

HARMONY & HETEROTOPIAS:
CHINA'S ETHNIC FRONTIERS IN THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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My dissertation looks at the depiction of China's ethnic frontiers in contemporary Chinese literature in order to examine a range of responses to the state-envisioned ideals of Harmony propagated throughout PRC history. The Confucian texts of *Datong*, or Great Harmony, are embedded in Maoist utopian visions for moulding the natural and human worlds in anticipation of socialist modernity; the contemporary revival of the *Datong* ideal expresses China's desire to build a harmonious (*hexie*) society in the 21st century. In the world of fiction, China's borderlands, home to ethnic minorities, are often conceived of as idyllic lands brimming with the type of harmony that is absent in the imperfect actuality of the political center. These depictions have emerged as either direct reactions to grand narratives of progress or as continued attempts to create an audience that grows attentive to the alternative models of a good society inherited from and preserved by the traditions of minorities. I borrow Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" to analyze literary fantasies surrounding three minority regions — the wilderness of the Inner Mongolian steppe as the cradle of the wolf totem, the Tibetan areas associated with

mythical Shangri-La, and the homeland of the matrilineal Mosuo, known as the Country of Women, in Southwest China. My dissertation formulates and develops the thesis that the featured writers set heterotopias at the geographical and social periphery in order to imagine and reconfigure China's road to modernity in a fashion that paradoxically challenges and enriches the official discourse of utopianism. They withdraw from the grand schemes of Harmony by creating their own utopian visions. In the meantime, their quest for a spiritual asylum unveils the historical impact of socialist campaigns on minority regions and people. The textual construction of the three different minority areas both capitalizes on and revolutionizes the stereotypical image that has presented such places as backward and primitive. Instead, the texts my dissertation analyses offer a fantasy about how minority places deliver the spiritual, ecological, and gender-based harmony that complements and perhaps even surpasses the dominant political narrative, when describing the ideal interaction between individuals, society, and nature.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The imagination of China's Ethnic Frontiers in Contemporary Chinese literature constitutes an act that is loaded with the burden of political imperatives and utopian impulses. The history of the PRC is littered with cautionary examples of how the state's utopian movements almost always draw to dystopian conclusions. The repercussions of totalitarian visions of utopia imbue intellectuals with desires to conceive of a different kind of world. China's frontier land, home to ethnic minorities, is frequently the imaginative grounds of choice; it is a site where Chinese intellectuals reflect on and contest the grand narratives of utopia, drawing on fantasized images of the other to lament the failure of state-envisioned means of achieving a harmonious future.

My dissertation concentrates on the literary imagination surrounding three specific minority regions in China's borderlands — the wilderness of the Inner Mongolian steppe as the cradle of the wolf totem, the Tibetan areas associated with mythical Shangri-La, and the homeland of the matrilineal Mosuo, known as the Country of Women, in Southwest China.¹ Products of a fascination with alternative social and/or natural spaces, these fictionalized lands contain various conceptualizations of harmony—ecological, spiritual, and gender-based—that are

¹ The term "Tibetan areas" refers to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan provinces (A. Zhou 9).

conceivably absent in the imperfect actuality of the center. Unlike the usual “non-existent society” in the genre of literary utopia, the literary spaces in question have prototypes in actual minority regions that have been subject to the influence of the socialist narrative of modernity. Acting as a dystopian mirror for the hopes and fears evoked by political utopian ideals, the spaces of otherness modeled on non-Han cultures possess their own ambiguities and imperfections. They also inscribe the periphery’s encounter with the state’s utopian projects into the reader’s cultural memory.

My dissertation formulates and develops the thesis that the textually constructed spaces of the other have emerged as either direct reactions to the recurring themes of utopian politics in PRC history or continued attempts to create an audience that grows attentive to the alternative models of a good society inherited from the traditions of minorities. Setting the predominant plotlines of the texts at the periphery is a way of imagining and reconfiguring China’s road to modernity in a fashion that paradoxically challenges and enriches the official discourse of utopianism. As Foucault writes, “It is the decentred position which enables us to decipher the truth, to do away with all the illusions and errors which want to make us believe that one is living in a world of peace and order. The more I move away from the center, the more I see the truth” (qtd. in Wagner 181).² In moving away from the center, we will gain insights into the “truth” figured in the historical narratives of China’s search for harmony.

² Benno Wagner quotes from Foucault, Michel. *Vom Licht des Krieges zur Geburt der Geschichte*. Berlin: Merve-Verl., 1986: 15.

The “truth” of concern in this dissertation is, firstly, the political practices that derive from “the utopian aspects of Maoist mentality” (Meisner xi). These practices refer to social experiments such as the People’s Communes in the 1950s and 60s and the decade-long Cultural Revolution starting in 1966, in which the Confucian ideal of *Datong* or Great Harmony seeped into and then maintained Mao’s vision for a better world. Secondly, in aiming to redress the devastation caused by Maoist extremism, China turned to a more economically pragmatic path in the 1980s, which subsequently resulted in an exhausted socialist dream, an ideological vacuum, and a deteriorating natural environment. Under the circumstances, the state revived the ideal of a Great Harmony to express China’s desire to build a harmonious society (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) in the 21st century. Since there is often a political impetus behind the textual search for an alternative society, it is beneficial for us to examine the ideal of Great Harmony and related utopian narratives in detail.

1. China’s Aspirations for Great Harmony

The Confucians revered antiquity, referring to the time of the mythical emperors Yao 尧 and Shun 舜 as an irretrievable Golden Age. The ideal Confucian model of the *Datong* society is described in the *Liyun* 礼运 (Evolution of Rites) chapter of the Confucian Classic *Liji* 礼记 (*The Book of Rites*) as follows:³

When the Grand course was pursued, a public and common spirit ruled all

³ The main content of the *Liyun* chapter is Confucius’s discussion with his student Yanyan 言偃 about the rites of the Zhou dynasty (*Zhou li* 周礼) early in the Warring States period.

under the sky; they chose men of talents, virtue, and ability; their words were sincere, and what they cultivated was harmony. Thus men did not love their parents only, nor treat as children only their own sons. A competent provision was secured for the aged till their death, employment for the able-bodied, and the means of growing up to the young. They showed kindness and compassion to widows, orphans, childless men, and those who were disabled by disease, so that they were all sufficiently maintained. Males had their proper work, and females had their homes. (They accumulated) articles (of value), disliking that they should be thrown away upon the ground, but not wishing to keep them for their own gratification. (They laboured) with their strength, disliking that it should not be exerted, but not exerting it (only) with a view to their own advantage. In this way (selfish) schemings were repressed and found no development. Robbers, filchers, and rebellious traitors did not show themselves, and hence the outer doors remained open, and were not shut. This was (the period of) what we call the Grand Union. (Legge, “Li Chi” 364–365)⁴

The *Datong* affirms the Confucian belief in morality as the foundation of a good society, where administration is in the hands of the virtuous and capable and everyone can fully

⁴ Legge translates the term *Datong* as the “Grand Union,” whereas my study adopts the “Great Harmony.” The original text is “大道之行也，天下为公，选贤与能，讲信修睦。故人不独亲其亲，不独子其子，使老有所终，壮有所用，幼有所长，矜寡孤独废疾者皆有所养，男有分，女有归。货恶其弃于地也，不必藏于己；力恶其不出于身也，不必为己。是故谋闭而不兴，盗窃乱贼而不作，故外户而不闭。是谓大同。”

display his or her talents. This is a world in which people remove their selfish desires and extend their love of close family to the public. The *Datong* is not only a Confucian idealization of antiquity but also indicates the Confucian paradigm of history as degenerating from an age of perfect virtue.

Yet it is arguable that the vision of *Datong* is not regressive in essence since it implies Confucius' anticipation of the restoration of the golden time through projecting the past onto future.⁵ In the *Liyun* chapter, Confucius sees the early Zhou dynasty as displaying a more immediate social pattern called the *Xiaokang* 小康 (Small Tranquillity) in contrast to the primordial *Datong* society. Confucius views *Xiaokang* as a model that his own chaotic time should set into motion to emulate by first restoring the Zhou rituals and institutions.⁶ Confucius's rendering of *Datong* and *Xiaokang* embodies

⁵ Historian Martin Bernal offers a speculation that "the *Liyun* was written long after Confucius in the third or fourth century BC and that it is full of Mohist and Taoist thought" (12) based on his reading of works such as Qian Mu's 钱穆 *Zhongguo Jin Sanbainian Xueshu shi* 中国近三百年学术史 (*Chinese Intellectual History in the Past Three Hundred Years*). Bauer (82-83) expresses a similar view — *Datong* is in part derived from Xun Zi 荀子 and in part from Mo Di 墨翟, since Mo Di advocates industriousness and universal love. Bauer describes Mo Di as a "socialist," and this is probably a reason why the *Datong* can be bound up with Marxist socialism in modern and contemporary China.

⁶ Though Confucius reveres the remote past as the *Datong*, we can sense from the *Liyun* chapter that he actually respects specific historical moments, such as the time of King Wen and King Wu of the Western Zhou Dynasty (1050-770 B.C.). After describing the *Datong* ideal, Confucius continues to depict a picture of the *Xiaokang* society: "Now that the Grand Course has fallen into disuse and obscurity, the kingdom is a family inheritance. Everyone loves (above all others) his own parents and cherishes (as) children (only) his own sons. People accumulate articles and exert their strength for their own advantage. Great men imagine it is the rule that their states should descend in their own families. Their object is to make the walls of their cities and suburbs strong and their ditches and moats secure. The rules of propriety and of what is right are regarded as the threads by which they seek to maintain in its correctness the relation between ruler and minister; in its generous regard that between father and son; in its harmony that between elder brother and younger; and in a community of sentiment that between husband and wife; and in accordance with them they frame buildings and measures; lay out

a cyclical perspective on social development.⁷

Tao Qian's 陶潜 (365-427) "Tao hua yuan ji" 桃花源记 ("The Story of Peach Blossom Spring"), which David Wang describes as "the ultimate Chinese utopian text" (254), is arguably a Confucian text. In "Tao hua yuan ji," a fisherman's exploration along the river leads him to the Peach Blossom Spring, a rustic utopia whose residents are unaware of the dynastic changes in the outside world. The settlers' ancestors took refuge here after having fled the tyrannical rule of the Qin and hence maintain the

the fields and hamlets (for the dwellings of the husbandmen); adjudge the superiority to men of valour and knowledge; and regulate their achievements with a view to their own advantage. Thus it is that (selfish) schemes and enterprises are constantly taking their rise, and recourse is had to arms; and thus it was (also) that Y ü Thang, Wan and W û king Khang, and the duke of K âu obtained their distinction. Of these six great men every one was very attentive to the rules of propriety, thus to secure the display of righteousness, the realisation of sincerity, the exhibition of errors, the exemplification of benevolence, and the discussion of courtesy, showing the people all the normal virtues. Any rulers who did not follow this course were driven away by those who possessed power and position, and all regarded them as pests. This is the period of what we call Small Tranquillity" (Legge, "Li Chi" 366-367). This passage is the translation of "今大道既隐，天下为家，各亲其亲，各子其子，货力为己，大人世及以为礼，域郭沟池以为固，礼义以为纪，以正君臣，以笃父子，以睦兄弟，以和夫妇，以设制度，以立田里，以贤勇知，以功为己。故谋用是作，而兵由此起。禹、汤、文、武、成王、周公由此其选也。此六君子者，未有不谨于礼者也。以着其义，以考其信，着有过，刑仁讲让，示民有常，如有不由此者，在执者去，众以为殃。是谓小康。"

⁷ It is worth noting that this interpretation of the *Datong* ideal as not strictly backward-looking and its relationship with *Xiaokang* as cyclical is based on a historical perspective on the evolution of Confucianism. Scholars have different opinions on the dating of the *Liji*, especially regarding when the different versions of the book took shape and to what extent the text truthfully recorded the Zhou rites. If the *Liyun* chapter was compiled during the Western Han as some scholars suggest, it is possible that it may echo the social concerns and ethos of the time. Moreover, interpretations of the *Datong* and *Xiaokang* may also bear the influence of later Confucian tradition, such as the absorption of the *yin-yang* cosmology that started in the late Zhou and the early Han periods. This evolved form of Confucianism is apparent in works such as *Chuanqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (*Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*) by Western Han scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, in which the author integrates the *yin-yang* cosmology into Confucianism, applying cyclical doctrine to systemize dynastic changes in accordance with the alternating cycles of the cosmos.

legacy of an earlier time. Given the unmistakable Daoist overtone in the recluse theme, Tao Qian's fictional account conjures up an ideal past reminiscent of the idea of *Datong* that is more of a historical and philosophical construct with a mythical color.⁸

The Peach Blossom Spring is a secluded world in which its settlers are content with a tranquil agrarian life. When discussing Chinese utopian narratives, Dutch sinologist Douwe Fokkema notes that “the continuous predominance of Confucianism restrained any deviation from the *Peach Blossom Spring* model” (24). Or in other words, a distinctly Confucian sense of nostalgia always pervades Chinese utopian narratives, which are often characterized by “pastoral, virtuous, or mystical bliss” (ibid). This project of looking for happiness in an irretrievable past is indeed locatable in later Chinese scholarly pursuits of a virtuous, ideal society.

For example, the evidential learning (*kao ju xue* 考据学) that emerged in the 17th and 18th century inherited the Confucian reverence for antiquity, viewing history as “a dual process of material progress and moral degeneration” (Teng 203). Refuting the interpretations of the Classics in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, the evidential scholars were determined to retrieve what they perceived as true teachings of Confucius through textual practice.⁹ According to Emma Teng, some Qing scholars' travel writings about Taiwan echoed the tradition of evidential scholarship in their

⁸According to Douwe Fokkema, “the Confucian conception of the exemplary moral person” anticipates “The Story of Peach Blossom Spring” (166).

⁹ The school of evidential learning considered Neo-Confucian orthodoxy the cause for the moral degeneration of, and consequently, the fall of the Ming dynasty. Thus adherents turned to philological analysis to repudiate and re-explain this received tradition.

empirical approach, since they regarded Taiwan's indigenous customs as derivations from or remnants of ancient Chinese rituals. The Confucian concept of "all under heaven" was the guideline for the Qing conceptualization of its frontiers; hence, these travel accounts denied the indigenous people a history of their own, while also slightly adjusted the sino-centric rhetoric when describing non-Han people.

In the late 19th century, Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) adopted the tool of "evidential learning" to revolutionize Confucianism in order to pave the way for the institutional reform of the late Qing dynasty. In the early 20th century, he wrote *Datong Shu* 大同书 (*The Book on Great Harmony*) in which he envisioned a one-world government with the social boundaries between nations and ethnicities all eliminated. A synthesis of traditional Chinese thinking and Western ideas, Kang's Great Harmony is future-oriented, replacing Confucian nostalgia for the past with Western concepts of progress.

Kang's Great Harmony anticipated a trend that philosophy historian Xiufen Lu describes as follows: "In modern Chinese political thinking, the ideal of Great Harmony serves as a binding thread connecting different modern social reform movements and revolutions" (174). China's revolutionary pioneers contemplated the compatibility of *Datong* with the concept of Communism. In 1925, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 wrote a short piece of fiction titled "Ma ke si jin kongmiao" 马克思进孔庙 ("Marx Enters the Confucian Temple") in which Marx and Confucius reach a consensus on the sameness between Communism and *Datong*. The *Datong* concept

also facilitated Li Dazhao's 李大钊 acceptance of Marxism, as he saw the correspondence between Communism and *Datong* through the lens of the role of ethics in democracy. In a similar fashion, Sun Yat-sen uses the concept of *tian xia wei gong* 天下为公 (a public spirit will rule all under heaven) from the *Datong* passage of the *Liji* to express his principle of People's Rights (*minquan* 民权). In a word, those revolutionists found an accord between China's thousand years of longing for the *Datong* society and their specific political pursuit to legitimate certain Western ideas on Chinese soil.

As a matter of fact, Mao Zedong's thoughts also bear the unmistakable imprint of the *Datong* ideal. In 1917, inspired by Kang Youwei's *Datong shu*, Mao wrote in a letter to his friend Li Jinxi 黎锦熙 that "Datong is our goal" (G. Lin 172).¹⁰ Later, due to the influence of the May Fourth revisionism, Mao developed a critical perspective on Confucianism. Though he viewed Confucianism as fostering hierarchy and controlling minds, Mao never totally repudiated it. In 1939, he applied Marx and Engel's dialectical materialism to interpret the Confucian concept of *Zhongyong* 中庸 (the Doctrine of Mean).¹¹ Marxist dialectical materialism holds that the material world, whose existence is independent of human perception, is in a constant state of change, and class struggle as a means of generating change is material in nature when acted out for economic advantages. The change of quality in a physical object or an

¹⁰ Mao wrote that "大同者，吾人之鹄也".

¹¹ Mao expressed this idea in his letter to Zhang Wentian 张闻天 in Feb 20th, 1939. (*Mao Zedong Shuxin Xuanji* 144-148).

event takes place when the accumulation of quantitative changes leads to qualitative change. Mao suggested that the “*Zhongyong*” is the “quality” in the process of change, and either excess or deficiency would cause left or right deviation.

In 1949, Mao described the Communist goal as the elimination of classes and the achievement of *Datong*, pointing out that Kang Youwei did not and could not find a road to the Great Harmony.¹² According to Mao, the establishment of the perfect end-state is in the hands of the people, since, in his own words, “People, only people, are the driving force for the creation of world history.”¹³ Mao also showed enthusiasm towards the peasant utopian experiments inspired by Daoism or the *Datong* ideal, especially the Zhang Lu 张鲁 rebellion described in the *San guo zhi* 三国志 (*History of the Three Kingdoms*) and the Taiping rebellion in the Qing dynasty. Mao’s utopian socialist mentality condensed in his belief that human will and power can transform nature and restructure human society. This mentality came to underpin a series of political campaigns. Maoism as it unfolded in practice overlooked the “objective law of development” of Marxism which it claimed to uphold.

Interestingly, in 1958, Mao associated the Peach Blossom Spring with the People’s Commune (K. Lin 45). It suffices to say that Mao’s understanding of socialism through China’s traditional intellectual heritage is imbued with a utopian

¹² This is from Mao’s well-known article “Lun Renmin Minzhu Zhuanzheng” 论人民民主专政 (On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship), in which he envisioned the road to the *Datong* as the People’s Republic in the hands of the proletarians. (*Maoze Dong Xuanji* vol. 4: 1477)

¹³ The quote “人民,只有人民,才是创造世界历史的动力” is from the third volume of *Mao Zedong Xuanji* (1031).

overtone. The word utopia comes from Thomas More's fiction *Utopia* (1516), simultaneously suggesting a good place (eutopia) and no place (u-topia). The modern Chinese transliteration of "utopia" is *wutuobang* 乌托邦, which, is always dubbed as "wishful thinking and fantasy" (*kongxiang* 空想).¹⁴ This pejorative interpretation may partly owe itself to Marx and Engels's critique of utopian socialism.¹⁵ Marx and Engels' brand of scientific socialism perceives its difference from utopian socialism in its conceived means of realization of a shared common goal— Communism. Meisner has pointed out that Maoism, as a variant of Marxism, bears similarities with utopian socialism in its failure to posit that social progress requires specific historical conditions and a material basis.¹⁶ The movements launched to realize the state's desire for a good future resulted in dystopian scenarios: from the late 1950s to the 1970s, the whole country was devastated by famines, instability, and violence.

In the 1980s, the Deng regime set *Xiaokang* as the objective of the developmental stage of reform and opening up on the road to Communism. The CCP acknowledged the failure of Mao's utopian ideals when it seemingly stepped back from the advanced vision of *Datong* to the less evolved *Xiaokang*. The objective

¹⁴ Thomas More's *Utopia* describes a perfect society on an island and does not have negative implications.

¹⁵ In *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels criticize the mid-19th century utopian socialism of writers like Saint-Simon and Robert Owen.

¹⁶ Fitzgerald introduces the common dismissal of the "self-proclaimed ideals" of the Cultural Revolution "as ideological camouflage disguising the self-seeking political machinations of Mao Zedong" (26). Be that as it may, scholars such as Meisner, Mahoney and Jiexiong Yi, find it meaningful to retrieve the initial idealism that drove those movements aimed at egalitarianism.

implies that the *Xiaokang* society is the predecessor of the *Datong* world according to the Confucian cyclical view of social development. This evocation of *Xiaokang* stresses it as a prosperous society functioning well when rituals and wise rulers regulate the people in pursuit of their private well being. Yet, arguably, the overemphasis on fulfilling private desires creates an acquisitive society in which people crave material things without regard to the sustainability of natural resources.

Under the circumstances brought on by rampant materialism, the Hu Jintao regime “recycled” the Confucian *Datong* ideal and introduced the *hexie* 和谐 (harmonious) concept to refashion a neo-socialist ideal for the 21st century. The ideal of building “a socialist harmonious society” before achieving the *Xiaokang* stage of development draws on the Confucian concept of “*he*” i.e. genuine harmony in political and personal conduct.¹⁷ The resurgence of those concepts does not “replace” Marxism but packages it as a culturally desirable expression of man-society-nature unity.¹⁸ The harmonious discourse does not aim so much to gain credence for the ideal of Communism as to reconcile China’s socialist past and its current reform, as articulated by John Fitzgerald, “China can no longer afford the luxury of grand visions, and yet cannot remain China without them” (28).

¹⁷ In September 2004, the 4th Plenary Session of the 16th CCP Party congress introduced the goal of “Building a socialist harmonious society,” though official references to “harmony” can be traced back to the 1990s.

¹⁸ As pointed by William Callahan, some contemporary Chinese intellectuals rejected the Great Harmony as a kind of utopian socialism, given that this ideal prompted “Mao to skip historical stages and prematurely rush into Communism” (578).

When taking the credit for China's prosperity, the CCP cannot throw off the responsibility for the signs of disharmony that come along with increased affluence. Here we might cite Hu Jintao's report to the 17th National Congress: "While recognizing our achievements, we must be well aware that they fall short of the expectations of the people" (qtd. in Anderson 74). In a 2006 speech, Hu presented the six qualities of the harmonious society:

Democratic rule of law (*minzhu fazhi* 民主发展); fairness and justice (*gongping zhengyi* 公平正义); honesty and fraternity (*chengxin youai* 诚信友爱); full of energy (*chongman huoli* 充满活力); a stable orderliness (*anding youxu* 安定有序); and sustainable development i.e. harmony between people and the environment (*ren he ziran hexie xiangchu* 人与自然和谐发展). (qtd. in Mahoney 115)

These qualities show that the harmonious discourse is meant to address the major by-products of a preoccupation with economic development through cultivating social virtue and responsibility. Unfortunately, the dystopian fate of the hegemonic vision for the future seems to recur when pollution and corruption are only getting worse in the course of building a harmonious society. China's contemporary engagement with the ideal of Great Harmony explains why Chinese intellectuals would choose to mount a dystopian critique of the state's utopian precepts. One of the most conspicuous aspects of these social critiques is the way that they frequently make use of China's ethnic minorities and their living spaces as the fount of inspiration.

