
   ↓
Oracles' Plot
   Tries to use superstition to control daughter
   ↓
Young Couple's Plot
   Daughter disrespects mother
   ↓
       Runs away to find Xiao Erhei
       ↓
Arrested by Tyrants

Tyrant's Plot
   Tyrant's tyranny discovered
   ↓
   Arrested
   ↓
Villagers' Plot
   Asked to testify
   ↓
   Overcome fear
   ↓
   Testify
   ↓
   Tyrant's Plot
   Imprisoned
   ↓
   Villagers' Plot
   Freedom from tyranny

Young Couple's Plot
   Parents' illegal marriage arrangements discovered

Oracles' Plot
   Both Oracles called on carpet
   ↓
   Er Zhaige forced to give up public voicing of superstition
   ↓
Oracle's Plot
   Gives up role of coquette
   ↓
Third Fairy's Plot
   Called on carpet
   ↓
   Public humiliation
   ↓
   Gives up superstitious practices

Figure 2: Diagram of Plot Interconnections for “Xiao Erhei Gets Married”
Table 3: Flash of Scene Excerpts from the Chinese text of “Xiao Erhei Gets Married”

Exposition

1. (V.2) 因为他长得伶俐可爱，大人们也都爱跟他玩，这个说：“二黑，算算十岁属什么？”那个说：“二黑，给我上一课！”

2. (V.2) 那时侯小二黑十三岁，已经长得好高了，可是大人们却把他当成小孩来玩弄，好几个二诸葛开玩笑的，一到家，登好对房二诸葛问小二黑道：“二黑！算算今天宜不宜栽种？”和小二黑年纪相当的孩子们，跟小二黑生了气，就连声喊道：“不宜栽种不宜栽种…”

3. (V.3) 二诸葛说是个便宜，先问了一下生辰八字，掐算了半天说：“千里烟绝使线牵”，就替小二黑作宜栽种。

4. (V.4) 父子俩吵了几天，二诸葛争论不行，小二黑说：“你愿意栽你就栽着，反正我不栽！”

Fictive Present

5. (VI.1) 金旺就向兴旺说：“小二黑是童仆，其实是被小芹勾引住了，可以斗争他一顿。”

6. (VI.3) 小芹拉着妇教会主席也来找村长，她一进门就说：“村长！捉贼捉赃，捉奸捉双，当了妇教会主席就不说理了？”

7. (VII.4) 过礼那一天，小芹跟媳妇闹起来，把吴先生送来的首饰统统扔下一起走。媒人走了后，小芹跟媳妇说：“我不嫁！谁收了人家的东西谁跟人家去！”

8. (VII.5) 婆婆先备办了酒席替不了家，后来说小芹跟吴先生是前世姻缘，还唱些什么“前世姻缘由天定，不顺天意活不成…”

9. (VIII.1) 小二黑说：“不用理她！我打听过区上的同志，人家说只要男女本人愿意，就能到区上登记，别人谁也作不了主…”

10. (X.1) 二诸葛一夜没有睡，一遍一遍念：“大黑怎么还不回来，大黑怎么还不回来。”
Table 3 (continued)

11. (XI.1) 三仙姑慢慢起来梳妆，于福问她道：“不去打听打听小芹？”她道：“打听她做甚啦？她的本命多大啦？”于福也再没有敢说甚么，……

12. (XI.2) 饭还没有吃罢， 区上的交通员来传她。 她好像很得意， 喉子拉得长长地说：“闺女大了咱管不了， 就去请区长替咱管管吧！”

13. (XI.4) 邻近的女人们都跑来看， 挤了半院， 唏唏嘘嘘说：“看看！ 四十五了！” “看那裤腿！” “看那鞋！”

14. (XI.4) 交通员领着小芹来了， 故意说：“看甚么？ 人家也是个人吧， 没有见过？ 闪开路！” 一伙女人们哈哈大笑。

15. (XII.1) 有个被他两人作践垮了的年轻人说：“我从前没有忍过？ 他忍越不得安生！ 你们不说我说！”

16. (XII.1) “我歇歇再说， 先让别人也说几句！”

17. (XII.3) 这其间， 金旺老婆自然也落了选。 傍她还变了口吻， 说：“以后我也要进步了。”
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