2. Conceiving of an Alternative Space Brimming with Harmony

The Confucian concept of Great Harmony is a model of society under centralized authority. The Confucian view of world order implies the center's objective to pacify, civilize and assimilate "barbarians" or "foreigners." Today the ethnic minorities, or *shaoshu minzu* 少数民族, are the constitutive other in the multiethnic and unified "Chinese nation." Anthropologist Nicholas Tapp argues that the term *minzu* suggests a combination of ethnicity and "political construction" in the Chinese context (154) and has become "a valid form of identification" and "a social reality" (148).¹⁹ The accommodation of the other complicates China's overall vision for harmonious unity. In Western academia, studies of China's various ethnicities are frequently found in ethnographic accounts, film analyses, and investigations of tourism, wherein fiction is sometimes inserted as some sort of supplementary evidence. These studies tend to concentrate on revealing the exploitative gaze imposed by the hegemony of Han culture on China's domestic others.

Mass culture commodities in the forms of theme parks, art, film, and music are all organic parts in the production of the minority discourse. In discussing minority films as a genre, Yingjin Zhang uses the term "minority discourse" to suggest the

¹⁹ The Han majority comprises approximately 92 percent of the Chinese population. The ethnic classification project in the 1950s designated, for example, the Mongolians and the Tibetans, as *shaoshu minzu*.

genre's subjugation to nationalism and a "Han-centered viewing position" (80).²⁰

"Internal orientalism" is a concept adopted by anthropologist Louisa Schein to describe the practice of exoticizing and feminizing minority cultures within China.

Schein directs our attention to the way in which the minorities are usually represented by rural women in media cultural products under the gaze of urban Han observers. In considering the kinds of cultural practices that contribute to the crafting of the image of the other, Dru Gladney makes a similar argument. He states that "minorities are to the majority as female is to male... The widespread definition and representation of the minority as exotic, colorful and primitive homogenizes the undefined majority as united, mono-ethnic and modern" (51).

Overall, previous studies on China's ethnic representation tend to concentrate on deconstructing the myth of egalitarian relations between majority and minority as propagated by the dominant culture. As Homi Bhabha notes in *Nation and Narration*, "the marginal or 'minority' is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization" (4), and the construction of the other serves the national interest in such a way that the other becomes the victim of dominant interest. That being said, it is also true that the other, especially in the literary imagination, can act as a resource for thinking of a way out of a current predicament, for considering an alternative. For their producers, the others and their spaces represent the ultimate difference, and it is

²⁰ Several scholars have categorized films drawing on the ethnic minority people and culture as the "minority film" of the PRC. Kuoshu (166) uses the expression "national minority genre," and Yingjin Zhang (73) regards "minority film" (*shaoshu minzu dianying* 少数民族电影) as a "special genre."

this sense of difference that fuels the intellectual tradition of looking for sources of national inspiration in the borderlands.

Within this tradition, the land of the other becomes the anchor of the utopian dream. One key example comes from the work of Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902-1988) written in early twentieth century China.²¹ In Shen Congwen's 1934 novel *Biancheng* 边城 (*The Border Town*), a sense of pathos permeates his evocation of the divine humanity of the country people, who live in an idyllic place and are seemingly not irritated by the social turmoil of the outside world at the time. Shen's inspiration for the fictional Border Town comes from the remote countryside of West Hunan, the mountainous southwestern border of what has historically been considered civilized China and home to the Miao and the Tujia people. In *Xiang xing san ji* 湘行散记 (*Random sketches on a trip to Hunan*), Shen associates the "Peach Blossom Spring county" in West Hunan with Tao Yuanming's poem upon returning to his native soil, but describes it as an "*imperfect paradise*" where the good qualities of the rustic people in his memory are disappearing.²² Moreover, Shen's fictional world frees the frontier from Confucian moral constraints and bestows it with spiritual purity without subverting the impression of the frontier as primitive and mysterious.

²¹ Other examples may include Ai Wu 艾芜's (1904-1992) writing about the minority people in China's southwest in his *Nanxing Ji* 南行记 (*Travelling Southward*) and Shi Zhecun's 施蛰存 (1905-2003) novel *Jiangjun de tou* 将军的头 (*The Head of the General*) which tells the story of a general who is torn between his Tibetan and Han identities.

²² "*Imperfect paradise*" is the title of the translated anthology of Shen Congwen by historian Jeffrey Kinkley.

Shen Congwen and his contemporaneous writers' legacy resurfaced in the 1980s new wave literary movements such as "root-searching" (*xungen* 寻根) and "avant-garde" (*xianfeng* 先锋), which share the consistent belief that the means for spiritual salvation lie in the non-standard culture of the folk and the minority. In the eyes of the new wave writers, cultural subjectivity and cultural ego are located in "a cultural anthropological rediscovery of the Chinese language and way of life" (X. Zhang 140). As early as the May Fourth movement and culminating in the Cultural Revolution, Confucianism was under attack for its alleged association with feudalism, and the process of eliminating it resulted in the fracture of traditional culture (though, as discussed, the *Datong* ideal survived in the political ideologies). Perhaps paradoxically, root-searching did not aim to revisit the Confucian traditions, but to transcend "the immediate cultural order rooted in the past experience of the Chinese revolution and Chinese modernity" (X. Zhang 140). Thus the goal of root-searching was to break the pre-existing ideological frameworks by taking advantage of the cultural discontinuity of Confucianism. The avant-garde, or the post-*xungen* literature, continues to draw spiritual momentum from the other in order to fill the spiritual vacuum in post Cultural Revolution China.²³ Specifically, avant-garde fiction, moving from the cultural center, imagines the relationship between humans and their world through a genre that is often described as magical realism.

²³ Xudong Zhang regards the avant-garde fiction as "the post-*xungen* literature" (151).

Disappearing from the new wave cultural production of the 1980s are the larger-than-life images used in socialist realism, those ideological characterizations based on the polarized concepts of good and evil as predetermined by one's class origin. The new wave represents the types of artistic experiment and innovation that require some sort of "cultural support," and cannot be limited to the monolith of the Han culture. It is, then, only natural that the literary spaces of the other constructed in the 1980s undermine many of the utopian themes of socialist realism.

I mention this tradition of writing about others to point out that literary texts, compared with other artistic forms of ethnic representation, may contain equal, if not greater, potential to articulate the historical conditions around the irresolvable utopian/dystopian dilemma in PRC history. Disillusioned with the socialist dream, most of the writers whose work my dissertation explores are compelled to transplant their utopian desire. Their utopian dream may initially be indoctrinated by official didacticism which then resurfaces and is channeled into their writings about the other. Their description of harmony adopts diverse forms of indigenous knowledge such as Tibetan Buddhism or the Mongolian understanding of a sustainable ecosystem. Yet, it is possible that their understanding of the indigenous culture is still in the grips of the familiar ideological paradigm, no matter how much they may wish to subvert this paradigm. In other words, their quest for a continued spiritual asylum both aims for an alternative to the grand socialist narrative and pays homage to the utopian dreams that

the political center prescribes. In the meantime, their quest reveals the historical impact the state-driven utopian projects have made on minority regions.

Acknowledging the differences between the real minority, the ethnographically constructed minority and the imagined minority, my study delves into the reasons behind the magnification and modification made in the literary imagination of the other. The minority regions in literature contain vitality, yet concurrently, their inhabitants represent the barbaric and backward. The dual qualities find their meeting ground in the spaces of the other where the culture of ethnic minorities creates “harmony.” The purpose of my project is to look at the fictional descriptions of China’s minority regions through the lens of the individualized utopian impulse in writing. Moreover, my investigation of the popular reaction to the ideal of Great Harmony and the harmonious discourse takes a detour and adopts an angle that previous studies on Chinese utopianism, generally speaking, have tended to overlook. In other words, to expand the existing discussions on China’s ethnic minorities, my dissertation explores the utopian and dystopian imagination in the textual construction of China’s ethnic frontiers.

My approach to studying the literary imagination of minorities involves highlighting the role of geographical space in shaping the popular imagination of certain groups. Note that ethnic identity is closely related with local identity. In terms of gendered representations of the ethnic minorities, my study of literature will also show that minority groups are not universally feminized in relation to the Han

majority. For example, in literature, the Tibetans are identified with a robust physique and perseverance that allow them to thrive on the roof of the world, and the Mongolians of the grasslands are portrayed as the rough-and-tumble heirs to the legacy of Genghis Khan. The minority place in fiction, or what I term “heterotopia,” is desirable to the reader because it boasts not only exotic culture but also distinct models of physical and spiritual harmony.

3. Defining Heterotopia

I use the term “heterotopia” as an encompassing expression to describe the literary fantasies surrounding the three minority regions that my dissertation investigates. My inspiration is drawn from Foucault’s speech “Of Other Spaces,” which is concerned with places that are on the margins of dominant society. Foucault sees utopias as unreal, while a heterotopia, in contrast, is “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites... are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (24). Foucault’s heterotopia refers to places possessing complex and even incompatible meanings; the ethnic frontiers in the literary imagination I discuss in this dissertation share this precise trait.

In Foucault’s terminology, our world is a “heterogeneous space,” the delineation of which hinges on the relationship between sites (22).²⁴ If we accept utopia as “the task for the future” (Jameson, “Of Islands and Trenches” 3), heterotopia instead

²⁴ In “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault deems our time as the “epoch” of “simultaneity” and “juxtaposition” (22).

directs our view to another world in juxtaposition with the space in which we live. A heterotopia is not future-oriented. It provides an “otherness,” in this case in contrast to contemporary Chinese society, through depicting different modes of living that exist peripherally in space and time.

At least in legend, the steppe of Inner Mongolia, Shangri-La hidden in the Tibetan areas and the Country of Women in southwest China can be associated with real sites. However, my dissertation demonstrates that these places are “the mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 24). Foucault likens the overlapping area between utopia and heterotopia to a “mirror” through which we see the reflection of reality on the other side of the glass, with the reflections constituting a “virtual space.” The mirror is a utopia because it creates an unreal vision. The mirror is also a heterotopia since the mirror itself is a physical object. From the virtual space behind the glass, “I direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am” (ibid). The heterotopias I discuss are the three particular minority regions that the writers fantasize as desired to form a mirroring space between self and other. In a sense, the texts studied here also function like a mirror, through which the writers’ living space as shaped by a series of state-driven utopian movements is reflected in the ethnic frontiers they portray in their writing.

Given that heterotopia is an “enacted” utopia, implicit in heterotopia is the logic of making a utopia. Jameson repudiates the conventional ways of conceiving utopia as

some sort of ideal society, and his understandings of utopia assist my conceptualization of heterotopia.²⁵ By this token, heterotopia is likewise imperfect when it is, like utopia, drawn from constant references or allusions to the existing world. However, it is important to point out that my use of heterotopia explicitly accentuates the dynamic, transformative relationship between utopia and dystopia.

That scholars other than Foucault have used “heterotopia” further demonstrates its applicability in describing the literary imagination of otherness. Tobin Siebers describes heterotopia as “a postmodern vision of utopia” based on the postmodernists’ celebration of “heterogeneity” and “multiplicity” (20).²⁶ The classical utopian ideas advocate equality and uniformity, while heterotopias allow for the flowering of differences and diversity. As Siebers states, “Postmodernists want to preserve a sense of ‘concrete otherness’ within models of equalities rather than to focus on similarities” (7). I find this interpretation of heterotopia useful for my study in showing that heterotopia, itself a term standing for conglomerations of ideas, constitutes a realm in which “otherness” has equal capacity for producing meaning. The heterotopia, home to “concrete otherness,” registers the frontiers’ experiences with the center’s definitive guide to achieve social harmony.

²⁵ Jameson notes that “it is less revealing to consider utopian discourse as a mode of narrative, comparable, say, with novel or epic, than it is to grasp it as an object of meditation... Utopian praxis is thus... a schematizing activity of the social and political imagination which has not yet found its concepts” (“Of Islands and Trenches”11).

²⁶ Siebers traces the source of the term to Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo. It seems that this usage of heterotopia is distinct from and not influenced by that of Foucault.

The heterotopia that I conceive of provides the real and mythical reflection of PRC history by virtue of its ability to accommodate ethnic differences. In the year 2000, China's preeminent anthropologist and sociologist Fei Xiaotong 费孝通, the initiator of the project of building a harmonious society, used the notion of "Harmony-with-difference" (*he er bu tong* 和而不同) from the Confucian *Analects* to extend his theory on the "pluralistic unity of the Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua minzu de duoyuan yiti geju* 中华民族的多元一体格局).²⁷ The CCP soon embraced this idea as a useful supplement to the emphasis on the "grand union" in the concept of Datong. This more comprehensive model of "Harmony-with-difference" has potential to make room for voices that were previously repressed in the hegemonic vision, the focus of which was exclusively on the unifying power of the Han culture or the socialist culture. The model, through acknowledging and "managing" differences, propagates the quest for a pluralistic harmony between cultural and ethnic components, whereas heterotopia concretizes the political propaganda. It demonstrates how differences can

²⁷ Fei delivered his famous speech titled *The Pattern of Pluralistic Unity of the Chinese Nation* in 1988 at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The "pluralistic unity of the Chinese nation" describes the formation of the Chinese nation as a process of pluralistic amalgamation between different cultures and ethnic groups. Later the CCP adopted Fei's and other scholars' development of the theory as guidance for making ethnicities policy (*minzu zhengce* 民族政策). The official transformation of the theory goes as follows: *Zhonghua minzu*, the higher level national identity, surpasses without replacing or excluding the lower levels of identity of each nationality. The Chinese nation is an entity composed of independent and inseparable nationalities that are bonded by concerns and emotions over their common fate, and the Han act as the cohesive force in the formation of the entity. Within the parameter of the coexistence of the two levels of identities, there are internal contradictions between the pluralistic components, though the identities would ideally adapt themselves to the changing environment to achieve a unity with difference.

exist in harmony and provides vivid examples of the productive coexistence of the “differences” based on a firm confidence in the capacity of the “concrete otherness.” As I argue in the discrete chapter outlined below, the textual construction of the three heterotopias both capitalizes on and revolutionizes the stereotypical image that has predominantly presented the ethnic other as backward and primitive.

4. Chapter Outline

The focus of Chapter II is *Wolf Totem* by Jiang Rong 姜戎, a novel published in 2004 that has ignited wide discussion in China. *Wolf Totem* is a warning that an ecological catastrophe is imminent. The novel delineates the costs of the Maoist utopian project of conquering nature. It focuses on the mobilization of the Han immigrants to the Mongolian steppe during the Cultural Revolution in the name of bringing modernity to the grasslands. According to the novel, the mass execution of the wolves is also partly responsible for the transformation of the steppe from pasture into agricultural land that damages the harmonious ecosystem of Inner Mongolia.

Taking an environmentalist position and advocating for the spirit of the wolf, *Wolf Totem* is marked as potentially subversive, but not marginal. It is difficult not to make a connection between the book and the call to build a harmonious society. The novel moves beyond the abstract notion of human-nature harmony described in the Chinese Classics, situating the Mongolian culture within its typical environment to detail a distinct interpretation of harmony. Moreover, the harmonious discourse is

underscored by the “peaceful nature” of the Confucian doctrine, the alleged prerequisite for striking an accord between the disparate elements in a national and even global context. *Wolf Totem* boldly praises the spirit of the wolf while questioning the docile yet potentially destructive way of life of the Han Chinese.

This chapter tackles the mystery of why many critics devalue the book’s reference to the imminent ecological crisis and regard it as a piece of counterfeit writing of culture by what can best be described as a “Nature Faker.” I argue that this critical tendency lies in the discrepancy between the novel’s two narrative arcs, an activist’s call for environmental preservation and its use of animal allegory. *Wolf Totem* uses the wolf as a metaphor for national character. It calls for the transformation of the obedient but weak sheep, i.e. the Han Chinese, through an injection of the “blood,” i.e. the spirit of the independent and aggressive wolves, the totem of the Mongolian nomads. The novel dismisses the Confucian ideal of Great Harmony and adopts a nationalist stance which is paradoxically identified with both a commitment to militancy and a yearning for political freedom.

Chapter III elaborates on the indigenization of the Shangri-La and Shambhala myths in China. James Hilton’s 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* describes “Shangri-La,” a mysterious utopia somewhere on the Tibetan plateau. In popular culture, the name has become a reference to mythical Tibet and, more often, a synonym for utopia, as seen in renderings such as historian Shiping Hua’s translation of “Tao hua yuan ji” into “Peach Blossom Shangri-La”(22). Hilton’s Shangri-La was arguably a product born

out of the Western fascination with the Shambhala myth, which tells of a Buddhist pure land on earth.²⁸ China's active engagement with the Shangri-La and Shambhala myths underscores the absence of faith and vibrancy in the Chinese heartland.

This chapter starts with discussion of how, in 2002, a Tibetan autonomous town called Zhongdian 中甸 in Yunnan province received the official sanction to rename itself Shangri-La. Based on different readings of *Lost Horizon*, writers and scholars voiced their disapproving or approving attitudes towards the renaming project, which publicizes Shangri-La County as the epitome of the envisioned harmonious society. The localization of Shangri-La exploits Zhongdian local culture for the purpose of attracting tourists. That being said, the locals' active participation in the fantasy-making of a harmonious Shangri-La reflects a minority region's struggle for resources and appeal for sustainable development when marginalized in China's blueprint for the future.

Earlier in the 1980s, Tashi Dawa 扎西达娃, an avant-garde writer, drew on the theme of searching for Shambhala to contemplate the "marvelous reality" of Tibet. In his short story "Xizang, xi zai pisheng kou shang de hun" 西藏, 系在皮绳扣上的魂 ("Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong"), Tashi questions "the reality" in the epistemological frame of reference that defines socialist realism, which normally treats the great campaigns and movements waged to march into Communism as the real. The novel's thematic and formal innovations challenge the discursive constraints

²⁸ Donald Lopez points out this possible link in *Prisoners of Shangri-La* (185).

of socialist realism, bringing to the fore the “utopian” nature of the conceptually-perceived real. Just as Jameson perceives the nature of utopia as “neutralization” (“Of Islands and Trenches” 6), the novel juxtaposes or relativizes Shambhala and Communism. This story neither negates nor transforms the imperfect actuality, but, rather than providing the solution, neutralizes the ideological contradictions.

The last part of the chapter introduces He Ma 何马’s *Zangdi mima* 藏地密码 (*The Tibet Code*), a serialized novel of ten volumes published between 2008 and 2011. The novel fuses scraps of Shangri-La/Shambhala myths from a great variety of sources with a spirit of playfulness. Ostentatiously unfolding an image of Shambhala as a sacred temple, the novel features a treasure hunt suspense-adventure story. The main characters, lost in the material world, come to identify Shambhala as their faith, that which restores the spirituality lacking in their given living environment. More importantly, interwoven in their pursuit of faith is a profound revelation of both the bright and pessimistic sides of an “enacted” utopia.

Chapter IV centers on “*Nü’er guo*” 女儿国 (The Country of Women), home to the Mosuo 摩梭, a small indigenous population in the mountainous region of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. The Chinese audience is familiar with *Nü’er guo* as the fantasized Kingdom in *The Journey to the West* (*Xi you ji* 西游记) and *Flowers in the Mirror* (*Jing hua yuan* 镜花缘). *Nü’er guo* is a title often used to refer to the Mosuo land, since the Mosuo are popularly known for maintaining their matrilineal society.

The classical utopia of the Great Harmony is “undoubtedly patriarchal” in that Confucius “has nothing to say about women’s share in public affairs,” as Qingyun Wu points out (10). The modern reformation of the Great Harmony in Kang Youwei’s *Datong shu* claims that gender egalitarianism is, in Wu’s words, “the passport for the road to *Datong*” (11). After the establishment of the PRC, socialist realist art forms promoted the socialist concept of gender egalitarianism through an attempt to erase femininity and eliminate gender differences. When talking about “minority film,” Esther Yau notes that, “the non-Han women on screen provided an exotic and convenient site for the representation of sexuality not assigned to the Han women’s bodies” (qtd. in Kuoshu 168). Yau’s observation holds true for the fictional accounts of the minority women as well.

During the 1980s, it was fashionable for Chinese ethnographies to describe the matrilineal Mosuo as “living fossils” of family evolution. Scholars, especially those of Mosuo descent, in collaboration with academics outside the PRC, are now re-writing the Mosuo as a positive model of a harmonious community. The changing perspectives on Mosuo culture follow the trajectory of how the interpretation of the Mosuo interacts with the socialist utopian discourse. Often, writers illuminate the Mosuo way of life as an alternative to the repressive socialist discourse concerning gender and/or sexuality.

Bai Hua’s 白桦 fiction *The Remote Country of Women* (*Yuanfang you ge nü'er guo* 远方有个女儿国) explores the relationship between sexuality and totalitarianism.

Bai Hua's writing debunks the pretentious utopian goals of the Cultural Revolution. His portrayal of the Mosuo's sexual practices, though suggestively described as those of a "living fossil," is meant to protest the brutality of the Cultural Revolution. Only in "The Country of Women," the sheer opposite of a society where sexuality is highly politicized, has humanity returned to its basic instincts. The hysteric presence of the Mosuo from the standpoint of the center in turn exposes the tyranny and erotic decadence of the space of the Cultural Revolution.

This chapter is also concerned with the writing career of a Mosuo woman named Yang Erche Namu 杨二车娜姆, and the way in which her autobiographical writings both build upon and then come to reject the changing ethnographic perspectives on the Mosuo. Namu was first introduced to Han culture at the age of 13 as a performer of ethnic music; she later went on to live in the U.S. and Europe. She has made a career of marketing her identities as an authentic Mosuo native and as a successful public figure who has learnt to navigate the transnational world many Chinese people now aspire to inhabit. Her ambiguous identities, wedged between east and west, primitive and modern, have given her a privileged position from which she orientalizes the dominant Han culture. In other words, her cross-cultural imagination shifts the ground of hierarchy that commonly differentiates the civilized Han from the primitive ethnic minority.

In my dissertation, I propose that these texts in fantasizing the three distinct minority regions construct heterotopias. The strength of the concept of heterotopia lies

in its ability to contain hybrid identities and flexible hierarchies. In a sense, the works by the Han writers, Jiang Rong, Bai Hua and He Ma follow a literary tradition of valuing the virtue of the non-Han people, though it is arguable that there is still a Han-centered writing or viewing position at work. This calls to mind Spivak's classical question: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Harboring the hope that the subaltern can be heard, I introduce works by the "indigenous" writers Tashi and Namu to probe into how they engage and defy the official discourses and/or the traits normally ascribed to their ethnic groups.

To extend the reach of previous studies on China's ethnic minorities, my analysis of the literary imagination of minority peoples will enable a glimpse into the complexities of the "dominant gaze" and the "minority discourse." My dissertation aims to reveal the embellished and, sometimes, contradictory power relations hidden in these heterotopias. Heterotopias do not fall within the standard nationalist utopian vision since they dismiss the ideas of universal equality and happiness. They seek to control the utopian desire of humanism through the construction and mediation of dual visions. To be more precise, they simultaneously deploy the rhetoric of the primitive and the pristine. The affinity, or the mutual implication, between the uncultured and the spiritual other poses a paradox. For one thing, the spaces of the ethnic other occupy a realm that is divine and thus untenable. These spaces flower in the imagination, beyond the here and now. For another, their physical association with China's borderlands points to their marginal existence in China's contemporary

economic and cultural terrain. Those remote places represent spirituality and humanity; they are far from being “eutopia,” but exist as the spaces in which political forces and the “primitive” interact.

CHAPTER II

WOLF TOTEM: A NATURE FAKER'S VISION OF HARMONY

Wolf Totem (*Lang tuteng* 狼图腾) by Jiang Rong 姜戎, published in 2004, has become a literary sensation in China.²⁹ Featuring the vast wilderness of Inner Mongolia and animal allegory, *Wolf Totem* has captivated both the mass market and intellectuals. The novel owes much of its fame to its environmental consciousness and its controversial content. It has provoked debates about its veracity in portraying the ecological scenario on the Inner Mongolian steppe in the 1970s. Yet, under close analysis, it becomes clear that the arguments surrounding the novel are less related to its scientific accuracy than to its view on the Chinese national character. The most fascinating aspect of this novel is that it has provoked reflection on ideas that pervade China's utopian movements, from the Maoist resolution to conquer nature to China's current project of building a harmonious society. The heated debate on *Wolf Totem* opens a window onto a number of contradictory points of view born out of China's narrative of development.

The readers of *Wolf Totem*, many of whom had never seen a wild wolf, have been titillated by the book's depictions of wilderness and nuanced characterizations of wolves that serve as a counterpoint to the clichéd ferocious wolf in popular culture.

²⁹ In 2008, four years after *Wolf Totem* came out and before the purchase of the copyright by the Penguin Group, the accumulated sales records of the legal Chinese copy had reached over 2.4 million. In terms of its total sales record, the statistics vary from a few million to over ten million, with the latter figure taking into account widespread pirated copies.

As Chengzhou He, a professor in the English Department at Nanjing University, points out, *Wolf Totem* is not the first literary work available to Chinese readers that depict wolves “in an unusually positive and appreciating manner as their images are endowed with the writer’s personal emotions, environmental imagination and cultural reflection”(398).³⁰ Yet none of the other wolf books has achieved such a high national profile or generated so many questions and controversies. Given the novel’s favorable portrayal of wolves, it remains unknown why *Wolf Totem*, in some instances, seems to reinforce the stereotypical and malevolent image of wolves that it allegedly attempts to combat. Moreover, the way in which its animal symbolism seems to steer the focus of the novel from its ecological mission toward nationalist statement is puzzling. Many of these apparent contradictions are rooted in the inherent conflicts of the novel itself or the way the novel is constructed. Thus before delving into criticism on *Wolf Totem*, I will explore the content and the structure of the novel to examine its efficiency and inefficiency in addressing its ecological and social concerns.

The novel describes how Chen Zhen 陈阵, a sent-down youth from Beijing, grows so obsessed with the wolf totem on the Mongolian steppe that he raises a wolf

³⁰ He lists the Chinese translation of Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* as the most influential western wolf book in China. The translations of *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, *Wild Animals I Have Known* by Ernest Thompson Seton, *Never Cry Wolf* by Farley Mowat and *Survivre Avec Les Loups* (Surviving with wolves) by Mischa Defonseca are among other favorites of Chinese readers. Moreover, Jia Pingwa’s 贾平凹 2000’ *Huainian Lang* 怀念狼 (Remembering Wolves) and Chi Li’s 池莉’s *Yi shamo wei Beijing de ren yu lang* 以沙漠为背景的人与狼 (Man and Wolf against the Background of the Desert) are two wolf-centered books by well-known Chinese writers that came out before 2004.

cab both as a pet and an object of study. In the meantime, Chen becomes a witness to the mass execution of the wolves and the imposition of the agrarian way of life, which destroy a finely balanced relationship between humans and animals and ends an authentic culture on the steppe that was once directed by nature. Jiang Rong admits in interviews that Chen Zhen is a semi-autobiographical image of himself and the stories of wolves are based on real-life experiences and stories he collected from the local herdsmen.³¹ Jiang Rong, the pseudonym of LüJiamin 吕嘉民 (b.1946), was a professor of political science at China Labor College (中国工运学院) at the time of the publication of the book. He spent 11 years in Inner Mongolia as an intellectual youth. It is through Chen's perspective that he builds up the storyline and the argumentation of the novel.

There are two narrative arcs that set the parameters of *Wolf Totem*. The first arc suggests quite convincingly that the novel contains a clear didactic purpose regarding the contemporary eco-crisis. The popularity of *Wolf Totem* developed against the backdrop of increased visibility and consciousness of the environmental deterioration occurring across China. The second arc of narrative reveals Jiang Rong's cultural agenda. After momentarily enjoying the marvelous descriptions of the protagonists' grassland adventure, readers may take notice of the novel's pervasive, crude, and heavy-handed animal symbolism. The novel defines the perceived differences among

³¹ In both his 2004 and 2008 interviews conducted by Wu Fei and Zhang Ying respectively, Jiang Rong reinforced the role of his real life experience, his collection of wolf stories and his research played in his writing.

species as analogous to the differences among ethnicities. To be more specific, it draws a polemic between the Mongols, whose enduring and noble spirit is equated to that of the wolves, and the Han Chinese, who are represented by meek sheep. Jiang Rong's ambition is to transform the Chinese national character by, in his own words, "transmuting to the blood of the Han Chinese the wolf spirit of the nomad" (Y. Zhang 40).³² The attribution of anthropocentric symbolic value to the wolf blurs *Wolf Totem's* position and focus.

The novel's ability to commit to depiction of the actual grassland in relation to its ability to express its political allegory entails different opinions seen in reviews of *Wolf Totem*. These opinions are also swayed, in large part, by the very humanistic concepts that Jiang Rong intends to portray through the idea of wolf totem. It is the wolf totem of the Mongols commingling with the living ecosystem of the steppe that drives the environmentally-oriented reviews of the novel. As I will examine later, *Wolf Totem's* overpowering nationalist appeal intends to project its envisioned paradigm of eco-harmony epitomized by the wolf totem onto a social context. In instilling the wolf totem with emotional and spiritual capabilities, the novel paradoxically risks diminishing its characters and plot to mere symbolic value.

If in *Wolf Totem*, the perseverance of the nomadic herdsmen and the wisdom of the wolf are elements that comprise a heterotopia featuring a symbiotic natural system, does the novel create a nostalgic image of a lost paradise? While it does idealize the

³² Jiang Rong says in the interview by Zhang Ying that "*xiang hanren de xueye zhong shuru youmu minzu de langxing* 向汉人的血液中输入游牧民族的狼性。”

grasslands and its abundant wildlife as embodiments of pristine harmony, the narrative never diminishes the ferocity of the forces of nature that makes survival a battle. Therefore, I will first look at how the heterotopia on the Mongolian steppe is far from being a fantasy of complete peace and happiness, but an ecosystem where it is possible to thrive through application of the traditional Mongol values of harmony and sustainability.

The discourse of building a harmonious society touches upon every facet of social life, and recognizes that to live in harmony with nature as the foundation of living in harmony with society. To live in harmony with society requires sacrifice on the human part based on a thorough reconsideration of the consequences of the previous utopian movements. *Wolf Totem* delineates a geobiological milieu of the grassland of the past, not far from fabricating a blueprint for sustainable development, though the irony emerges when the literary blueprint is modeled upon the factual disappearance of the eco-harmony of the grassland.

1. The Vulnerable Eco-Harmony of the Grassland

The stories of *Wolf Totem* take place on Olonbulag, a fictional piece of grassland in the Ujimchin Banner of north-central Inner Mongolia, where Chen Zhen grows fascinated with the Mongolian wolves.³³ Initially, Chen and his three friends who later share a yurt volunteered to go to Inner Mongolia as part of the movement to send

³³The Ujimchin Banner 东乌珠穆沁旗 of north-central Inner Mongolia is located in Xilin Gol League 锡林郭勒盟.

youth “up to the mountains and down to the countryside.” The term “volunteering” is problematic in the sense that the youth, many of whom were former red guards, did not necessarily want to leave their home but were dispatched to alleviate political tension and employment pressure in the cities. Here, “volunteering” merely points to the educated youth proactively choosing the grassland as their destination from among a few available options set out by authorities.³⁴

The four students are sons of “black-gang capitalist roaders” or “reactionary academic authorities.” As explained in the novel, “They shared similar circumstances, ideology and disgust for the radical and ignorant Red Guards, and so, in the early 1967, they said good-bye to the clamor of Beijing and traveled to the grassland in search of a peaceful life” (20).³⁵ Stories about Chinggis Khan’s heroism and the Mongol expansion, the excitement of leaving the constraints of cities and families, and the vision of riding on horseback on the vast grassland all contribute to their choice of location for their rural education. With this introduction of its heroes’ travel to the steppe, *Wolf Totem* lays the first brick of the foundation on which the eco-heterotopia of Olonbulag is built. Chen once expresses his feeling that “Out here

³⁴ In the interview conducted by Wu Fei (2004), Jiang Rong mentions that he was fascinated by the grassland described in the Russian novel *Quiet Don*. He also anticipated that it would be easier to hide his collection of forbidden books while living in separated Mongolian yurts than it would have been at his other possible destination in Heilongjiang province.

³⁵ The citations of the book are from Howard Goldblatt’s translation, except for the content that has been deleted from the Chinese original version. Those passages will be indicated by citation of Jiang Rong’s *Lang tuteng*. Goldblatt deletes certain content with some historical depth probably in an attempt to make the novel more accessible to an English reading public.

heaven is high and the emperor far away” (172) and this remoteness seemed to promise that the grassland would be spared the miseries of the rampant Cultural Revolution.

In order to better understand Jiang Rong’s depiction of the students’ choice to go to Inner Mongolia, it is useful to look at the Maoist vision of the relationship between people and nature. In the Mao era, the state forged a series of political campaigns to diminish the influence of “wilderness” on people’s lives. It was “a utopian urgency” (Shapiro 4) that sponsored a race against time to mould the physical world in anticipation of socialist modernity. As illustrated in sections of *Wolf Totem*, construction projects from the Cultural Revolution are undertaken without regard for geographical specificity or ecological wellbeing.

According to Shapiro, “Mao’s *war* against nature” was not only mobilized through military imagery to “conquer” nature, but implemented through the militarization of civilians whose task was to fight nature – the enemy of human dominance.³⁶ It was under these circumstances that educated youths were assigned to the farms of the Inner Mongolia Production and Construction Army Group.³⁷ During this time, the youths and local herdsman alike were all put under army leadership. In *Wolf Totem*, the military presence is apparent whenever the character Bao Guishun

³⁶ The expression of “Mao’s *war* against nature” is from the title of Shapiro’s book.

³⁷ It is called *Neimenggu shengchan jianshe bingtuan* 内蒙古生产建设兵团. The war preparation campaign of the 1960s and early 1970s reinforced the urgency to reshape the landscape. The relocation of Han Chinese, including the youth, was meant to overcome real and imagined security threats at home and abroad.

包贵顺 shows up in a scene. Bao, as the representative of the Banner Revolutionary Committee and commander of the military district, represents the Maoist oppositional stance against the law of nature.

Chen's yearnings for the grassland do not go against the political call to transform a "backward" landscape, since *Wolf Totem* implies that the youths are instruments for stabilizing and "civilizing" the borderland. There are quarrels and discontent between Chen and the other students with regard to the treatment of nature and wildlife. The description of these arguments suggests that Chen's views only represent those gaining personal transformation through learning a bioregional understanding from the herdsmen. From Chen's standpoint, Olonbulag is a heterotopia with amiable ethnic relations between the intellectual youths and the local. In describing that the youths become aware of how Maoist socialist movements do not work, *Wolf Totem* suggests that the youths are indeed re-educated through acquiring the wisdom of the minority people, notably the Mongols' dialectical reasoning in understanding nature.

1.1 The Union between the Big Life and the Little Life

Wolf Totem elaborates on a biological hermeneutics detailing inherently intricate interrelations and interactions between the living creatures of the grassland ecosystem. One of the novel's purposes is to create "a referential connectivity" to the ecological actuality of the Inner Mongolian grassland. The eco-heterotopia of Olonbulag

deconstructs socialist utopianism by way of literary imagination, reflecting how the cruel treatment of nature during the Cultural Revolution erodes the original harmony of the ecosystem of Inner Mongolia.

The novel portrays various interactions between animals that center on competition and cooperation within the food chain. One revelatory event describes the wolves' tactic of hunting gazelles by ambushing, encircling and killing their prey by driving the gazelles to jump off a slope onto a frozen lake covered with snowdrift, a location carefully chosen site by the wolves for its inescapable quality. After consuming some of the fresh meat dragged out from the snowdrift, the wolf leaves their prey as a sure repository of food, knowing that they could come back in the following spring when this natural refrigerator would reveal the frozen gazelle carcasses in the thawing period. The gazelle's carcasses are the wolf food (*langshi* 狼食) from which the herdsmen and the youths would profit. The herdsmen later come to dig out some of the gazelles, loading up their cart and taking the meat home. Bilgee, the father figure of the novel, praises the wolves' hunting of gazelles as the "sacred cleansing of the grassland, a good and benevolent deed" (28). His praise does not grow out of the joy of easily getting a share from the wolf's cold storage, but out of the knowledge that uninhibited growth of the gazelle population would damage the delicate grassland.

Having already grown interested in the wolves before this event, Chen nonetheless finds himself pitying the "warm, beautiful, and peace-loving herbivores,"

and cursing the evil wolves that kill the innocent as “oblivious to the value of a life” (44). The old man Bilgee sets Chen’s romantic ideas straight in strong terms, saying, “Does that mean that the grass doesn’t constitute a life? That the grassland isn’t a life? Out here, the grass and the grassland are the life, the big life (*daming* 大命). All else is little life (*xiaoming* 小命) that depends on the big life for survival” (45). Bilgee inverts big and small, as grass, the big life, is the most fragile component in the food chain. Roaming animals, like the gazelle, become the potential killers of the big life through their never ending consuming and stomping. In the eyes of Bilgee, the big life is the origin of all the little lives, which include those of wolves and humans. As a result, it is the grass that should be pitied instead of the gazelles, which cause more damage to the grass than the wolves.

The ecological philosophy of the inhabitants of Inner Mongolia in *Wolf Totem* is based on the observance of the hierarchical rule of the big life and little life. The underlying philosophy is that heaven, grassland, animals and humans exist in unity. The four elements of this union comprise what we call nature, under whose “totality” humans are but one “continuity” with the other elements. The pests of the grassland are field mice, wild rabbits, marmots and gazelles, since they all contribute in different ways to the destruction of grass. A local saying has it that “When marmots leave their burrow, the wolves go up the mountain,” which describes the spring time when the marmots become an important source of food for the wolves and the livestock could get a rest from the scourge of the wolves (237). Thus to wipe out the

wolves is tantamount to eliminating the natural enemy of pests, and ultimately, destroying the ecological balance of the steppe.

Taking a broad view, *Wolf Totem* sketches out the harmonious symbiosis of the big life and the little life on Olonbulag through narrative examples. Tengger, the highest deity in the Mongol pantheon, presides over this union. Tengger, heaven, with all its enormous and delicate forces, keeps the ecosystem intact. Though the novel notes that the herdsmen are not allowed to openly worship Tengger at the time, they continue to worship the deity in their hearts (15). In the four-dimensional model of “heaven, grassland, wolf and human,” “Tengger is the father, the grassland is the mother, and the wolves kill only animals that harm the grassland. How could Tengger not bestow its favors on wolves?” (22) Those words uttered by Bilgee not only designate the status of the big life in the union as that of the mother figure, but assign to the wolves the position of the protective guardians of the mother in their interrelatedness with all other species. Tengger is “fair” in sending the gazelles as the gifts to the wolf pack and allowing the humans to take some wolf prey as “reparations” for the wolves’ killing of domestic animals (56).

One of the effects of describing the interrelatedness of the big life and the little life is to deconstruct the philosophical chasm between humans and the animal other. In his seminal essay “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” Jacques Derrida critiques a hierarchical “divide” or “duality” of the relationship between Man and Animal (398), based on his readings of major figures in the history of philosophy.

Adopting a non-duality position, Derrida deconstructs the hierarchy or power relations embedded in the binary oppositions that govern our understanding of the world.

Like Derrida, Jiang Rong exhibits deconstructive spirit by inverting the traditional system of thought. To bridge the limit between human and animal, Jiang Rong reshuffles their relationship under the “mandate” of Tengger, (though as I will discuss later, the novel does not adhere to its deconstructive position when engrossed in the symbolic binary between wolf and sheep). In explaining the role of the Mongols in relation to the wolves, Bilgee says, “We Mongols are also sent by Tengger to protect the grassland” (123). Moreover, “Heaven and man do not easily come together, but a wolf and the grassland merge like water and milk” (228). Tengger favors the wolves because they are responsible for controlling the number of grass foragers. Humans shall inspect the number of wolves, since the divine turns into evil when the wolf population exceeds a proper limit. Once the livestock is taken by the evil, the Mongols lose their sustenance, and the grassland disappears. The logic dialectical in essence in its role of maintaining the health of the grasslands.

1.2 The Eco-heterotopia Slips into History

All the living beings’ observances of the rules set by Tengger (the natural laws of the grassland) guarantee the harmony of Olonbulag. When ignoring or breaking the rules, humans experience immediate consequences. The number of wolves is

controlled by various means. The distribution of ecological energy commanded by Tengger rewards or punishes the wolf. This balance is put into jeopardy at the moment when, due to their ignorance, humans underestimate the actual complexity of the ecosystem and set out to wipe out the wolves. This act of the derailment of the rules reveals the vulnerability of the grassland, or the big life, which is “thinner than people’s eyelid” (234).

Within the novel, the political attitudes at the time are at the root of the sorts of ignorant actions that lead to ecological destruction. Legitimized under the hegemony of the unified nation-state government, the exploitation of the little lives would begin to threaten the big life. The eco-harmony of the territory is in danger when the whole nation, facing bleak austerity, keeps requesting a supply of meat from Inner Mongolia. As Bilgee articulates, “When you people come demanding our meat, what you’re really asking for is our grass, and if you keep it up, you’ll kill off the grassland. The pressure from government quotas has nearly turned several banners in the southeast into desert” (234). Natural disasters or plagues common on the steppe make the nation’s demands even more devastating to the big life. The eco-heterotopia of Olonbulag is not a Peach Blossom Spring; it survives in the midst of making the uncompromising choice between life or death: “All the seasoned herders had committed to memory (sic!) a grassland maxim, written in blood: On the Mongolia grassland, peace does not follow peace, but danger always follows danger” (69). Those inconceivable hardships facing the grasslanders are an indispensable part of a

balanced grassland life. Under the circumstances described in the novel, it is the immigrants to the Mongolian steppe, mobilized in the name of modernity, that represent an extra danger to the balance.

For the purpose of meeting the nation's meat requirements, the Olonbulag leadership decides to open a pasture as grazing ground.³⁸ This previously unused "virgin land" (293) is exploited to save Olonbulag from being overgrazed; yet, as the land's own "otherworldly" shape disappears, it appears as a microcosm of the fading soundness of the Inner Mongolia grasslands at large. There is a swan lake in the new pasture, which is like a pearl mirroring the pasture's Eden-like beauty; the pearl becomes coated in dust when the immigrants break a local taboo by killing and eating the swans, which are revered as sacred by the local Mongols for their ability to "fly up to Tengger"(285). Yang Ke 杨克, Chen's friend, foresees the future of the pasture and laments that "all that keeps it from being perfect is the presence of Bao Guishun, the Chinese students, and the other outsiders. The Olonbulag shepherds would have no trouble living in peace and harmony with the swans" (294).³⁹

Moreover, the exploitation of the "gold mine" of new pasture is made possible by the influx of migrants under military protection. The arrival of the outsiders is exceptionally visible through the migrants' efficiency in activities such as putting up

³⁸ Experienced herdsmen, such as Bilgee, also participate in making the decision.

³⁹ "The Chinese students" is Goldblatt's translation of *zhiqing* 知青 (intellectual youth). In actuality, it was unthinkable for the Inner Mongolians, as designated minority people in the PRC, to address the youth as "the Chinese" as if to distinguish them as non-Chinese.

brick houses. The incursion of the agrarian way of life into the steppes results in the catastrophic degeneration of an established ecosystem. Farming practices replace the original means of subsistence, thereby causing a fracture in nature's intrinsic and salient continuity. Bao Guishun often laments that the land used for grazing is a waste, as it could otherwise be used to feed a large farming population. He never realizes that it is exactly the agricultural land "reclamation" that causes large-scale desertification and the loss of local culture.⁴⁰

Of course, the systematic slaughter of wolves is another important factor that contributes to the drastic changes in the steppe environment. *Wolf Totem* describes the Cultural Revolution as a period when, "the traditional life of the grassland, a mixture of tending sheep and hunting wild animals, had been turned upside down" (13). The process of Han demographic and economic intrusion goes hand in hand with a process of dispossession of the indigenous way of living on Olonbulag, changing the grassland that had not changed since "time immemorial" (116). To safeguard their livestock, the military leadership becomes determined to combat the wolves, declaring them a dangerous enemy. "Motor vehicles, assault rifles and machine guns" (441) eventually bring triumphs to human over the wolves, and the few surviving wolves are driven across the border into Outer Mongolia. The detrimental effect of the wolf

⁴⁰ According to historian Yihong Pan's study, there were two "major campaigns" for land reclamation, the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) and the Cultural Revolution (the statistic covering the more intensive period of 1966-1973), during which time approximately "2 million hectares of grassland were opened for farming" (229). Pan also cites the statistic that "between 1960 and 1980, the total area of desert in Inner Mongolia increased from 7.33 million to 10.6 million" (ibid).

slaughter is straightforward in *Wolf Totem* given the wolves' status as the "nerve centre" (*zhongshu shenjing* 中枢神经) of the ecosystem.⁴¹

At this juncture, it is worth thinking about the cultural basis for the political endeavor that ignores the geographical differences; that is, the commonly held Han Chinese attitude that agrarian means of subsistence are superior in nurturing the great Chinese civilization. In Mao's war against nature, the utilitarian attitude towards the environment reached its apex. Under the paradigm of the Marxist linear narrative of social development, the normalization of uneven development across the country relegated the minority peoples to a stage that existed in the past for the civilized Han. Hence the Mongol culture, with its very different epistemology and worldview, becomes synonymous with backwardness. Probably with the hope of mitigating the ethnic conflicts between the Han and the Mongols, Jiang Rong instead stresses the way in which the Mongols are co-opted in the implementation of the imposed worldview that reshapes the new pastureland. In *Wolf Totem*, most of the migrants to this pasture, the fellow-villagers of Bao Guishun, are "assimilated" Mongols from the northeast, who show disrespect for the rules of Tengger either out of willful ignorance or out of unfamiliarity. The novel seems to suggest that the Maoist campaigns are efficient in their efforts to "assimilate diverse cultures and spiritual traditions into a

⁴¹ This is a word used by Jiang Rong in the interview conducted by Zhang Ying 张英.

homogenous code,”⁴² and further decodes the homogenous code of the center-defined modernization.

Before their arrival, Chen and Yang had a yearning for the grassland, which they believed contained “the most extensive primitivism and freedom anywhere” (34). Yet we shall admit that in Chen’s perception of the grassland, primitivism is not divorced from backwardness. Seeing language as an ongoing and imperative mode of culture preservation, Chen makes the point that writing is the privilege and property of the Han Chinese; thus, a lack of literacy results in Mongols’ “inadequacy” in recording their ecological and military wisdom. Totems, and hence the book *Wolf Totem*, are ways of handing down the undocumented wisdom to posterity. In this sense, Jiang Rong is not unlike the root-seeking writers of the 1980s to recall and even idealize the primitive. Somewhat ironically, it is through the construction of the wolf totem that the novel grants the primitive a sense of profoundness and density that defies the totem’s common association with backwardness.

2. The Wolf Totem: A Constructed Philosophy

Nearly two centuries ago, the term “totem” (aoutem) was introduced to the French language by early explorers of North America. Initially meaning “a familiar spirit” in Native American language, totem’s contemporary definition encompasses “a complex of ideas and practices based on the belief in kinship or a mystical

⁴² This is originally an expression that Huggan and Tiffin (2) use in their description of Western history’s hegemony in assimilating diverse cultures.

relationship between men and natural objects, such as animals and plants.”⁴³ *Wolf*

Totem brings together a number of phenomena under the name of totemism; the

Mongol belief in a kinship relationship with the wolves is one example.

In the 1980s, “heirs of the dragon” (*long de chuanren* 龙的传人) became a catchword in China’s cultural milieu to describe a common symbolic legendary lineage shared by Chinese all over the world. He Xingliang 何星亮, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, claims that the dragon is a unified totem for each variety of China’s ethnic groups along a historical spectrum, a totem worshipped both as a representation of imperial royalty and a rain deity pivotal in agrarian culture (39).

Wolf Totem exploits the age-old discussion of the dragon as a national totem which stands for the great unity of the *Zhonghua minzu*. The novel’s conceptualization of the wolf totem solidifies a reinterpretation of, or establishes a linkage with the dragon totem by tracing the farming tradition to its nomadic precursor. Since “symbols of nationalism”, such as the dragon, are “powerful emotive instruments of mass persuasion” (Sleeboom 19), the novel attaches elements of sentiment to the wolf totem in an attempt to lay a foundation for posing a vision of a balanced natural/human world inspired by Mongolian culture.

Totemism in *Wolf Totem* eludes absolute definition, since it is a contingent combination of particulars which we can associate with different scholastic understandings of totems. Literary critic S.K. Robisch’s taxonomy regarding the real

⁴³ Bleakley quotes from the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (130).

wolf and the wolf of our imagination provides a niche that accommodates the wolf totem of our concern. There is the real wolf, the existence of which is independent of texts. There are literary representations of wolves, which refer to “the wolf of a world of our invention, a symbolic figure shaped according to our own desires, for prowess, material, nurture, conquest, or identity, our placement in the cosmos” (16).

Specifically, the construction of the corporeal wolf, a subgroup of the literary representations of wolves, aims at bringing to life the real wolf in text, or, in other words, to achieve mimesis.

The other subgroup, namely the ghost wolf, is an imaginary construct with twofold implications in Robisch’s categorization. First of all, the ghost wolf has a strong presence in mythologies and totemic beliefs. It often appears in human culture as some sort of symbolic image. Additionally, the “ghost” moniker hints at the history of eradication of wolves in Europe and the United States. When the wolf has largely disappeared from the face of the earth, the wolf of the imagination could become nothing more than a phantom, a ghost. The spiritualization of the wolf in *Wolf Totem* evokes the ghost wolf at a time when the diminishing number of wolves living on the inner Mongolian grassland needs the rejuvenation of the wolf totem. Moreover, the novel’s construction of the wolf totem starts from its evocation of the corporeal wolf and aims at re-marking the totem’s bearing on the formal structuring of social relations. In order to correlate the corporeal wolf with the ghost wolf, it is through a

palpable structural design that the novel brings into play the mythical and personal dynamics of its peculiar conceptualization of totemism.

Above all, the wolf totem fits the above mentioned definition in which a totem is a culture's expression of its linkage with an animal. The wolf totem's symbolism coalesces on four dimensions. The first one is the functional one, which registers the Mongol's day-to-day interaction with the wolf. The second one is the social one, which connects the wolf with the Mongols based on a belief in kinship between the Mongols and the wolf. The third one is a ritual one, and the fourth comes into being when the wolf totem finally condenses into the personal totem of Chen Zhen. Though the four aspects of the wolf totem are intricate, sorting them out in accordance with the novel's structure will facilitate our understanding of the wolf totem as an all-round concept on par with the historical density normally ascribed to the dragon totem.

2.1 The Totemic Coin

The wolf totem is not a mitigating measure stipulated by the grasslanders in order to show sympathy to the animal, though it certainly functions to curb humans' desire to remove wolves. Some critics, such as the aforementioned Chengzhou He, have drawn a simple equation between the wolf totem and worship, regarding the totem as the power given to the mythic subject.⁴⁴ In the novel, several characters hold an

⁴⁴ In his article, Chengzhou He equates the wolf totem with the worship of wolves. He notes that "the novel *Wolf Totem* is a contemporary reconstruction of the wolf worship, which, I think, is the soul of the novel" (400).

anthropocentric view that affects their understanding of the wolf totem. Bao Guishun, a committed wolf killer, views the wolf totem as nothing more than the herdsmen's nonscientific justification for leniency in dealings with the wolf, and thus encourages humans to serve the wolves. In contrast, characters such as Bilgee ascribe to a ceremonial relationship with the wolf. The novel describes Mongol sky burial, a ritual through which the deceased is brought to heaven by the soul of a wolf. The ritual is a telling example of beliefs in which animals are not the beneficiaries of the totemic relationship; on the contrary, humans rely on the non-human to ascend to paradise. Moreover, Bilgee explains, "We grasslanders eat meat all our lives, for which we kill many creatures. After we die, we donate our meat back to the grassland" (125). In this sense, the wolf totem represents a ritualistic, mutually beneficial relationship between the Mongols and the wolves.

The first dimension of the wolf totem functions like a totemic coin. To the Mongolian people, the wolf is "their spiritual totem but a physical enemy" (333). The seemingly opposing but related status levels of the wolf in the hearts of the Mongolian people remind us of the capability of heterotopia to accommodate the incompatible. "A fearful yet revered wolf totem" came into being against the nomadic people's life, in which they must practice "taking the bitter with the sweet" (208). The lines of the story's plot are entangled with the bitter and sweet sides of the totemic coin as they advance simultaneously. The bitter is poured into the story when the wolf pack mercilessly murders the sheep and horses. The sweet candies the story in the form of

the wolf food that occasionally appears to feed the herdsmen and, in a more significant way, is assured by the thriving grasslands as long as the herdsmen stay under the wolf's protection. In a word, neither the bitter nor the sweet dominates the narrative's wolf stories.

The establishment of the binary value system in which the wolf totem requires either veneration or fear sets up a balance. The requirements of worship alone are insufficient in explaining the wolf totem. The key to the wolf totem is in the contradictory roles played by the wolf in crafting a sound ecosystem. Equally importantly, it is in the strong people attaining the wolf's spirit in the process of fighting with this exact physical enemy. In this sense, the two sides of the coin are not necessarily confrontational or inherently undermining. This is ultimately not a relationship of binary opposition, but one of the symbiotic, complementary and reciprocal. Chen understands that "Wolves were the enemies of herdsmen, as well as their revered divinities, their totem, their bridge to heaven, and as such, creatures to whom homage was paid"(165). The wolf totem as a "predatory totem" (90) implies the nomads' mixed feelings towards the wolf.⁴⁵

The totem is an expression of culture-nature interaction. It offers illuminating insights into the Mongol's sense of identity and cosmological positioning. In line with

⁴⁵ An anonymous Mongol writer mentioned in Long Xingjian's criticism denies the centrality of the wolf totem in her culture based on the allegation that the Mongols admire every kind of ferocious animal (36). The veracity of the writer's statement aside, Jiang Rong does not claim the wolf totem to be the exclusive or uniting theology of the Mongols. In addition to the worship of Tengger, all animals with wings are considered to have the ability to fly up to Tengger and thus are revered. Note that the taboo against eating swan, an issue that was discussed earlier, is broken by the outsiders in *Wolf Totem*.

this attitude, the existence and behavior of the Mongols organize and function with the rhythm of nature. The wolf totem is not restricted by a religious outlook. The Mongols' coexistence with other creatures on the grassland grants the wolf totem its pragmatic significance. A secular outlook coupled with a religious veneration of the wolf as a species pervades the idea of the wolf totem. Furthermore, the novel does not situate the ghost wolf solely in the contemporary context. Its structure lays out an exquisite exposition of the textual wolves located in historical texts.

2.2 The Historical Lineage

The novel ushers in the sacred elements of the wolf totem by means of presenting them as the results of the energetic activity of the entire ecological realm taking shape throughout history. The wolf totem is not only a mode of personal inquiry as expressed from the perspective of a former educated youth, but a concept built upon the history of the textual wolf. In the original Chinese version of *Wolf Totem*, each chapter starts with one or two quotations, which have regrettably been deleted in the English translation. The historical depth of the wolf totem is manifest through this mixture of quotations, which are mainly from the historiography of China and the West. Historical presences of the wolf, some of them in the form of legends, reveal a wolf culture that is worldwide in scope, and the goal is to place *Wolf Totem* within a cross-cultural context.

As eye-catching they may seem to be, the quotations, surprisingly enough, do not explicitly designate the interpretive rubric of the wolf stories in the novel, nor do they foreshadow the schema according to which the stories are organized. Because they are disassociated from the narrative of *Wolf Totem*, the quotations may seem like an overly-conspicuous and artificial method of splitting up the chapters. Then what is their purpose beyond creating an unusual textual blend out of some mythical/historical ingredients? To address this question, we need to explore the symbolic frame set up by the tradition of wolf literature. The book sketches out an intricate and aesthetic labyrinth of intertextual references, most of which are carefully selected to counter the stereotypical wolf image in its popular representation.⁴⁶

Though the quotations do not sharpen the focus of the text, they dictate humans' genetic and mythic relations with the wolf in service of the book's cultural agenda.

The quotations counter the tendency of viewing the totem as a turn to the backward primitive and lead instead in the direction to historicization.⁴⁷ A process of historicization or euhemerism of the wolf myth is detectable in the quotations, some of which trace the Mongol's link to the mythical animal ancestors from which they believe themselves to be descended. The animal genealogy accounts for the mythical pattern of the wolf totem. The epigraph of chapter nine consists of two stanzas from

⁴⁶ This is especially true for the Chinese version.

⁴⁷ Sarah Allan talks about "historicization" or "euhemerism" in her study of the Shang myths, or how myth and history merge into one. One of Allan's arguments is that the Yellow Emperor is the lord of the underworld and the spirits of the dead. The Yellow Emperor was only transformed into a historical figure due to later "embellishment" or transformation of the Shang myth.

two modern Chinese translation of *Menggu mishi* 蒙古秘史 (*The Secret History of the Mongols*) by Yu Dajun 余大钧 and Daorun Tibu 道润梯步, respectively.⁴⁸ The novel mentions several times that *The Secret History of the Mongols*, a history of the origin and rise of Chinggis Khan, is Chen Zhen's favorite source for investigating the roots of the wolf totem.

The first stanza from Yu's Chinese annotated translation traces the ancestors of the Mongols. "There was a bluish wolf (*cang lang* 苍狼) which was born having 'his' destiny from Heaven above. His spouse was a fallow doe. They came, passing over the Tenggis (sea or lake)".⁴⁹ *Cang* could mean blue, dark green or grey, so the variance in translation appears in the color adjective describing the wolf, or, more likely, in the interpretation of the true meaning of *cang lang* as I will describe below.

According to the Ming document *Lidai diwang xingxi tupu* 历代帝王姓系统谱 (*General Register of the Surnames and Lineages of the Emperors and Kings of Successive Dynasties*), the ancestor of the people of the Yuan Dynasty is a man of bluish color begotten of Heaven, who coupled with a dull-white woman" (Cleaves xxvii). In contrast, *Daming tongyi zhi* 大明统一志 (*The Consolidation Record of the Great Ming Dynasty*), as Francis Cleaves points out, contains a reference to *The Secret History of the Mongols*, which says that a *cangbai lang* 苍白狼 (plain white

⁴⁸ *The Secret History of the Mongols* was written in the 13th century in Mongolian language. The surviving copies of the text are mainly the Ming dynasty translation or transcription into Chinese characters.

⁴⁹ This is the translation by Cleaves. Yu's translation is as follows: "当初元朝人的祖，是天生一个苍色的狼，与一个惨白色的鹿相配了，同渡过腾吉思名字的水来..."

wolf) met a *cangbai lu* 惨白鹿 (dull white doe) and they gave birth to the ancestor of the Yuan clan (*yuan shi* 元氏). Contemporary scholar Daorun Tibu argues that *cang lang* and *bai lu* are the mistranslations of the Ming scholars, and the original terms in the Mongolian language are nothing more than two human names (4).⁵⁰ In *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia—the Chinggisid Age*, Peter Golden writes about the genealogy of the Mongols, noting that a “grey wolf” and “fallow deer” are “animals familiar to Inner Asian ethnogenic myths” (20). In a similar fashion, Yu explains that the myth reflects the Mongols’ inheritance of the deer totem and the wolf totem from their remote ancestors. In all, we can sense that the substitution of *ren* for *lang* in certain translations betrays a sort of anxiety over the animalization of a human ancestor. This anxiety will also lead the “civilized” mind to read the thoughts of the animal character of the original ancestor as “irrational.”⁵¹ Yet taking a closer look, we will detect that *Wolf Totem* indeed strives for a balance between the level of history and the level of ancient mythology in its formulation of the idea of the totem.

The novel explains that “the Mongols’ ancestors were hunters in the forests surrounding the upper reaches of the Heilong River who slowly migrated onto the grassland, where they lived as hunter-herdsmen” (19). Some of the quotations that introduce chapters in the Chinese version of *Wolf Totem* express that some of the

⁵⁰ Daorun Tibu does not mention the exact Ming texts he refers to, but we can assume that the Ming scholars here may include, such as, the author of *The Consolidation Record of the Great Ming Dynasty*.

⁵¹ The conceived “irrationality” also sows the seed for *Wolf Totem*’s criticisms, such as the claim that it elevates animality into the realm of the metaphysical, a topic we will discuss later.

northern nomadic tribes regarded the wolf as their ancestors. For example, the first chapter of *Wolf Totem* starts with a line from Fan Wenlan's 范文澜 *Zhongguo tongshi jianbian* 中国通史简编 (*Brief Compilation of a General History of China*): “The *Quan Rong* 犬戎 clan claims two white *quan* (dog or wolf) as their ancestors. Therefore, they might regard *quan* as their totem” (3).⁵² A quotation from the same source opens Chapter thirty-five, the last chapter: “Yan Di 炎帝 is surnamed Jiang... The Jiang clan is a branch of the group of Qiang 羌 of the Western Rong, the nomads from the west drifting into the central region” (376).⁵³ These two stanzas explain the sources of the pen name “Jiang Rong,” two characters standing for the two ancient nomadic tribes. Considering that Yan Di is the alleged ancestor of the Han Chinese, it is implied here that the wolf totem has been carried down over generations from nomadic ancestors. Thus, the author's choice of the pseudonym “Jiang Rong” suggests a nomadic origin of the Chinese culture.

The quotations frame the story of China in the 1970s in a zone of historical textuality. The supplementary Classical Chinese documents place the wolf totem into a lineage that links humans' existence to that of the wolves. The imagination of the ghost wolf is, in a way, historically accumulative. The age-old wolf myths bring to the

⁵² My translation of “‘犬戎族’自称祖先为二白犬，当是以犬为图腾，” from Fan's *The Brief Collection of the General History of China* 《中国通史简编·第一编》. Jiang Rong argues that the *quan* should actually be *lang* (Jiang 411). Na Mu Ji La's 那木吉拉 research supports this view based on the possibility that the Chinese word *quan* is used here as a transliteration of the Mongolian word for wolf (49).

⁵³ My translation of “炎帝姓姜……姜姓是西戎羌族的一支，自西方游牧先入中部。”

surface a special and intimate connection between the human and the ghost wolf. The legendary wolves of literature are the bridge to comprehending how the ancient mind conceptualized the wilderness and shaped the animal totem.

Epistemologically speaking, behind the mythic wolf in the historical account is the real wolf. That the herdsmen in the novel get a share of the wolf food echoes a quotation in chapter nine concerning an ancestor of Chinggis Khan who, in hard times, survived on wolf food (93). Quoting Daorun Tibu's translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*, the passage introduces how the hero uses arrows to kill game that was ambushed in the valley by the wolves. Earlier in the novel, Bilgee narrates a colloquial version of the story on how the hero survived on the leftovers of the wolf (55). This is one of the quotations that are not randomly chosen to hold the text together. The historical record should stand by itself as proof of human's eternal relationship with animals. Yet historiography could fail to stir up sentiments in the reader who may perceive the quotations as less comprehensible than the narrative. The novel blatantly adopts a more straightforward manner to sell its idea of the totem, delivering a lecture with the support of purported visual evidence.

2.3 A Lecture

The third dimension of the wolf totem is derived from its historical foundation and strives for an aesthetic appreciation of it. Placed after the postscript, the section “Lixing tanjue – guanyu lang tuteng de jiangzuo yu duihua” 理性探掘—关于狼图腾

的讲座与对话 (Rational exploration—lecture and dialogue about the wolf totem) appears as an adjunct to the main text but with a tenuous narrative connection.⁵⁴ The section is presented in a different, smaller font. The “Lecture” is a scholastic paper that supplements the text, the purpose of which is to articulate the writer’s social agenda at the expense of the coherence of the fictional narrative. It is worth noting that the whole section is removed from the English translation, presumably out of fear that the ghost wolf might loom too large, overshadowing the corporeal wolf.

Wondering around Olonbulag twenty years after having returned back to the city, Chen Zhen and Yang Ke exchange dialogue that expatiates some of the views in the main body of the text. Towards the end of Chen’s lengthy lecture is his unconventional interpretation of a particular dragon *taotie* 饕餮, or mythical animal. The *taotie* in question is the “Jade dragon” of the Hongshan culture, the so-called “No. 1 dragon of China” excavated in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.⁵⁵ The inscribed animal known as the Jade dragon remains essentially unidentified, since dragon is merely a moniker reflecting an association determined by archaeologists. One of the speculations holds that this “C” shaped jade dragon, its tail rising and curling inward, is the “pig dragon,” judging from its relatively exposed nose, long mouth and other facial features. The pig elements in the jade dragon emphasize the

⁵⁴ I will refer to the section as the “Lecture” hereafter.

⁵⁵ The Hongshan Culture is dated back to five to six thousand years and is believed to have lasted for two thousand years. Deriving its name from the Hongshan Mountain in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous region, it covers part of south-east of Inner Mongolia and part of western Liaoning Province. It is known for painted pottery and jade artifacts.

importance of domesticated pigs as nomadic culture transitioned into an agrarian economy. The narrative of *Wolf Totem* describes the appearance of the little wolf that Chen raises at length and with affection, with every descriptive detail carrying out a mission to hint that the “pig dragon” is indeed a wolf.

Suffice it to say that some narrative details in this regard orient towards a concerted action with the “Lecture.” Reading the face of the little wolf was Chen’s hobby back on Olonbulag. In one instance, the novel describes:

His eyes ...were round, but slanted upward and outward, and were more striking than the eyes painted on the face of a Beijing Opera performer. The inner corners of his eyes slanted downward to form a dark tear-duct line, giving them an especially eerie appearance.... (399)

After more than twenty years of rumination on the haunting image, Chen enthusiastically declares his discovery in the “Lecture”, stating that the Hongshan jade actually has a “wolf head and dragon body” (Jiang 439). He reasons that the body of the jade dragon does not have scales (*linpian* 鳞片). Instead, parts of the neck and head look like a replica of those of the wolf, especially the round and slanted eyes. Moreover, Chen found that “most terrifying [of the little wolf] were the furrows that formed alongside his nose when he was angry” (399). Why do the furrows matter? The Hongshan jade dragon has a furrowed nose, which roughly resembles the nose of

a pig. The furrows are a small piece of evidence hidden in the narrative that does not reappear in the “Lecture” part, though it still serves Chen’s discovery.⁵⁶

That Chen Zhen traces the prototype of the artistic image of the dragon to the wolf is conceivably controversial since it identifies the wolf as the ancestral totem of the Han Chinese. That being said, *Wolf Totem* is not a pioneer to draw support from ancient artifacts and documents to account for the mystical or the symbolic. Over a century, etymological and mythical origins of the dragon have intrigued many scholars and spurred many debates. In the 1940s, the renowned scholar Wen Yiduo 闻一多 (1899-1946) first applied the Western notion of “totem” to analyze the dragon as a fictitious creature, a synthesis of different animals.⁵⁷ Historian Sarah Allan’s analysis of the images of the *taotie* mask of Shang times will shed light on the implication of the assemblage composition of the totem.

Allan sees Shang totemism as a system of classification. She claims that totemism is the way in which the Shang people perceive their world through classifying and drawing analogies between men, animals and other natural objects. The decor on the Shang sacrificial bronze vessels reflects that the boundaries of the real world are subject to “distortion.” Specifically, the combination of parts of different animals and/or people suggests that there is no distinct boundary between

⁵⁶ It is not surprising that most readers ignore this small piece of evidence in the narrative. Critic Long Xingjian’s counterargument to Jiang Rong’s wolf hypothesis that the jade pig dragon in fact represents a wolf is precisely based on the wolf’s smoothed nose.

⁵⁷ Wen’s thesis of the dragon as a non-existent animal has become very influential though his paradoxical identification of the main part of the dragon as snakelike is debatable.

human and animal in the cosmological concept of the Shang people. Totemism thus creates “a correlation” between human society and the natural world (Allan 172), a correlation that *Wolf Totem* also conjures up.

In the “Lecture,” Chen analyses the *taotie* as situated in the transformational stage between the wolf totem and the dragon totem. Such a decoding of the dragon totem has given rise to a subsequent “totem fever” in academia. Acknowledging that he was inspired by *Wolf Totem*, Ye Shuxian 叶舒宪, a renowned scholar on mythology, composed his work *Xiong tuteng: Zhonghua zuxian henhua tanyuan* 熊图腾: 中国祖先文化探源 (*Bear Totem: Exploration of the Source of Chinese Ancestor Culture*). Ye claims that “The ancestral totem of the Chinese did not originate from one single source” (204).⁵⁸ According to his argument, the *taotie* could be interpreted as a bear morphed into the C-shaped dragon through a historical process of abstraction. The disagreement on the origin of the dragon totem suggests in a way that the species boundary in the *taotie* image could be remarkably contingent.

Finally, it is worth noting one of Allan’s points regarding the *taotie*. Allan discusses how the *taotie* is not only “pure” or “meaningless” form, but has become a representational icon through the rearrangement of its body parts which are derived from reality. The *taotie* image cast into the decor of the sacrificial vessels evokes a sense of the sacred, and the image may inspire Jiang Rong, figuratively speaking, to take on the role of shaman wearing a wolf face-shaped mask. The mask is the

⁵⁸ My translation of “中华祖先的图腾不会是一源的。”

communicative medium in a ritual ceremony, which is a means to recover a natural sense of the sacred. The mask projects the wolf in its corporeal form, but its effect transcends the corporeal, aiming to create a “metaphysical projection.” The ritual of mask dancing intends to maintain ambiguities within the boundaries between the species. When his character Chen Zhen identifies the wolf as the ancestor totem of the Han Chinese, this categorization confuses the deeply embedded division of self and other. The mask is a prop for a shaman’s theatrical performance, or a forum for displaying the aesthetic and sacred value of the wolf totem. Underneath the mask, there grows a personal involvement with and attachment to the wolf totem.

2.4 The Personal Totem

The above mentioned components of the wolf totem track the chronology of the wolf’s iconic power as mapped out through a sentimental trail of human-wolf interaction. *Wolf Totem* also develops the totem into a personal one when Chen Zhen contributes to the cyclical tales of human’s affiliation with wolves. Chen’s exploration of the wolf totem, especially his choice to raise the little wolf, is a theme that drives the narrative to flow through his direct or indirect encounters with the earthbound wolf. The wolf totem had been a central part of the primordial way of life of the Mongols, which gradually makes its way into Chen’s heart.

The novel is structured through Jiang Rong’s internalized form of totemic writing, which bears the influence of Jack London, a name closely linked to animal literature,

from whom Jiang Rong draws much inspiration. When Robisch talks about Jack London's totemic writing, he says "A literary figure becomes totemic according to its tendency to overwhelm a writer" (291). London's devoted writing about wolf characters receives the "reactive eruption" of the totem due to the omnipresent forces of nature. Similarly, Jiang Rong does not invent a totem; instead, a totem takes shape as Chen digs up information on the influence of the wolf on the grassland. From a group emblem to an individual totem, the totem's impact on Chen is far from just nominal. It becomes an appropriate log through which the so-called civilized mind comprehends so-called primitive spirituality. Moreover, the individualized totem is fitted with some of the basic aspects of totemism as seen from an anthropological viewpoint.

Some anthropologists believe that the most salient aspect of the totem rests in its pedagogic function: "The animal— as natural (biological) or spirit (psychological) animal—is taken as initiator, guide and educator" (Bleakley 132). In *Wolf Totem*, the wolves are time and again referred to as the inspiration for the military tactics of the Mongols and the reason for the military miracle that the Mongols represent in history. In studying the wolf, Chen has a teacher besides the old man Bilgee — the little wolf, who introduces him to the core of the wolf totem. It is for the purpose of familiarizing himself with the ways of wolves that Chen determines to raise a wolf cub. Sacking the wolf den in the spring time is a way of controlling the wolf population and protecting the livestock. Pulling seven cubs from a den, heroic Chen keeps the strongest one;

while the herdsman Dorji keeps another one and sends the rest of the litter to see Tengger. From then on, the free and feral creature, the trophy of their cub hunting, becomes Chen's living "wolf totem."

Thanks to the adaptability that, in the Mongols' view, the wolves receive from Tengger, the little wolf adjusts to life in Chen's yurt without losing his wolfish instinct. When chained to a pole and severely baked in the lethal sun, the little wolf is smart enough to dig a hole in which he buries most of his body to keep cool. At one point, the novel describes that "The cub looked over at Chen and squinted to form a smile, seemingly pleased with himself and what he was doing" (334). Amazed by the cub's "extraordinary talent for survival and [...] native intelligence" (335), Chen learns of the wolf's love of "darkness" for its sense of security. Before coming to some scientific conclusions, this and similar moments reinforce Chen's feeling for this little creature. Chen's reflection would almost always follow an observation of the wolf's behavior. Overall, his exploration of the wolf's behavior is to support the view that the wolves have "evolved to the point of perfection" (466). The protagonist's search for the wolf's knowledge is the string that ties the text together. In other words, the book starts with Chen's curiosity about the wolf totem, proceeds with an adventure in which he explores the world of the wolf, and ends with a lecture summarizing his discovery.

Even given the trust the cub has for Chen, it never "displayed a hint of gratitude toward" (263) his human feeder in spite of being treated like a "royal." Feeling

jealous of the freedom enjoyed by several dog puppies, the tied up little wolf sends “hateful glares” at Chen. When the day comes when instinct drives him to make loud sounds as if he were “howling to be found: he was calling for the wild to which he belonged” (361), the cub attacks Chen when he tries to stop the howling for fear that it will attract an attack from the wolf pack. The incident is one of many that leads to the forced extraction of the cub’s greatest weapons—his front incisors.

At this moment, it seems clear that Chen’s individual identification with the wolf totem has two contradictory aspects. Chen establishes the wolf as his totem while, at the same time, he treats the cub as an “experimental object.” The novel states that “Raising [a wolf] like a pet was something a herdsman could not condone; it was a blasphemy in the spiritual sense and consorting with the enemy. He had broken one of the grassland’s prohibitions, violated a cultural taboo—of that there was no doubt” (269). Moreover, raising a wolf cub involves the danger of being viewed as “extolling the virtues of the reactionary theory of class harmony” (ibid), given that the wolf is a ready metaphor for the class enemy at the time.

Chen challenges the deep-seated wolf totem of the local Mongols in pursuit of his “scientific experiment.” Nevertheless, he experiences “powerful qualms of conscience” (336) for being the one who destroys the family of the little wolf for his selfish purpose. The narrative tone surrounding the wolf’s experience of captivity evolves from one of sentimental appeal to one of bitter remorse in hindsight. Chen’s firsthand knowledge reinforces the mythic nature of the wolf. Yet he also realizes that

the forced communication beyond boundaries of species is, in fact, “inhumane treatment” (296). Captivity is the deadly price the wolf has to pay for Chen’s desire to bond with a wild wolf as well as to learn from it.

The little wolf is chained for the safety of the other herdsmen and their livestock, and it is the chain that ultimately claims his life, as he never loses his wolf nature. The little wolf’s insistence on his fundamental self is an anthem to the wolf’s love of freedom. His wild soul responds to the call of the wilderness. Though realizing that the wolf should not be living in a situation in which he is caged, lonely, and suffering, his owner and captor is never able to let him free. In the end, Chen’s comprehension of the wolf spirits comes at the price of the little wolf’s life.

The local Mongols have a custom of stuffing wolf pelts with straw to restore the shape of the live wolves. The pelts are later hung on a birch rod in front of the yurts of formidable hunters like waving wolf flags. In the final chapter, Chen sees the pelt of the little wolf flying and dancing in the mist like a dragon. Goldblatt’s translation presents this moment as follows: “At that instant, Chen Zhen believed he saw his very own wolf totem” (503).⁵⁹ Chen reinforces the wolf totem, “the soul of the grassland” (333), as his personal totem which he does not forget to connect with his Han identity that is normally associated with the dragon. Ultimately, he does not replace the

⁵⁹ However, a word-by-word translation would read: “Chen Zhen believed he saw the wolf totem that truly belonged to his heart” (Jiang 386). This is my own translation of “陈阵相信，他已见到了真正属于自己内心的狼图腾” when he saw that “pale smoke rising from the yurt’s chimney wafted under the pelt, making it seem as if the cub were riding the clouds, roiling and dancing freely and happily in the misty smoke” (502).

dragon totem with the wolf totem, whose basic premise is not an iconoclastic view of the symbolic dragon. The novel's redefinition of the dragon totem is meant to draw on the psychological effects of the dragon as a nationalist cultural marker.

In encompassing the four aspects of the wolf totem, the novel asks for a wider sympathy for the wolf through cultural memory as well as a personal memory. The wolf totem, as a philosophical construct, strengthens the view that being blind to the interrelatedness of nature and nature-friendly cultural traditions holds severely negative consequences for the environment in the grasslands and beyond. The long-term effects would emerge across China's vast land in days to come. It is likely that some of Jiang Rong's writing was conducted while his window in Beijing was not so gently tapped by sand-dust storms sweeping all the way from the ever-expanding deserts of an environmentally ravaged Inner Mongolia.⁶⁰ When the complex contemporary legacies of the utopian project of conquering nature tend to pervade and pollute every atmospheric particle, what is the basis for critics' suspicions regarding the veracity of Jiang's novel?

I have demonstrated that the meaning of the wolf totem is far from esoteric. Reaching to pertinent textual, ritual, and empirical tradition, the novel develops a working definition of the wolf totem that points at a combination of the sacred and the mundane presence of wolves in human perception. The wolf totem aims at instilling

⁶⁰ Chen Zhen, the surrogate of Jiang Rong, actually confirmed this little speculation toward the end of the novel in the section after the epilogue that is deleted from the English translation, which will be discussed in detail.

the conceptual wolf with cultural and spiritual qualities. As mentioned, what lies beneath the novel's formulation of the wolf totem is an imbalanced maneuver between its two narrative arcs. The quotations and the "Lecture" stifle the narrative flow of *Wolf Totem* with its attempts to control how the concrete level serves the discursive level of the novel. This may partly explain why many critics of *Wolf Totem* tend to neglect or de-value the novel's reference to the current ecological crisis.

3. The Indictment of a Nature Faker

In an oft-quoted article titled "Shi zhenzhu, haishi wandou? –ping 《lang tuteng》” 是珍珠，还是豌豆？—评《狼图腾》 (*Wolf Totem*, pearl or pea? A criticism of *Wolf Totem*) by critic Li Jianjun 李建军, *Wolf Totem* is said to have created a literary spectacle that is large yet shoddy (66).⁶¹ After posing the question whether *Wolf Totem* is a string of priceless pearls or a bed of moldy peas, Li does not hesitate to discard the novel as the latter. Generally speaking, the criticisms directed at *Wolf Totem* can be likened to the two sides of a coin. If "heads" marks that *Wolf Totem*'s "green" message is worth celebration, "tails" may be sculpted with the word "Nature Faker." Of course, one side by no means carries less weight than the other.⁶²

⁶¹ My translation of "巨大而虚假的文学奇观."

⁶² The bifurcated criticisms had been most observable when the favorite endorser of the novel went along with a severe backlash to discredit it. Later, there were certainly articles coming out trying to settle the disputes and come to terms with the contradictory nature of the novel. See Wang Xueqian 王学谦, Hou Ying 侯颖.

At this juncture, in order to explain my use of the borrowed expression “Nature Faker,” it is worthwhile to stress Jack London’s influence on the novel one more time. In one scene in *Wolf Totem*, Chen and his peers on Olonbulag eagerly share a handful of forbidden books they had secretly transported with them to the grassland. Among these books are Jack London’s *Sea Wolf* and *The Call of the Wild*. Interestingly enough, London was one of the targets in the Nature Fakers’ controversy of the early 20th century in the United States. The term “Nature Faker” was coined by Theodore Roosevelt, who joined John Burroughs in criticizing the prominent nature writers at the time as fraudulent naturalists.⁶³ The Nature Fakers’ controversy has a surprisingly familiar ring when linked to the veracity debate surrounding *Wolf Totem* a century later. Indeed, Jack London’s Chinese fan, Jiang Rong, was labeled a century later as such which, in my opinion, can be best epitomized with the term Nature Faker. The term provides an angle from which we can access the book’s argumentation and its internal controversies.

3.1 The Distortion of Common Sense

Poet and literary critic Long Xingjian’s 龙行健 book – *Lang tuteng pi pan* 狼图腾批判 (*The Criticism of Wolf Totem*) sketches out the picture of the novel as a fake. Long interviews an anonymous Mongol female writer, who complains of “excessive exaggeration” (过度夸张) in the description of wolf behaviors in *Wolf*

⁶³ Theodore Roosevelt considered animals as objects, the first role of which was to satisfy human needs. He also believed that conservation was to assure perpetual supply.

Totem (36). Also, according to her, the Mongols appreciate all ferocious animals, so the elevated closeness between the Mongols and the wolves described in the novel is biased and untruthful. Interestingly, one hundred years ago, Roosevelt, known as the naturalist President, gave a similar evaluation of the North American Nature Fakery: “They don’t know, or if they do know, they indulge in the wildest *exaggeration* under the mistaken notion that they are strengthening their stories” (Lutts 106).

In the case of *Wolf Totem*, Long expresses his outrage that the novel is merely purporting to report on the ecological and cultural condition of the Inner Mongolian grassland during the Cultural Revolution. Launching an all-round attack on the novel, Long sets out to prove that *Wolf Totem* teaches a false natural history, hoping that a query about the realness of those wolf stories would shake the foundation of the reader’s fondness for the novel. One of his informants is a former intellectual youth who spent eight years in a location in the vicinity of Jiang Rong’s brigade. The wolves, said the informant, were a rare sight on the grassland. She only spotted one single wolf during her long stay on the grassland. According to her, the locals had never heard of those spectacular anecdotes in *Wolf Totem*; instead, the herdsmen detested the wolves because they posed a danger to the sheep. (Note that, strictly speaking, the “totemic coin” as described in the novel does not go against the comment made by the informant regarding the nomads’ “hatred” of wolves.) Based on this interview, Long concludes that the wolf pack had disappeared before the

arrival of the students and its disappearance was not due to the mass slaughter portrayed in the novel.

It may come as a surprise that the distinction between the real and the fictional seems to hold little significance for Long. Jiang Rong intends to convey to the reader a kind of reality that includes his received knowledge, and above all, his individualized vision of life on the grassland. Framed within this vision, what is presented as the actual world of the steppe is an idiosyncratic processing of memories. *Wolf Totem* is concerned with a remarkable creature on the Mongolian steppe whose active involvement in the ecosystem occurred in a bygone age. However, Jiang Rong wants to evoke a sense that his writing is an adequate approximation of the real situation on the grassland at the time of the Cultural Revolution. The realist tone of the novel, in addition to the author's identification with the protagonist, does guide the reader to expect a description of the actual ecological conditions of the grasslands. Yet in all likelihood, the critics, such as Li Jianjun and Long, may have lost sight of the element of "wonder" in this "realistic" work. Therefore, believing that there must be "actual" occurrences on which the text is based, Long has spared no pains to test *Wolf Totem* against his acquired firsthand information.

Moreover, the scrutiny to which *Wolf Totem* is subjected casts doubt on the validity of the featured wolf knowledge. Li Jianjun states that "*Wolf Totem*, assuming a surprisingly challenging gesture, distorts facts and subverts common sense," (69)

when he dismisses *Wolf Totem* as a pile of rotten peas.⁶⁴ The common sense referred to here is nothing more than the wolf as an archetype in the collective unconscious. Unmindful of the wolf as a participant in nature's processes, Li elaborates on its negative character, which he believes is dominating our cultural imagination and moral judgment. Failing to provide a "harmonious sense of security," the wolf spirit in *Wolf Totem* is, according to him, an outrageously bigoted point of view in service of a constricted version of jungle law (69).⁶⁵ In other words, to build up the wolf totem as his personal totem, Jiang Rong becomes a Nature Faker.

We can refer to Ralph Lutts' description of the Nature Faker, which, he thinks, "is best applied to people whose sentiments about nature blind them to the real living animal in the wild— people whose deeply held personal beliefs lead him to spin fanciful visions of nature" (176). Though it may include some facts, it must be recognized that *Wolf Totem* creates a vision adhering to the writer's subjective beliefs and speculations. Then, if Jiang Rong's sentiment about nature and nomadic culture clutters his perception of the 1970s grassland as he experienced it, is there a possibility that the preference for "common sense" also blinds the critics to the "lustrous pearls" dotting Jiang Rong's "fanciful visions?"

Fostering lupine infatuation could be offensive in a culture that traditionally views wolves in an unfavorable light. The common sense that Li Jianjun reinforces

⁶⁴ My translation of "狼图腾以一种令人惊讶的挑战姿态歪曲事实颠覆常识."

⁶⁵ My translation of "和谐的安全感."

can be glimpsed through how wolves are cast as crafty scourges or laughing stocks in traditional tales like “lang san ze” 狼三则 (“Three Pieces on Wolves”) by Pu Songling 蒲松龄, or what is arguably the most popular children’s cartoon in recent years, *Xi yang yang he hui tai lang* 喜羊羊和灰太狼 (*Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf*).⁶⁶ We can sense the role of the wolf in the collective unconscious through an analogy used in *The Remote Country of Women*, a text analyzed in the next chapter, in which people in the Cultural Revolution are described as “starving wolves, waiting for their chance to tear up any among them who appears weaker and more pitiful” (102). In one word, wolves are indeed *sheng ming lang ji* 声名狼藉 (have gained extreme notoriety) in light of their cultural representation.⁶⁷ *Wolf Totem*’s deviation from or challenge to so-called “common sense” is one of the reasons why it ceases to be treated as fiction in the public discussion. Though it is indeed the content of the book that invites scrutiny, a couple of noteworthy questions have escaped the range of public attention. Should the level of adequacy in the descriptive correspondence with the actual wolf be of concern to the reader? Or how adequate is the novel in the mind of the reader as an acceptable description of reality?

Let us get back to the distinction between the real wolf and the ghost wolf. In addition to its ghostly demeanor, the ghost wolf, or the wolf of the imagination,

⁶⁶ Henningsen briefly talks about the traditional wolf image in Chinese literature. Inspired by *Wolf Totem*, some scholars have set out to research this subject.

⁶⁷ Here are more examples of wolf-related idioms: *lang xin gou fei* 狼心狗肺 (rapacious as a wolf and savage as a cur), *lang bei wei jian* 狼狈为奸 (collude with wolves as partners in conspiracy), *ru lang si hu* 如狼似虎 (be fierce as tigers and wolves).

involves a complex process of mythmaking, which constitutes one singular aspect of the textual construction of the eco-heterotopia of Olonbulag. The placement of the ghost wolf in our model of heterotopia will shed light on the cause of the indictment of Jiang Rong as a Nature Faker. Again, heterotopia contains an adequate level of factuality, but it is never the goal of heterotopia to achieve mimicry. Jiang Rong only comes around committing to the fictional Olonbulag. The actual, for Jiang Rong, relates directly to an ecological philosophy evolved from real life events on this land. The actual grassland goes beyond the details of the events but ought to be understood in the sense of a dynamic wholeness of the ecosystem.

In constructing the eco-heterotopia, *Wolf Totem* combines what we would usually consider the real with the imagination, for it is as much about the recollection of a former intellectual youth as it is about the instilling of ideas in the present readership. Ultimately, “the negotiation of the corporeal wolf and the ghost wolf” (Robisch 21) epitomizes how the eco-heterotopia creates a connection between the realm of the concrete and the realm of imagination. Jiang Rong activates this unrecorded natural history of what he names the “wolf totem.” It is a creative human endeavor to make sense of the interrelatedness of life on earth. The heterotopia reaches to an actual ecosystem that lies outside the text. The textual heterotopia only refers to the actual grassland as a vehicle that transmits an environmental sensibility. The reader can compare the text against the implied outside, yet, quite unexpectedly, they may blur the boundary between the real and the imagination.

The notion of “*semiotic fallacy*” in light of the explanation by the “green” critic Laurence Coupe (2) is illuminating. The notion illustrates the situation when our failure to distinguish the signifier and the signified leads to the conclusion that nature is “little or no more than a linguistic construct” (Terblanche 235).⁶⁸ The aforementioned critics questioning the veracity of *Wolf Totem* may have inserted an equal sign between the object of description and the means of description. To be more explicit, they may get lost in the confusion between the ghost wolf and the real wolf, or left perplexed by the imagined silhouette of the ghost one. Then, do a few instances of “*semiotic fallacy*” diminish the potential of language to describe nature, the potential we have endorsed through our previous discussion? In the field of ecocriticism, literature is a sort of “ecological being,” given that “language, [acts] out the fact that it remains smaller than all of nature” (Terblanche 226). Acknowledging that the “real” of the natural world is in actuality beyond words, we shall gain the awareness that the limitations of language and the exaggerations of language do not impede our efforts to familiarize ourselves with the 1970s Mongolian steppe.

Though pure words cannot capture the reality of the natural world, literature somehow stores and conveys the energy and wisdom experienced in nature for sharing among readers. In the minds of the local Mongols described in the novel, the wolves pay homage to Tengger when howling up into the sky, since in Mongolian belief, their “amazing native intelligence” is bestowed upon them by Tengger (365).

⁶⁸ According to Terblanche, things, from the perspective of deconstruction, are ultimately textual—whether in a limited, metaphorical, or profound sense.

Chen Zhen ponders the intelligence exemplified by the wolf howl in his exploratory mind: “He was beginning to detect an arrogant, menacing quality to their baying... it was the sound that hung in the air longest and was able to travel the greatest distances” (359). The idea that “crying is alien to wolf’s character” comes to Chen’s mind, who has not satisfied with his initial impression of a howl expressing “a thousand years of sadness.” Instead, he strives for a more “scientific” understanding. In this example of how the novel negotiates the relationship between the corporeal wolf and the ghost wolf, literary description feeds our need to get to know the unknown part of the ecological universe of which man is a part.

As a result, the stirrings of a sense of reality can be justified through the recognition that Jiang Rong is faithful only to what he feels, remembers or perceives as the actual. The critics questioning the veracity of the novel eclipse the potential of the literary imagination in shaping the “real” public consciousness regarding the ecological crisis. The novel’s questionable truthfulness of presenting the natural history of the grassland should not dwarf *Wolf Totem*’s attempt to generate or increase a powerful ecological awareness. The ecological degradation of the grassland is nothing less than real, and to call attention to this sign of ecological disharmony is in no way lacking in sincerity.

At the same time, the debate on *Wolf Totem* has significant cultural currency. The debate is not simply a clash over the veracity of the wolf stories in the book, or over the reader’s inability or unwillingness to embrace a subversive image of the wolf.

It is the novel's overindulgence in cultural concern that potentially defeats its ecological goals. *Wolf Totem* inadvertently reinforces the boundary between its nature writing and its cultural thesis.

3.2 "Anti-Culture, Anti-Civilization and Anti- Human"

The reasons for the contradictory evaluations of the novel, and especially for the suspicions related to its veracity, lie in *Wolf Totem* itself. Jiang Rong's stance is provocative, to say the least. Rather than presenting as autobiographical, *Wolf Totem* comes close to an egotistic text. Its fundamental ambivalence results from Jiang Rong's struggle to reconcile his ecological ideals with social ones. There are no apparent inconsistencies in his point of view, but his culture/nature dichotomy often times is factionalized so that the narrative falls short of clarifying his complex positions. On the one hand, *Wolf Totem* purports to be a realistic representation of the Mongolian grassland, but, on the other hand, it takes great liberties in employing animal symbolism. Jiang Rong's construction of the wolf totem, such as his hypothesis of the origin of the Jade dragon and his emphasis on the lineage that connects the Mongols and the wolves, aims to pave the way for transforming animality into a cultural metaphor for national character.

The way in which the novel is structured situates the ghost wolf within highly constrained cultural bounds. The book is not an impartial wildlife text. The familiarity that Chen Zhen feels with the wolves and the Mongols is, for the most part, designed

to generate reflection on his Han identity. The philosophy of the nomads guides him to reach “the core of why, over millennia, there has been constant and violent conflict between the carnivores and the herbivores” (45). In the Chinese copy of the text, the carnivores (*shirou minzu* 食肉民族) and the herbivores (*shicao minzu* 食草民族) explicitly refer to the nomads and the farmers respectively (Jiang 32).⁶⁹ Chen acquires a profound understanding of those who he previously considered barbaric and backward nomadic people, those who throughout history slaughtered their sedentary neighbors. Inspired by the logic of the big and little life, Chen interprets the war launched by the “carnivores” (the nomads) as a move to “return cropland to pastureland,” which sets them in sharp contrast to the “herbivores” (the famers) who exclusively care about the precious human life, or the little life. He believes that, for the carnivores, the importance of the survival of the grassland far outweighs the survival of people.

The purity of the nature writing in *Wolf Totem* is tainted by Chen’s emotional distaste for the sheep, and from this standpoint alone, Jiang Rong may indeed be a Nature Faker. Jiang writes, “The sheep, cowardly and stupid, would not make a sound even when the wolves were ripping open their bellies, and would passively accept the slaughter” (115). Feeling that his hunting instinct is awakened while hiding with Bilgee to watch the movement of the wolf pack, Chen makes the following comment:

⁶⁹ The English translation blurs the direct linkage.

Farmers had become as timid as sheep after dozens, even hundreds, of generations of being raised on grains and greens, the product of farming communities, they had lost the virility of their nomadic ancestors, going back to the legendary Yellow emperor. No longer hunters, they had become the hunted (23).

In this passage, the stupid and fat sheep is used as the substitute for the “stupid” and “gutless” farmers. As Chen himself is fairly aware, “much of his worldview” is “based on the Han agrarian culture” (46). In the process of breaking this cultural constraint, Chen remains within a static zone, analyzing the animal world by retrieving the wolf and sheep dichotomy from his background knowledge.

No wonder critics not only label *Wolf Totem* as “fake” nature writing, but writing of counterfeit culture. Despite the suggestions of some review articles, the proscription imposed on *Wolf Totem* does not center on the notion that the wolf totem is not the totem of the Mongols,⁷⁰ but on the very idea that is represented by the wolf totem. Ding Fan 丁帆 and Shi Long 施龙, from the research center of modern Chinese Literature of Nanjing University, judge *Wolf Totem* as offering nothing quotable in ecological terms. They warn readers to be careful of the regressive values in *Wolf*

⁷⁰ Much in the same line as Long Xingjian’s criticism, the journal article “Lang tuteng jucheng shi yizhong wenhua zaojia” 《狼图腾》据称是一种文化造假 (“*Wolf Totem* is Alleged to be a Sort of Cultural Counterfeiting”) points out that the Mongolian people only had negative feelings towards wolves and the wolf totem is just the personal totem of Jiang Rong.

Totem, which are “anti-culture, anti-civilization and anti-human” (21).⁷¹ *Wolf Totem*, they point out sharply, hides its wolfish ambition (*langzi yexin* 狼子野心) under a beautiful garment of anticipation for the harmonious co-existence of humans and animals (22).

Ding and Shi argue that the wolfish ambition creates a series of problems regarding cultural ethics and logic by valuing the nomadic over the agrarian, military over civility, the Mongolian over the Han, and the wolf over the human. They give an unqualified endorsement to anthropocentrism, insisting that nature evolves to reflect the fundamental interests of humans. This is based on their belief that “the non-human has no ability to maintain ecological health” (23). Their critique claims that an extremely backward means of thought masquerades as the extremely advanced to simplify the origin of culture as some sort of self-preserving animality. To put it another way, the wolf totem associated with the backward mode of living romanticizes the wisdom of the grassland and negates the accomplishments of agrarian human civilizations, and hence, is “anti-history.” Ding and Shi are under the strong impression that *Wolf Totem* limits our aspiration for a harmonious ecosystem by way of diminishing the role of humans. It is discernable that their views are quite contrary to our expressed appreciation for the book’s referential connection to nature.

Apparently, Ding and Shi are not impressed with the philosophical depth of the wolf totem that Jiang Rong tries to build up, as they belittle the wolf totem hyperbole.

⁷¹ The Chinese text reads “反文化，反文明，反人类。”

Their attitudes echo the Maoist sense of superiority over nature which is still evident in many of China's current construction projects. In spite of their biased point of view, their insight into the wolfish ambition of the novel does prompt us to consider the novel's arbitrariness and inherent contradictions. The novel calls for the preservation of the "pristine" grassland, but it also adamantly attaches to an anthropocentric symbolism. While many applaud the "greenness" of the novel, other critics find it easily to argue for an opposite view. Those who find *Wolf Totem* disturbing notice that its cultural metaphors tend to spill over into the eco-heterotopia. The idealization of the way of wolves partially results from the pretentious ego of Jiang Rong. *Wolf Totem's* appeal to transform the obedient but ignorant and destructive sheep into self-reliant, aggressive and independent wolves is nothing more than a project of pronounced Chinese nationalism.

3.3 The Rationale behind *Wolf Totem's* Animal Symbolism

Wolf Totem uses the wolf as a metaphoric figure for a thesis concerning national characteristics. Within the novel, statements similar to the following appear at high frequency: "You Chinese have the courage of sheep, who survive by foraging grass. We Mongols are meat-eating wolves, and you could use a bit of wolf courage" (21). The metaphor leaves the wolf's iconic power a symbolic construct, with a clear anthropocentric goal. As we have noted earlier, the novel applies a bewildering variety of sources to formulate its own usage of totemism. In the meantime, it creates

a homology of structure between human thoughts and the natural world. The wolf totem covers relations posed between two poles, one natural, the other cultural. As mentioned, it is not only the native concepts of the Mongols that are lumped together under the label of totemism. The novel has a tendency to postulate intimate connections between the totemic identification of social groups with natural beings and the social reality of what the totem denotes. The wolf totem is grounded in concrete experiences with the grassland, be they personal, historical or textual. Yet in laying out the experiences, the novel's search for the utility of the totem answers a nationalist call. Under close analysis, its thesis comes down to the suggestion that totemism is a mode of thought denoting the perceived character of social groups. Then questions arise: why do the animal domains offer such a system of denotation, and how does the novel fail to draw a clear logical relationship between the order of nature and its formation of a social comparison?

One of the inherent controversies of *Wolf Totem* is its simultaneous identification with and separation from nature. The novel's separation from nature is in line with anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss' suggestion made in his seminal work *Totemism*, in which he rejects the idea that the basis of totemic beliefs is the imagination of the affinity between man and the biological world.⁷² Lévi-Strauss confirms that the only possible relationship between man and totem is metaphorical. In his words, "the structure of the universe reproduces that of society" (42). That is to say, the social

⁷² Lévi-Strauss, a structuralist anthropologist, emphasizes the projection of the external analogy onto the internal conceptual and semiotic space, the space that is exclusively human owned.

system is comprised in the order similar to the one governing the non-humans. A tribe's identification with an animal expresses its self perception in relation to other tribes. To illustrate this point, we can adopt the logic of Lévi-Strauss to draw an analogy based on the ancestor myth in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. The wolf totem clan and the deer totem clan are named such due to the fact that they value the qualities of the two species. Yet the clan names do not normally evoke biological associations; they merely suggest that the relationship between the two clans is analogous to that between wolf and deer.

Wolf Totem takes a similar route by searching for the meaning of a totem in an association it brings to the mind. It distinguishes social groups from each other by their perceived identification with a natural species. The cultural thesis the novel suggests is actually conceptualized on the model of the oppositional pair of "sheep" versus "wolf" which is derived from a commonly shared law of logic among the Chinese. As a result, Jiang Rong is simultaneously committed to maintaining the sacredness of the wolf totem in balancing the ecosystem and to the secularity of the wolf totem as an abstract mental code. The Chinese's mindset that labels the wolf as fierce and sheep as tame is drawn from the structural relation of their relative qualities. Jiang Rong invents a new system of totemic names: wolf for the Mongols versus sheep for the Chinese, which is not governed by a principle of equivalence but is ordered hierarchically. In seeing the Han Chinese as the lamb that is constantly beaten up by the carnivorous nomads throughout history, *Wolf Totem* combats a consistent

self-perception of the Chinese as privileged, and hence, warrants the criticism that it is a writing of counterfeit culture.

The mythical genealogy of the Mongols tells of humans' ancient bonding with animals, which dwindled along with humans' progression towards civilization in most societies. The animal other gradually becomes "the vehicles through which social differences are registered and maintained, offering conceptual support for social differentiation" (Bleakley 137). For example, the naming of many of the ethnic minorities in imperial China reflects this passage from nature to culture. The Chinese characters representing their tribal names were composed with classifying character components representing animals. The *quanrong* 犬戎, the ancestors of the Mongols from whom Jiang Rong coins his name, were not only called *quan* (dog), a derogatory word from the standpoint of the Han, but also had another name, *xianyun* 狷狺, which describes a certain breed of hunting dog. By the same token, the wolf versus sheep analogy in *Wolf Totem* employs classification of the natural objects to determine how the social world is perceived. The analogy is originally drawn from humans' familiarity with nature, yet its formation concurrently suggests its diversion from its natural genesis.

What Lévi-Strauss criticizes is an "affective model of totemism" in anthropology, a model that *Wolf Totem* also embraces.⁷³ As discussed, the novel makes recourse to a sentimental dimension of the wolf totem embedded in the historical texts and the

⁷³ According to Bleakley (133), it was the anthropologists at the turn of the 20th century that "generated the affective view of totemism."

characters' hearts. However, the wolf versus sheep dichotomy comes into the picture, overpowering the substance of the animals' biological association. As mentioned, heterotopia is the mirror through which one sees one's otherness, an otherness akin to the conception of the self. Hosting the Mongol and the wolf in their metaphorical shape, the eco-heterotopia of Olonbulag is the habitat of the double other. The animal becomes wholly other, which, in conjunction with the Mongol other, is used as convenient material for *Wolf Totem*'s purpose of reflecting on the fabric of society, and such a metaphorical usage with an apparent metaphysical leaning makes the bridge between the novel's two narrative arcs shaky.

Wearing a mask while playing out the ritual, Jiang Rong, as the shaman, intends to confuse categorization, especially the binary oppositions that are confined in human perception of the world, such as that between human and animal. In contrast to an all-inclusive *taotie* image on the mask, the union of opposites between wolf and sheep attached with polarized sets of values resists borderlines and ambiguity. The ghost wolf that Jiang Rong imagines (allegedly through his empirical observation) turns into a symbolic figure in the human mind that is none other than the antithesis of the symbolic sheep. The totem as the binary pair easily finds one pole privileged over the other. In the end, the structure of the novel constructs the wolf totem as an all-around concept and, alas, the totem shrinks into a structure of cognition. The dual identity of Han and Mongol undermines the book's efforts to cross the ethnic divide and cultivate a fictional friendship between the intellectual youth and the herdsmen.

3.4 The Application of Social Darwinism and Racism

In affirming culture's supremacy over nature, the novel's sympathy with Social Darwinism and racism further detaches the wolf totem from its ecological anchor. Chen Zhen's announcement, "Relationships among the creatures on earth have dictated the course of history and of fate" (99) reflects the book's adoption of Social Darwinism. He once says "There is no wild animal that has evolved more highly or more perfectly than the gray wolf" (46). The book also favorably describes the Mongols, the equals of the wolves, as if they have evolved more completely than those of the Han ethnicity.

The risk involved in evoking the notion of "survival of the fittest" is considerable if we take a look at the following example. A mating fight among the warhorses sparks a round of discussion among the intellectual youth. Chen Zhen regards the primitive nomadic life as the childhood of the "most advanced people" in the West, and evaluates the cheese and steak eating Westerners as follows,

They cherish freedom and popular elections, and they have respect for their women, all traditions passed down by their nomadic ancestors. Not only did they inherit their courage, *their militancy*, their tenacity, and their need to forge ahead from their nomadic ancestors, but they continue to improve on those characteristics. (303)⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Italics mine.

Unfortunately, Chen's compelling passion for Western culture, or more specifically, for Western culture that originated from the nomadic way of life, has muted the conflict between conservatism and Capitalism. To make more acute the antagonism between the "nomadic wolf" and "domesticated sheep," *Wolf Totem* betrays its ignorance of the ecological impact of Western "wolf culture" on the globe.

As for the causal relationship between environmental crises and Western thoughts,⁷⁵ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have point out that eurocentrism and anthropocentrism share similar ideological grounds in the process of European expansion and the establishment of colonial institutions (6). In other words, the "militancy" that *Wolf Totem* celebrates so heartily produced the ideological hegemony of Europe via its history of conquest and colonization. The hegemony confirms that the human sphere occupied by the "civilized"/"European" is superior to the sphere of nature. As such, when ethics reside with human, humans can thereby engage in "non-criminal putting to death" of the animals, as Derrida phrases it (Wolfe 39). Based on this ideology, the concept of "humanity" comes to be defined in opposition to the existence of the uncivilized, the savage, and the animal (Huggan and Tiffin 6).

In seeing Marxism and Capitalism both as "incarnations" of Western history, we can sense a commonality between socialism and capitalism in that they both place human ethical and material priorities over those of other sentient beings, where the

⁷⁵ Lawrence Buell has also brought up this causal relationship.

other can be readily extended to include the social other.⁷⁶ The perpetual exploitation of the double other, the animal other (e.g. the wolf) and the social other (e.g. the Mongols), is one of the root causes of environmental degradation as reflected in *Wolf Totem*. The novel draws on the conflict between socialist modernity and Mongolian tradition; whereas it selectively stresses the positive qualities of Western culture. It fails to recognize that Western metaphysics and ethics “need revision before we can address today’s environmental problems” (Buell 2). Lawrence Buell, a pioneer of ecocriticism, argues that we need “better ways of imagining nature and humanity’s relation to it” (ibid).

Moreover, the metaphoric relationship in *Wolf Totem* between the Westerners and the wolves paves way for a reflection on the Chinese national temperament. Chen’s friend Zhang Jiyuan 张继原, an intellectual youth trained to be a herder, comments that he feels “weak as a kitten” and “there is something lacking in us” (303). He associates the national temperament with the students’ survival ability on the grassland. In Chen’s words, “temperament not only determines the fate of a man but also determines the fate of an entire race” (174). He further brings up the novel’s widely-discussed thesis of “blood transfusion”: “the later Teutons, Germans, and

⁷⁶ As Susie O’Brien suggests by citing Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Western history, in both its Marxist and capitalist incarnations, worked ‘to assimilate diverse cultures and spiritual traditions into a homogeneous code’, at the same time as it naturalized ‘uneven economic development according to a linear narrative of civilization. Its success in doing this, however, depended on its ability to temper its teleological heavy-handedness with the promise of progress” (qtd. in Huggan and Tiffin 2). As a result, we can understand that the utopian promise made by the myth of modernity is the shared history of socialism and capitalism.

Anglo-Saxons grew increasingly powerful, and the blood of wolf ran in their veins. The Chinese, with their weak dispositions, are in desperate need of a transfusion of that vigorous, unrestrained blood” (218).

Chen’s theory holds that it was because of the “blood” transfused time and again from the nomadic people that the farming people of China’s central land were able to keep their civilization alive. In this round of the metaphoric transmission from nature to culture, the novel demonstrates its inadequacy in developing a sensible speculation on national character. When the novel suggests that the degree of lupine blood can determine the fitness of a species, its stance on social Darwinism gets tangled with its racist voice.

In the Chinese copy of the text, the words Han or Mongolian “*minzu*” are used rather than the Chinese language counterpart of “race.” It is still undeniable that *Wolf Totem* consistently indicates matters of race through its ethnic metaphors. Rather than creating conditions in which the Han is the privileged group with a sense of superiority, *Wolf Totem* displays a sense of envy for the Mongols. Tamas Pataki talks about the role of envy in some forms of racism. Transposed to the novel, it is the historical loss that stimulates envy. Coming to terms with what he sees as his nationality’s inferior temperament and inefficiency, Chen associates the weakness with genetics or “blood” to suggest the generic appeal of those constructed as the other. The book challenges the cultural basis in which the Chinese have prided themselves and makes constant references to China’s historical blunders, such as,

“Beijing has been taken more than once by Mongol armies” (376). Furthermore, the “Lecture” delineates the role the nomads played in China’s dynastic transitions, warfare, and subsequent occupation and ethnic amalgamation.

The historical connection between the agrarian and the nomadic described in the book projects the modern history of China and the West. The grassland is “a battlefield,” and the Mongols, the apprentices of the wolves, are “the warriors” (124) with shrewd fighting-skills. Chen Zhen believes that “human history is essentially a chronicle of fighting over and safeguarding living space” (350). The book thus implies that in the process of the Han accepting an injection of the fresh, vibrant blood of the nomads, there exists an undeniable history of hostility towards the uncultured “barbarians,” which arises from the perception that they are the potential competitors for space. The other is, in a way, envied as a formidable perpetual enemy, much in the same way the wolf totem is conceptualized.

In summary, the root cause for *Wolf Totem*’s inherent controversies is an inability to reconcile the wolf as a living being and the wolf as human projection. Overlaying nature with culture, *Wolf Totem* obscures the intermediary position of the wolf totem between man and nature. Jiang Rong never refrains from speaking for nature while speaking with it. Hence, a sense of falseness, or a sense of over-deliberation, enters his writing, which earns him the title of Nature Faker in certain critical circles. That being said, most criticisms of *Wolf Totem*, whether positive or negative, have overlooked the novel’s alternative way of envisioning social harmony. Without

aiming to rescue the book from its fundamental flaws, we need to consider whether there is a third dimension to *Wolf Totem* that will reveal deeply the motivating agenda behind its adoption of the two critical angles.

4. An Unbalanced Harmony

Towards the end of his totemic exploration, Chen finally comprehends the true meaning of the wolf spirit. When raising the little wolf, Chen Zhen tries to connect to the creature in a sensitive and responsive manner. However, Chen renders it mute and exploitable on the most violent scale. It is the cub that helps Chen crystallize his understanding of the wolf spirit. Eventually, the cub struggles to death against his chain when he refuses to be caged and transported. With the instance comes Chen's realization that "Neither food nor killing was the purpose of the wolves' existence; rather it was their sacred, inviolable freedom and independence, and their dignity" (462).

If there is something downplayed in the debates about the novel, it might be the spiritual power of the wolf totem. The novel claims that "the spiritual power" of wolves is built upon their "sacred articles of faith" (264). The philosophy of the big life and the little life ensures sanctity of the wolf totem through rules and codes, which the herdsmen abide by spiritually rather than dogmatically. In the end, the novel condenses the wolf spirit as the obstinate observance of faith-directed spirituality. Given the novel's established gap between culture and nature, Chen's

distillation of the wolf spirit poses some crucial questions that deserve further clarification. Does *Wolf Totem* advocate an epistemological revision to the imagination of nature? Does it confront the continuing hierarchies and divisions reproduced by the state hegemony and reinforced in the socialist campaigns of utopianism? Does it suggest that the wolf spirit is as effective as it used to be on the grassland in facilitating social and environmental harmony in the contemporary world?

In reimagining nature, *Wolf Totem* proposes an alternative, a “non-Han” epistemology that the literary and cultural criticism still routinely overlooks. Though *Wolf Totem* fails to portray a deep relationship with nature, we cannot, by now, look at the word “wolf totem” again without recognizing its orienting value. First of all, the aggressive Maoist approach of waging war against nature and the traditional Mongolian values of harmony and sustainability are rendered in sharp contrast. Secondly, the demise of the harmonious eco-paradise of Olonbulag is the thread through the narrative of *Wolf Totem*, which calls attention to China’s current ecological crisis more incisively than the state propaganda does. In further support of this view, a totem seen from the perspective of spiritual instruction is an aid rather than an obstacle to the cultivation of environmental consciousness.

The Mongolian model of “Tengger, grassland, wolf and human” provides a spiritual orientation for the grassland community. It coincides with the basic premises of Confucian metaphysics of harmony and conflict. According to philosophy historian

Chung-ying Cheng, Confucian dialectics of harmonization refer to how conflicts in the cosmic and social milieu would interact and ultimately generate harmony – “Reality (called the Dao or the way), which encompasses Heaven, Earth, man and the ten thousand things, is both a process of change and an ordered structure” (188).⁷⁷ It is arguable that the discourse of building a harmonious society in the twenty-first century weaves a dream of the “unity of heaven, earth and human” without implementing concrete measures to prove the CCP’s comprehension of the “process of change” or harmonization. The official expression of nature-human unity turns into an adjunct to the revived vision of the Great Harmony, which is a human-centered utopia in the *Liji*. Today, the official promotion of “sustainable development” remains anthropocentric in its calculation of the usefulness of sustaining nature for the sake of economic development.

In *Wolf Totem*, the four dimensional model of “Tengger, grassland, wolf and human” reinforces the wolf totem’s spiritual guidance. On this point, it seems to deviate from Confucian dialectics of harmonization, which stresses that self-cultivation can lead to the spiritual unity of man and the Dao in the Confucian paradigm. In his interview with Zhang Ying, Jiang Rong expresses his ambition to

⁷⁷ The harmonious campaign adopts the Daoist notion of *tian di ren he* 天地人和 (the harmonization of heaven, earth and human) to address ecological considerations. In terms of the Confucian view of nature, a line found in Section III of the *Liyun* reads “man is (the product of) the attributes of Heaven and Earth, (by) the interaction of the dual forces of nature, the union of the animal and intelligent (souls), and the finest subtle matter of the five elements”(Guo and Guo 2008). This line is a rare expression of natural interrelatedness in Confucian texts, though in the Confucian-legalistic model, nature is considered powerful and merciless.

“return justice to the wolf nature” (*huan langxing yige gongdao* 还狼性一个公道).

Yet his intention should be, at least in part, utopian, if aimed at a spiritual transformation of the Han mindset, especially when the novel amplifies the weights of the fighting spirit in an originally balanced whole of the wolf nature in order to fulfill its ambition. Though committed to environmental responsibility, *Wolf Totem* attaches a dilemma to its argument. The dilemma is the tangled relationship between its evocation of the wolf nature and the thoughts couched in the prevailing cultural and political rhetoric.

4.1 “A Wolfish Ambition”

Ultimately, at the heart of *Wolf Totem* is a concern with national dignity and national destiny. Criticizing the novel’s “wolfish ambition,” Ding and Shi label it a text of cultural nationalism (*wenhua minzu zhuyi* 文化民族主义), questioning its tendency to idealize some sort of cultural tradition as a spiritual totem (26). Indeed, *Wolf Totem* deliberates on the price China paid for social reform and engages in a dialogue with various forms of modern nationalism, both state-led and popular.

At the state-sponsored level, Deng’s reform shows China’s retreat from idealist utopianism, yet the new-age socialist construction still appeals to the public zeal and energy that the Maoist utopian projects used to utilize, calling for loyalty to the nation—and therefore the CCP. The propagandistic organ evokes, for example, the dragon emblem to generate a public sense of pride in the perceived coherence of

Chinese history, and uses patriotic loyalty as the unifying glue when the communist ideals previously planted in the hearts of the people begins to wither. More recently, the harmonious campaign retrieves the Confucian tradition centering on the concept of *he*, peace and harmony, to advocate patriotism.

So-called popular nationalism, as opposed to nationalism that is promoted by the state, emerges when loyalty to the country does not naturally extend to loyalty to the Party. It is presumably “a natural outgrowth of China’s recent accomplishment and very unhappy narratives” (qtd. in E. Anderson 227).⁷⁸ “The unhappy narrative” is open for individual interpretation, dependent on individual experiences with the reform and opening up.⁷⁹ *Wolf Totem* is one such narrative. Chen Zhen’s “Lecture” stresses that the weakness of the national character brings problems like corruption, low efficiency, population explosions and the destruction of the ecosystem (Jiang 409). His voice represents many who are disappointed with the status quo and are still looking to the West for inspiration. Moreover, the focus of Chen’s argument, both in

⁷⁸ The newly emerged nationalist fervor among the young and middle aged urban population is termed “the elite-driven pragmatic nationalism” (Cao 444). The elite-driven pragmatic nationalism could underpin policy rationale. It is beyond the concern of this chapter to classify various kinds of nationalism.

⁷⁹ In the report to the 17th National Congress, Hu says that “while recognizing our achievements, we must be well aware that they fall short of the expectations of the people.” The problems are as follows: “economic growth is realized at the excessively high cost of resources and the environment. There remains an imbalance in development between urban and rural areas, among regions, and between the economy and society...There are still many problems affecting people’s immediate interests ...More efforts are needed to promote ideological and ethical progress...”(qtd. in E. Anderson 74).

the narrative and in the “Lecture,” drifts away from domestic affairs and moves towards the issue of China’s positioning in the world.

Wolf Totem links the positive, energetic wolf spirit not only with the Mongols but also with Western civilization. William Callahan has poignantly described China’s mixed feelings towards the West at the early stage of the reform: “Western tradition is defined in terms of dystopia according to the oppressive negatives of Social Darwinism, slavery, Christian cultural imperialism and predatory capitalism. On the other hand, the West is rehabilitated as the source of communist utopia” (576).⁸⁰ The reform aims at regaining China’s self-esteem on the international front following the humiliations it suffered at the hands of Western powers since the Opium War. John Fitzgerald attributes China’s positioning against the West in recent decades to a desire to challenge the West’s domination over the values of modernization and democracy (29). The harmonious campaign likewise fosters a Chinese vision of a desirable world order so as to explicate an alternative to a Western-dominated model of modernity.

Wolf Totem’s deep concern with the transformation of the Chinese character is pinned against the same historical memory of humiliation, yet with two distinct differences. First, its main weapon is the wolf spirit rather than the Confucian tenets. Secondly, the aggressive intrusion of the Westerner, or “the civilized wolf” (*wenming lang* 文明狼) Chen describes in the “Lecture,” is celebrated as the interruption of

⁸⁰ The New Year speech of Hu Jintao of 2012 reinforced similar concerns.

modern capitalism in China's closed agrarian economic mode (Jiang 434).⁸¹ The statement inherits the legacy of modern Chinese history in search of the universal principles powering the nation. It is reminiscent of a popular catchphrase used at the turn of the 20th century: "to subdue the foreigners by learning from their strong points" (*shi yi chang ji yi zhi yi* 师夷长技以制夷).⁸² In other words, Chen views the Western "civilized wolf" in a way as both the potential enemy and the source of self-strengthening, similar to how the wolf totem functions.

The harmonious campaign is presented as a more Chinese form of governance, yet *Wolf Totem* implicitly denounces it through its project to demystify the historical achievements of the Chinese. In the novel, Confucianism is no match for the wolf spirits; Chen describes the relationship between these two ideas as the outdated versus the vibrant (377). In this literary world, the deferential Confucius would not survive the fierce competition for survival. Echoing his theory regarding the blood transfusion, Chen says that "there'd be hope if our national character could be rebuilt by cutting away the decaying parts of Confucianism and grafting a wolf totem sapling onto it"

⁸¹ In the "Lecture," Chen Zhen charted an ideal route for the transition of national character from the ancient "civilized sheep" to modern "civilized wolf" 文明狼, then striving toward the "civilizing man" 文明人 with real liberation and real freedom and democracy.

⁸² The notion was originally conceived by late Qing scholar Wei Yuan 魏源 and exerted a strong influence on the self-strengthening movement of the late nineteenth century.

(ibid).⁸³ According to Chen, pacifism, which he recognizes as a virtuous element in Confucianism, needs to be combined with military power for a nation to prosper.

From a certain point of view, “Harmony-with-difference” is a form of pacifism. China’s foreign policy of pacifism in pre-modern times was to establish “harmonious coexistence” among the political powers based on the achievement of a sense of superiority over others.⁸⁴ In the current international context, this concept of “Harmony-with-difference” fosters a decentralized model of the coexistence of different cultures to combat the globalization initiated and designed by the West. The harmonious discourse is not only inwardly oriented, but meticulously presents an image of China’s “peaceful rise” or “peaceful development” to the outside.⁸⁵ By comparison, the main characters in *Wolf Totem* loath the peaceful nature of “the civilized sheep” (*wenming yang* 文明羊) and their proud, peace-loving tradition. Zhang Jiyuan’s voice reverberates here; he argues that “a fighting spirit is more important than a peaceful laboring spirit,” when he assesses the Great Wall as “dead labor” (305). Chen also warns to “be careful when you place the civil over the

⁸³ It is worth noting that in the “Lecture”, Chen Zhen indeed tried to differentiate between Confucianism of early ages and Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 Neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty. It is the latter that Chen criticizes for its repression of human nature, or humans’ wolfish nature.

⁸⁴ The civilizing projects of the center had been going on for centuries as an imperialist practice of conquering neighboring polities and civilizing the barbarians. Callahan also draws our attention to violence involved in the process of so-called pacifying (580).

⁸⁵ “Peaceful rise” was replaced by “peaceful development” in Hu Jintao’s 2005 London speech given the provocative implication of the term “rise.”

military. Without military might, the most glorious culture ever will eventually be reduced to rubble” (202).

The danger in *Wolf Totem*'s advocacy of militancy is self-evident. In the end, Chen's focal concern is the well being of the central plain, which hardly sets his view apart from those of any nationalist Han Chinese. There is one common objective, whether it requires the fighting spirit or the pacifist profile. The novel's overemphasis on the aggressive part of the wolf spirit obscures its other purposes, and indeed, acts as a barrier to demonstrating its vision of harmony and ecological well-being.

4.2 The Dialectical Harmony

Explicitly dismissing Confucianism, *Wolf Totem* actually adopts a selective approach of absorbing some of its element such as the aforementioned pacifism. *Wolf Totem* is a project that seeks to “harmonize” the collective mind with an individual's point of view regarding a single animal's symbolic importance in the formation of the national character. Again, the novel's over-deliberation on animal symbolism sabotages its objective of developing its own brand of dialectical harmony. This version of harmony is conceptualized in the narrative through a Confucian expression, *zhongyong zhi dao* (中庸之道 the doctrine of the mean). The *Analects* claim that “Perfect is the virtue of the doctrine of the mean” (*zhongyong zhi wei de ye* 中庸之为

德也).⁸⁶ Impressed by how the wolves control the number and quality of the horses,

Chen Zhen makes the following remark:

“The grasslanders are the best practitioners of dialectic materialism and are good at ‘the middle way,’ unlike the Han Chinese, who prefer extremes.

We promote the east wind overpowering the west wind, or vice versa. But here they’re experts in making use of contradictions to strike a balance while achieving two goals with one action” (376).

“The middle way” here is Goldblatt’s translation of *zhongyong zhi dao*. It emphasizes the mean in the qualitative sense, as the place between the excessive and the deficient.

More strikingly, this passage harkens back to the dialectical materialism that was widely inculcated in Jiang Rong’s generation. In “On Contradiction,” Mao says that “the laws of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the fundamental law of nature and of society and therefore also the fundamental law of thought” (Mahoney 105). Sadly, the Mao era trampled the belief that nature is governed by the law of contradiction, instead treating contradictions as absolute and non-cooperative. The consequences of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution are nothing less than the reversal of dialectical harmonization.

The wolf totem is a myth. The mythology should be an “analytical thorn” from the Marxist’s point of materialism. Jiang Rong, the shaman, practices a ritual called the

⁸⁶ In James Legge’s translation, the line “子曰：‘中庸之为德也，其至矣乎！民鲜久矣。’” is rendered “The Master said, ‘Perfect is the virtue which is according to the Constant Mean! Rare for a long time has been its practice among the people.’”

wolf totem to associate the Mongolian philosophy with the “objective laws of development” (257) i.e. Marxist dialecticism. In *Wolf Totem*, the construction of the idea of the totem, consciously or unconsciously, observes the motto of Mao’s dialectical method which Mao has used *zhongyong* to illustrate (as discussed in the Introduction). The descriptions of the big life and the little life, as well as the totemic coin, all bear the mark of the doctrine of the mean. There is another example of application of the doctrine in the “Lecture,” which states that the condition for the prosperity of the nation is the approximate balance between wolf nature and sheep nature in the Chinese national character, with the percentage of wolf nature slightly higher than that of sheep nature (Jiang 410). Given such clarification in the “Lecture,” the narrative of *Wolf Totem* is a product measured and determined by miscalculation of the golden mean.

Then why does Chen Zhen’s voice, assuming that of a dissenter, find itself ironically adhering to the authoritative language? According to Sleeboom’s observation of social science research in China, “Only the scholars that are initiated in the particular language used in politically and socially constrained discourse are capable of following the intricacies of political innuendo in debates” (152). Jiang Rong, a scholar of political science, delivers a patriotically-oriented text, communicates to his reader through political vocabulary, and carries out debates with the goal of imagining and establishing a different route to the Great Harmony.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the concept of *Datong*, which Mao found to fit into the grand vision of Communism, is a utopian ideal that survives in the current harmonious campaign. In *Wolf Totem*'s "Lecture" section, there is a renouncement of the Confucian conception of *Datong*, which Chen Zhen presents in a slightly sarcastic manner. According to Chen, the kind and plain aspirations of the ancient sages such as Confucius are based on the assumption that the Great Harmony would be realized with the eradication of the wolfish nature in humanity (Jiang 400). He further points out that the Confucian style of cultivating the character of *wenrou dunhou* (温柔敦厚 placid and gentle) has raised the abiding masses of "civilized sheep" only to be bullied by the "nomadic wolf."

At this juncture, in order to further explore *Wolf Totem*'s vision of harmony, we need to take a look at the major dialectical reasoning in the current official discourse of development. While many have assumed China less committed to Marxism at the present, Josef Gregory Mahoney argues that the harmonious concept is in accord with Classical Marxism based on its application of dialectical materialism. The discourse of building a harmonious society arises from, yet more importantly, amends China's previous modes of thinking regarding socialist construction. The Marxist dialectics stress that the resolution of contradictions is the cause of changes in the world, and in order to eliminate contradictions, strenuous class struggle must take place. Accordingly, in the first thirty years of PRC history, the CCP considered conflict a tool for advancing socialism to a higher stage of development.

Later in the Deng era, the state started to shift the focus of the socialist endeavor towards economic ends. The post-Mao leadership set the periodic objectives for the progression of socialist construction. As mentioned, Confucian's semi-utopian module of "*Small tranquility*," or *Xiaokang* 小康 was drawn up as the periodic goal of socialism. Mahoney considers the relationship between *Xiaokang* and *Datong* as dialectical. The grand vision of the Great Harmony is temporarily sacrificed in a *Xiaokang* society, the goal of which is a certain level of overall prosperity. Through tolerating the existence of internal discrepancies and incompatibility, the society still marches on towards the Great Harmony. In adopting this ontology of development at the early stage of reform, the Party assumed that social contradictions would dissolve naturally along the way; that, for example, people and regions that get rich first will bring along the less wealthy. As a result, the reform policies at the time reflected the official attitude that signs of disharmony such as environmental degradation and unequal distribution of wealth were conflicts that were manageable and necessary for economic development.

The recent conceptualization of the harmonious society is based on the state's realization that internal strife arises out of irresolvable conflicts. Defined as a period preceding the realization of *Xiaokang*, the harmonious society addresses the state's desire to strengthen China's foundation of stability. Applying the Confucian dialectics of harmony to express its ideal, the state now attempts to stress the Confucian notion of the complementary and dependent nature of polarities. Specifically, we can

understand “Harmony-with-difference” as a method of resolving contradictions between social groups, which shuns the Marxist notion of viewing polarities, such as class difference, as antagonistic and nonconformist. More importantly, the method propels the attunement of policies, since the vision of the rich pulling up the poor did not come true. From a certain perspective, the harmonious campaign rejuvenates Marxist humanism, which, according to China’s leading Marxist scholar Jiexiong Yi, centers on the liberation of the workers from exploitation and oppression (Mahoney and Li 178). The reform that features “empiricism and pragmatism” (181) causes misery among workers and peasants. Following Mahoney’s logic, a *hexie* concept that distills nutrition from Classical Confucianism is the new age articulation of the Communist ideal.⁸⁷ Paying attention to the vulnerable and the disadvantaged, the harmonious discourse offers theoretical adjustments to the dialectical synthesis of *Xiaokang* and *Datong* and leans closer to Marxist humanism.

When the state revives Confucian rites of propriety in the 21st century discursive campaign for harmony, its propagandistic aspiration includes managing contradictions through proper ethical guidance. The rhetoric of harmony proposes that the cultivation of personal virtues would serve as the tool for accommodating the incompatible and discrepant constituents of Chinese society. It promises that good governance shall afford the progressive resolution of sociopolitical contradictions, including the human-earth contradiction in the present context. This whole campaign is a totally

⁸⁷ Other scholars, including Callahan and Cao, may disagree based on their argument that the Confucian utopianism is designed to replace the “impoverished Marxist ideology” (Cao 436).

idealist move according to Chen Zhen's logic. Though *Wolf Totem* loses track of its environmental orientation just like the harmonious discourse, it views the practice of propriety unable to provide solutions to social problems given the history of the "civilized sheep" being bullied. The novel obviously deviates from Confucius' belief that "humanity is naturally on a spiritual quest to return to its proper, more human state— Datong" (Mahoney 110). It brings us to a heightened understanding of harmony that the wolf totem embodies, whose realization requires the fighting spirit. Unfortunately, the novel misuses the fighting spirit in a large part, which buries its call on the people to defend their happiness in face of the deleterious effects of China's utopian endeavors.

In *Wolf Totem*, Chen's friend calls him a "dyed-in-the-wool utopian" (295). Towards the end of his "Lecture," Chen steps into the shoes of those who still dream of real democracy, and states that he believes that democracy comes with the transformation of the national character. Being a utopian visionary as well, Jiang Rong is a man of action who hides an argument for the wolf spirit of independence and freedom within his novel's labyrinth of ideas. Facing various kinds of criticism, Jiang Rong holds to his defense. In an interview with Justin Hill (2008), he shares in a straightforward manner that is hardly conceivable within the Chinese media, saying "The most important thing in life is the capacity to be free... That individual freedom doesn't just include the freedom to make money. It includes the freedom of speech, the freedom of organization. Wolf packs are strong because they operate in groups."

There is another way to look at the dialectics of the vision of *Xiaokang* in that it advocates the sacrifice of political freedom for economic gains: with the promise of economic prosperity the government is able to exploit the freedom of the people, who, in the vocabulary of Chen Zhen, are the sheep. In the “Lecture,” the agricultural population is seen as those who feed the autocratic rulers (Jiang 438) and it is also on this basis that Chen criticizes Confucianism. The ethnic metaphor of wolf versus sheep embodies the intended primary contradiction of the novel between the wolf spirit and the spirit of agrarian Confucian sheep. Yi has noted that “The legacy of Confucianism continues to reinforce our acceptance of hierarchy, of anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian practices” (Mahoney and Li 185). Hence *Wolf Totem* is not the only voice for liberated thinking in support of political reform, though sadly it defeats its own purpose by associating the wolf totem to the dragon emblem, the imperial adoption of which exactly encouraged mass submission to despotism.

The popularity of *Wolf Totem* ushered in a publishing wave of “wolf books,” many of which are not nature writings. Interpreting the reason behind *Wolf Totem*’s best-selling to be its promotion of the wolf spirit, many capitalized on a public hungry for the mythical force of the wolf by publishing books and adopting *lang* in the titles. Most of the books praising the souls of wolves are self-help “wolf guidebooks” which center more or less on teaching how to emulate the survival strategies of wolves in

competitive contemporary society.⁸⁸ On the other hand, in a plethora of animal fictions whose production is arguably stimulated by the success of *Wolf Totem*, there are books that use the animal spirit to reflect upon what is missing in the market economy. One of the focuses of the next chapter is one such book that creates a fantasy of a pack of wolves and Tibetan mastiffs dwelling in Shambhala.

⁸⁸ To name just one example, see Wang Yu 王宇's *Langdao: Rensheng zhong de langxing faze* 狼道：人生中的狼性法则 (*The Principle of Wolfishness in Life*).

CHAPTER III

IN SEARCH OF FAITH: THE INDIGENIZATION OF

THE SHANGRI-LA AND SHAMBHALA MYTHES

Following the publication of *Wolf Totem*, there was a flowering of animal fiction, in which the Tibetan mastiff joined the wolf as favorite subject matter.⁸⁹ The “contagiousness” of animal themes and their niche in the book market shed light on how the popular works of fiction can use the spirit and strength of animal to satirize the present. *Zangdi mima* 藏地密码 (*The Tibet Code*) by He Ma 何马, a 2008 novel, continues the trend by mythologizing both the wolf and the Tibetan mastiff. The novel’s most conspicuous way of romanticizing the ghost wolf is by creating a fantasy of the friendly cohabitation of humans with a pack of mastiffs and wolves in Shambhala. *Zangdi mima* also draws on another literary tradition, namely that which describes Shangri-La and Shambhala.

As it is, we cannot discuss the wolf and mastiff pack thriving in literary Shambhala without an initial exploration of how the contemporary cultural terrain of China absorbs the myths of Shangri-La and Shambhala. As stated in the Introduction, Shangri-La is a utopia described in James Hilton’s 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*; whereas

⁸⁹ *Zang ao* 藏獒 (*The Tibetan Mastiff*) by Yang Zhijun 杨志军, a 2005 best seller, is a eulogy for representatives of the most chivalrous and loyal dog breed—the Tibetan mastiffs—who go through all kinds of challenges to save seven children on the grassland. *Zang ao* is one particular novel that critics like to compare to *Wolf Totem* due to these two books’ shared interest in animal spirits. See Tang Zhesheng 汤哲声 137-144, Qiu Zhijie 邱志杰 and Hao Fuyi 郝孚逸.

Shambhala is a Buddhist land of spiritual enlightenment. An examination of the textual conflation of Shangri-La and Shambhala is also a prerequisite for our appreciation of the literary imagination of the two types of utopias with different origins. Towards that end, I will start by considering my approach of studying the manifestation of the myth, be it in the literary sense or as a real life event of becoming the name of an actual Tibetan town in southwest China.

Some scholarship has applied the concept of heterotopia to reflect upon the Shangri-La myth and have associated it with the Western construction of images of Tibet. One example is *Xunzhao Xianggelila* 寻找香格里拉 (the English title printed on the cover is *In Search of Shangri-La: Essays on China Studies, Philology and Virtual Tibet*), self-selected works of Tibetologist Shen Weirong 沈卫荣.⁹⁰ According to Shen, some Westerners idealize Tibet as a utopia while simultaneously demonizing China as a “heterotopia” (166, 203). Shen adopts *yituobang* 异托邦 as the Chinese translation of “heterotopia” and regards it as the sheer opposite of utopia. His interpretation indicates how the West, in cooperation with the exiled Tibetans, shapes Shangri-La as a signifier for the peaceful and spiritual Tibet that is endangered by Communist contamination. When Shen sets his eyes on the dystopian dimension of heterotopia, his usage is different from mine, which is based on the Foucauldian concept and stresses the dialectical tension between utopia and dystopia.

⁹⁰ “Virtual Tibet” in Orville Schell’s book *Virtual Tibet: Searching for Shangri-La from the Himalayas to Hollywood* indicates to the Tibet portrayed in Hollywood movies. Shen Weirong uses “virtual Tibet” in a similar but broad sense, which means the Western images of Tibet.

Through the lens of Western interactions with Tibet, Shen looks at Shangri-La as a phantom of real Tibet, considering that material Tibet is effaced in the Western construction of the Shangri-La fantasy. He criticizes Donald S. Lopez's *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, pointing out that in its process of deconstructing the Western images of Tibet, the book mistakes the tool of deconstruction as the goal without producing a new, constructive way to look at the "Orient" (170-171). With the similar purpose of deconstructing the Western fantasy of Tibet, Shen's *Xunzhao Xianggelila* contemplates not only the Western origin but also the Chinese transplantation of the Shangri-La myth. Yet it is arguable that his usage of utopia and heterotopia overly emphasizes the Western intervention in the imagining of Shangri-La, thus falling short of drawing out a full-rounded picture of the significance of China's indigenization of the myth.

My study strives for a constructive way of looking at a cultural phenomenon surrounding the imagination of Shangri-La and Shambhala in contemporary China, which, I acknowledge, involves both idealizing and disparaging tendencies. My research is based on the premises that Shangri-La and Shambhala may perform, or in some cases, move beyond their roles as the bearers of the Tibetan fantasy. In other words, rather than conducting a survey of the representation of Tibet, I will concentrate on the dialogue between the imagined spaces of Shangri-La/Shambhala and the popular aspiration for utopia. That being said, it is worthwhile to note Peter Bishop's conception of the constructed image of Tibet as a heterotopia which — is,

“in Foucault’s terms, a heterotopia, a plurality of often contradictory, competing and mutually exclusive places simultaneously positioned on a single geographical location” (“Not Only a Shangri-La” 204). In a similar fashion, an evocation of Shangri-La and Shambhala in contemporary socio-cultural milieus constitutes a heterotopia featuring seemingly irreconcilable components from a great variety of sources, both local and global.

The imaginative tradition of Shangri-La and Shambhala normally manifests itself in the form of artistic creations such as painting and literature. In contemporary China, this purely intellectual and spiritual tradition has been distorted, and the name “Shangri-La” now takes on pragmatic roles. Drawing on specific ways of interpreting *Lost Horizon*, the Chinese government endeavors to inject the harmonious spirit of the textual Shangri-La into a tangible piece of land. The discovery of Shangri-La in China is the result of concerted efforts on all levels to bring a fictional utopia into reality. The localization of Shangri-La in an actual Tibetan town is an active concretization of a globalized sign, and shows the mutual fertilization that occurs between literature and people’s experience with the Tibetan region. In line with the state’s policy, building a harmonious Shangri-La also relates to the minority people’s desire to change their marginalized position on China’s geo-economic map.

The focus of this chapter is how the imagination of Shangri-La and Shambhala make the mirror image of the center’s utopian vision into an agent; or in other words, how the imagination enters into a conversation with creative forces that can agitate

spiritual aspiration. After discussing the landing of Shangri-La in China, I will examine Tashi Dawa's 扎西达娃 1985 novel *Xizang, xi zai pisheng kou shang de hun* 西藏, 系在皮绳扣上的魂 ("Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong") and *Zangdi mima*. Those two stories and the localizing project associated with the reading of *Lost Horizon* all dwell on people's yearning for alternative utopian dreams and speak for the role and responsibility taken on by those dreams.

1. The Localization of Shangri-La

In 2002, China's Civil Administration Department sanctioned the county of Zongdian 中甸 in the Diqing Tibetan autonomous prefecture to assume the new name Xianggelila 香格里拉 (the pinyin spelling of Shangri-La). Earlier in October of 1996, the government of Yunnan province organized a "Research Group on the Development of Diqing Shangri-La" (开发迪庆香格里拉课题组) composed of over 40 scholars in the disciplines of literature, ethnography, linguistics, religious studies, Tibetology, cultural studies and geography (J. Li 24).⁹¹ The research party conducted an investigation to verify the hypothesis that Zhongdian is the inspiration for the Shangri-La in James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*. The scholars conjured up the details of this unmappable Shangri-La as described in the novel in such a way as to match the geographical and cultural features of the Zhongdian region. Resorting to linguistic

⁹¹ In Tang Shijie's book (53), the research group is referred to as 云南迪庆香格里拉旅游开发课题组 (A Research Group on the Development of Tourism Resources in Shangri-La of Yunnan Diqing), and he mentions that he was a member of this group.

construction, they maintain that Shangri-La is the transliteration of the Tibetan term in the local dialect, *sems kyi nyima zlaw*, meaning “sun and moon of the heart” (Kolas 6). One more piece of purported evidence is the Tibetan name of the old town of Zhongdian —Gyalthang (Jiantang 建塘) reads “City of Sun and Moon.” As an explanation for why a writer who had never set foot on this piece of land would create so many “coincidences,” it has become a widely-held assumption that Hilton must have perused the Austrian-American botanist Joseph F. Rock’s articles and photographs, published in *National Geographic* in the 1920s, featuring what was then the China-Tibetan border. The field and archival exploration of the research party coupled with different kinds of publications on the topic sets the groundwork for Zhongdian’s successful lobbying to receive not only the official endorsement but also the public recognition required to become Shangri-La.

The localizing of Shangri-La reminds us of the concept of simulacrum as defined by postmodernist Jean Baudrillard, who interprets places designed to express a sense of fantasy (such as Disneyland) as the representations of a dreamland. Baudrillard writes, “The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false: it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real” (175). Likewise, the name change of the small county of Zhongdian in southwestern China sets up a simulacrum of a myth. The new Shangri-La County becomes a sign referencing a literary imagination which, to borrow from Baudrillard, “bears no relation to any reality whatsoever, it is its own pure simulacrum” (173). Baudrillard also argues that a

simulacrum is not merely a copy of the real, but becomes truth in its own right: the hyperreal. Following this line of thinking, the concretization of Shangri-La may distract us from the awareness that Shangri-La is a utopia that never actually existed. As such, scholastic responses to the localization plan are split, either upholding or debunking the authoritative construction of the hyperreal.

Within those polarized responses, different evaluations of the discovery of Shangri-La intrinsically pertain to different ways of reading a piece of English fiction, *Lost Horizon*. Some scholars are no more than the intellectual arms of the official project of distilling the utopian qualities of Shangri-La as dispersed in the novel and then projecting these qualities onto the perceived realities of Zhongdian. A 1999 book *Xianggelila jimi* 香格里拉揭秘 (Disclosing the Secret of Shangri-La) co-authored by the then Secretary of the Zhongdian County Party Committee Qizhala 齐扎拉 crystallizes “harmony” as the perpetual theme of the Shangri-La culture, a quality that draws a parallel between the fictional world and the reality of Zhongdian.⁹² As a matter of fact, “harmony” has become a buzzword and has set the tone for the discussion on the significance of the Shangri-La localization project.⁹³

⁹² The book is in a series of book called 香格里拉丛书, which is the product of the cooperation between the People’s Publishing House of Yunnan Province and the local government of Diqing Prefecture. The series includes a translation of *Lost Horizon*.

⁹³ For instance, according to Li Jufang 李菊芳, Shangri-La culture is, in my translation, “the harmony between human and nature, between human and human, between different ethnic cultures, between inner heart and outside world, and is fundamentally the harmony of society”(115-125).

Other critics are suspicious of the act of defining Shangri-La through its description in *Lost Horizon*, as such a practice is all too financially convenient. In other words, the angle from which they view the novel allows them to question the regional appropriation of a dubious literary fantasy into a “trademark” for commercial tourism. Ultimately, the expression of different opinions on *Lost Horizon* reveals a process of interpreting the measures of perfection characteristic of a utopia, and it is through a negotiation between the fiction and the reality that Shangri-La finds home in Zhongdian in the midst of both applause and doubts.

1.1 Trails of the Genuine in the Fictional World of *Lost Horizon*

That Shangri-La in *Lost Horizon* contains irreconcilable contradictions points at the way in which the research aimed at locating Shangri-La is a reading of obliteration, designed to exploit the commercial potential of Shangri-La as a brand name. Such a reading is based on a sort of geographical and cultural abstraction, in which some aspects (such as harmoniousness) are usually emphasized more than others. In contrast, quite a few scholars in and outside of China (such as Tomoko Masuzawa, Huang Lili 黄莉莉, Dibyesh Anand and Shen Weirong) draw our attention to the “colonist psyche” embedded in this earthly paradise. Generally speaking, they suggest an “orientalist regime of reading” (Tomoko 543) of *Lost Horizon*. Shen detects deep imprint of imperialism on *Lost Horizon*, which hides its many instances of covert violence behind a pure and utopian ideal (108). According to this “regime of reading,”

the utopian attributes of Shangri-La are nothing more than an orientalizing fantasy of the West, which was particularly attractive during the 1930s when the world was plagued by economic depression and war. It was an era that called Western values into question and provided renewed impetus for looking at the Oriental for spiritual guidance.

In *Lost Horizon*, a British government plane is hijacked during the evacuation of British nationals from a town in a state of unrest (possibly in today's Pakistan). Consul Conway, Vice-Consul Mallinson and two other passengers are thus brought to the valley of Blue Moon somewhere in the Karakoram in Tibet.⁹⁴ The natives of the valley, who are primarily laborers, live happily under the rule of the lamasery of Shangri-La, in which a Chinese man functions almost like a Mandarin in charge of concrete affairs. It turns out that the lamasery is not grounded in pure principles of Buddhism or local culture; the ruling lamas are revealed to be early European explorers who settled in the valley boasting a temperate climate and abundant gold. The High Lama, who is over 250 years old when he meets the British protagonists, was originally a Capuchin missionary from Luxembourg who ventured into the valley in 1734. Apart from its modern facilities such as central heating, the lamasery stores the cultural legacies of all the ages. In the words of the High Lama, the lamasery's

⁹⁴ The Karakoram range located at the center of Asia is called *Ka la kun lun shanmai* 喀喇昆仑山脉 in Chinese. The major part of the range spans the borders between Xinjiang and Kashmir, and only its eastern extension is in Tibet, to the northwest of the Himalayas.

treasures will serve as the sources for a future “Renaissance” following an apocalypse precipitated by upgraded arm races and wars in the outside world.

Based on the novel’s content, the orientalist regime of reading detects a nostalgic salute to the West, and especially its colonialist heyday. This reading suggests that Shangri-La is removed from time and space, or is a misplaced dream of a static East. In the novel, the last preserve of civilization, a lamasery hidden within snowy mountains, is a Western core behind an oriental facade. Here, some porcelain vases, lacquers, a lotus pool and a Manchu girl are the few random decorations that indicate an Eastern origin. Moreover, the novel is told from the perspective of the sympathetic character, Conway, whose calm demeanor stands in contrast to that of the impetuous Mallinson. According to Tomoko, Mallinson is the innermost other within Conway’s own self who describes “Shangri-La” as hellish, that “there is something dark and evil about it” (206). He eventually convinces Conway to run away despite the fact that Conway had been appointed by the High Lama as his successor. Mallinson’s voice may alert the reader to the problematic and unbearable side of Shangri-La, a community so harmoniously coordinated with great regularity and gentle rules on its surface. First of all, it becomes clear that the inhabitants of Shangri-La are, in a sense, “prisoners,” without freedom to move out from their strictly hierarchical society. Secondly, the Lamas, or the ruling classes, can gain exceptional longevity through special herbs and yogic practice, whereas the ordinary denizens of the valley cannot enjoy these privileges since, in the words of the High Lama, the “best subjects,

undoubtedly, are the Nordic and Latin races of Europe; perhaps the Americans would be equally adaptable” (122). As a result, this is not only a “colony of chance-sought strangers living beyond their years” (127), but a colony of racist tyrants.

Ruled by a theocracy of former missionaries, Shangri-La lacks the vitality that a youth like Mallinson desires. Mallinson shows an instinctive fear of its morbid and languishing air. Though the reader may find difficulty in extending sympathy to Mallinson as he is not a likeable or endearing character, his perspective gives away an orientaling psyche in which Shangri-La represents the ancient Oriental, never capable of change. No wonder Shen proclaims that Shangri-La is an Eden of the Westerners but not the Peach Blossom Spring of the Easterners, bemoaning the decision to label Zhongdian as Shangri-La (108-109). According to him, such an action of “inner Orientalism” is “politically incorrect” in the way that it ingratiates itself with the Westerner and sells traditional culture at a low price (109). Then, in order to capitalize on the trademark of Shangri-La as sealed with a Western stamp, has Zhongdian indeed been dressed up as a Tibetan fantasy, designed to live up to the “oriental image” conceived by the West? It is undeniable that Shen’s criticism contains a grain of truth, when there are discussions about how tourism and consumerism tend to devour the authenticity of the local culture.⁹⁵ Yet it may also be true that the textual construction of Zhongdian as Shangri-La is not merely tourism-oriented. This possibility can be explored through a different way of reading

⁹⁵ See Ashild Kolas’s book *Tourism and Tibetan Culture in Transition, a Place called Shangrila* as well as Rosa Llamas and Russell Belk’s article “Shangri-La: Messing with a Myth.”

Lost Horizon which emphasizes its utopian qualities rather than its orientalist tendencies.

In *Lost Horizon*, the story of Shangri-La is told through Conway's fragmented memories. These memories are slowly recovered from the depths of amnesia, presumably a consequence of the peril faced on the way out of Shangri-La. The novel never mentions whether Mallinson survives the escape from Shangri-La, and no one knows for sure if Conway, who later disappears again, has gone back to Shangri-La. It is possible to interpret Shangri-La as Conway's hallucinatory vision. If Mallinson and his disdain for Shangri-La represent the utilitarian, hasty and discontented West of the 1930s, Conway, who is at once a rational man and a "lunatic," speaks for the thrill of hunting for utopia and appeals to readers caught up in the dilemmas of modern life. From this standpoint alone, the discovery of Shangri-La is not a singlehanded effacement of the uneasy contradictions embedded in *Lost Horizon's* hope for the future. Nowadays, when faith in revolution has become a thing of the past and uncertainty has become the norm in China, what does Shangri-La mean to the Chinese people?

To answer this question, we need to track the interaction between 20th century China and the non-place of Shangri-La, which has produced troves of interesting stories. When introduced to China a few years after its 1937 Hollywood release, the adaptation of *Lost Horizon* was entitled *Tao hua yuan yan ji* 桃花源艳迹 (*The Amorous Trail of the Peach Blossom Spring*). The new title transformed an

exotic-sounding name into a rosy allusion to China's native-born utopia. Not long after *Tao hua yuan yan ji*, the theme song *Zhe meili de xianggelila* 这美丽的香格里拉 (*This Beautiful Shangri-La*) from the 1946 film *Yingfei Renjian* 莺飞人间 (*Songbird on Earth*) came into a fashion. Initially, this song, which featured the famous songstress Ouyang Feiyang 欧阳飞莺 singing of the beautiful Shangri-La as the ideal homeland, struck many people as expressing a yearning for, or perhaps concurrently, mourning for a joyous life that was lost during the turbulent years of war. Since it was a Nationalist state studio that produced *Yingfei Renjian*, the song was considered a “tune of decadence” and erased from the cultural memory in the early period of PRC history (Yue, “From Shambhala to Shangri-La” 170). Nevertheless, Shangri-La has proven itself to be a cultural symbol that is anything but ephemeral.

The opening-up policy reintroduced Chinese people to the concept of Shangri-La in the 1980s. Shangri-La was chosen as the name of a premier hotel chain founded in Singapore, whose owner was inspired by *Lost Horizon* to create a resort with a lofty mission; as the company's official website claims—“Some seek escapes, we bring you paradise.” In the 1980s, in the ears of Tang Shijie 汤世杰, the author of *Ling xi chui fu: Xianggelila cong xuni dao xianshi* 灵息吹拂:香格里拉从虚拟到现实 (*Whistle and Whisper of the Soul: Shangri-La from Fiction to Reality*), Shangri-La sounded not so different from “Adidas, Coca-Cola or Pierre Cardin,” reminding him of “the West, the modern, the expensive, the enjoyment, the luxurious and even the

amorous and the lustful” (28). Not until the early 1990s was the first Chinese translation of *Lost Horizon* published. As Tang notes, it was this event that precipitated the initial exploration of Zhongdian’s relationship with Shangri-La at the grassroots level, and later, the government got involved.⁹⁶

Growing to embrace Zhongdian’s new identity, Tang expresses his initial feelings of “huge astonishment” and “huge suspicion” regarding the hypothesis conflating the region with Shangri-La (34). In *The Myth of Shangri-La*, Bishop endorses the “essential authenticity” of Hilton’s Shangri-La as written in 1933, “not in the sense of being empirically feasible, but conforming to the reality of contemporary fantasy about Tibet” (216). Bishop’s point of view prompts us to ask whether the Shangri-La that the Chinese are now craving is likewise authentic in its own right, even though utopia (or u-topia) is essentially a no-place. As previously discussed, the simulacra of the fictional Shangri-La forms a reality. It is this reality through which people may envision Shangri-La as an authentic lifestyle and a beneficial counterweight to the malaises or the by-products of China’s development. Then to what sort of authenticity does a marriage between the fantastic and the local give birth?

⁹⁶ The translation of *Lost Horizon* by Zheng Qiwu 郑启五 titled *Xianggelila* was published in 1991. According to Tang Shijie (29) and Li Jufang (21), it was a tour guide named Sun Jiong 孙炯 who came up with the idea and went to investigate that the landscape of Zhongdian was Hilton’s inspiration. Sun later got a chance to introduce his vision of building Zhongdian into a tourist Shangri-La to Gesang Dunzhu 格桑顿珠, the Party Secretary of Diqing, an ethnic Tibetan. Moreover, there have been more versions of Chinese translation of *Lost Horizon* coming out since 1991, probably because of the ascending fame of Shangri-La especially after it has been domesticated at Zhongdian.

Not all the utopian readings of *Lost Horizon* in service of the rectification of Zhongdian's name are based on a superficial identification of its geographical landscape as that which Hilton's described as the valley of Blue Moon. The journey of finding the trails of the genuine from this fictional world involves probing the specificity of the cultural landscape of Zhongdian in relation to the "principle of Shangri-La." To be more precise, in *Lost Horizon*, Chang explains the principle through a claim that "our prevalent belief is in moderation. We inculcate the virtue of avoiding excess of all kinds—even including, if you will pardon the paradox, excess of virtue itself" (64). The rule of "moderate obedience" bounded by "moderate strictness" insures the "happiness" of the inhabitants who are "moderately sober, moderately chaste, and moderately honest" (65). Or in the words of the High Lama, they are "neither profligate nor ascetic" (126). The principle of moderation is obviously a version of Confucius' *zhongyong zhi dao* 中庸之道 (the doctrine of the mean) that we discussed, though in the context of *Lost Horizon*, it may strike one as a synonym for a hypocritical "policy of conciliation." Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Shangri-La principle as a philosophy for resolving contradictions approximates the rhetoric of harmony transmitted in China's current state discourse.

In *Lost Horizon*, the implementation of the Shangri-La principle is ensured by a benign government administered by divine elites seeking the synthesis of the merits of different cultures. Conway is struck by the feeling that "the atmosphere" of the lamasery is "Chinese rather than superficially Tibetan" (62) and "the valley is a very

successful blend of Chinese and Tibetan” (90). The popularity of *Lost Horizon* at the time it was published was partly due to the increasing interests in the Eastern spiritual tradition against the backdrop of the decline of Christian hegemony in Europe. As a result, we can contextualize Hilton’s Shangri-La in a history of the Western construction of the image of China and Tibet. *Kongjiao wutoubang* 孔教乌托邦 (*Confucian Utopia*), by Professor Zhou Ning 周宁 of Xiamen University, describes how the Western tradition of utopian imagination pervades the image of China transmitted by missionaries to Europe during the high Qing period (42). Zhou writes: “In China, Confucius’ ideal has become ideology whereas Plato’s ideal remains a utopia in the West” (112), and such is the utopian fantasy of the missionary-scholars who conceived of 17th and 18th century China as a paradigmatic, well-regulated government administered by philosophers.

According to Zhou, China then gradually turned into a “heterotopia” which the West used to imagine as an example of Confucian rule by virtue (185). Heterotopia here, drawn from the Foucauldian notion, is a real place that is an antithesis of the West due to its perceived backwardness and stagnation, or is a virtual space that mirrors the West’s moral ideal. Zhou continues to argue that *Lost Horizon* portrays a “Confucianism utopia [that] is ‘relocated’ to the margin of China and transformed into Shangri-La” (175) when in fact, the reality of China by the 1930s had shown itself to be far from a Confucian utopia. Moreover, he relates the choice of relocation with Western scholar Lee Feigon’s observation that “many Westerners perceived Tibet as

China's alter ego" (Zhou 192; Feigon 17). In the end, he laments that Shangri-La loses its Confucian core because it is a Christian utopia in essence (193). Such a China-centered approach of reading *Lost Horizon* regards Shangri-La as a microcosmic image of China as it exists in Western thought, but overlooks the profound tradition of the Western imagination of Tibet. In other words, we could also attribute the lost core of Confucianism in Shangri-La to the rising trend of fantasizing about Tibet in the West, a trend nurtured by Westerners' centuries-long history of expedition into the region. This act of imagining Tibet is selective, showing consistent respect for certain aspects of Tibetan culture while disparaging others.

Between the eighteenth and the twentieth century, from a position of assumed superiority, Western missionaries and explorers documented the geography and the peoples of Tibet. Bishop sensibly deduces that those travel accounts are "the stock of experiences and aspirations upon which Hilton probably drew" ("The Myth of Shangri-La" 37) when he wrote *Lost Horizon*. In other words, behind the novel there was a history of exploring the Tibetan region which was driven by the expansionist goal, which, at least until the nineteenth century, was inextricably enmeshed with the West's aspiration for the Chinese empire that lay beyond the Tibetan plateau. In the meantime, Tibet also found itself gradually becoming a target of attention.

In all, it might be fair to claim that Shangri-La could not have been invented out of thin air. This is a common impression shared by readers of *Lost Horizon* who aim to legitimize the overlap between Zhongdian and Shangri-La. Zhongdian's contact

with external cultural forces and inquiry, as through the aforementioned expedition of Joseph Rock, is co-opted as evidence of its association with the Shangri-La of Hilton's novel. Moreover, scholars and government officials, such as Tang Shijie, Li Jufang and Qizhala, all seize upon the textual detail describing the residents of Blue Moon as a "blend of Chinese and Tibetan" to match it with the characteristics of the Zhongdian region. On the southern tip of the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau at the fringe of the Tibetan culture, the Diqing prefecture was the last domain that the Han culture could reach and integrate into the local culture. That this ethnic corridor of Diqing accommodates a variety of ethnic groups seems to testify to the zeitgeist of harmony which encourages the amalgamation of ethnicities as the basis of national solidarity. Incidentally, the Shangri-La in *Lost Horizon* is said to be located in the Karakoram Range of northwest Tibet, yet this detail is unanimously ignored in arguments for Zhongdian's significance.

In *Lost Horizon*, another "harmonious" trait of the valley of Blue Moon is reflected in the coexistence of a Daoist temple and a Confucian temple with the lamasery of Shangri-La. The Diqing prefecture happens to be a region that houses institutions of Tibetan Buddhism, indigenous folk religions, Islam, Christianity and Daoism, most of which, not surprisingly, were established before the Communist rule. Their various degrees of recent revival constitute another dimension of the cherished hybridity of the region, and another reason for writers to point to Zhongdian as the actual site of Shangri-La. In *Lost Horizon*, the principle of moderation manifests itself

as a composite of various religious philosophies, which echoes Chang's remark that "The jewel has facet, and it is possible that many religions are moderately true" (90). After all, the High Lama is none other than Father Perrault, who at the outset was able to convert some of the inhabitants of the valley to Christianity. Yet as the converted slowly returned to their old customs, an aging Perrault found himself drained of his repulsion towards the heterodox Buddhist texts and began a study that dissolved his previously unshakable Christian faith and replaced it with trust in the value of balance. Stated thus, it seems sensible for Tang Shijie to assume that Father Perrault has dedicated himself (*xianshen* 献身) to Buddhism (216).

Yet when we refer back to Zhou Ning's criticism of the Christian core of Shangri-La, we become alert to the High Lama's vision that "the Christian ethic may at last be fulfilled, and the meek shall inherit the earth" (128). Ironically enough, failing to sense this underlying tone of Euro-centrism, Tang's wishful assumption is only reinforced by a "mistranslation" in the first Chinese translation of *Lost Horizon*, titled *Xianggelila*, by Zheng Qiwu 郑启五. The sentence quoted above is distorted in *Xianggelila* to mean "The Christian ethic will at last end, and the principle of moderation shall inherit the earth" (S. Tang 218; Zheng 123).⁹⁷ Who could have expected that an unfaithful rendering in the Chinese translation of *Lost Horizon* would become the starting point for the novel's intertextual utopian readings?

⁹⁷ My translation of "基督教的伦理终将结束，而适度的原则将承接这个世界。"

Shangri-La, in both fantasy and reality, has always been a symbolic work in progress. In the meantime, the symbol keeps living in both academic and prose travel writings. There is a trendy phrase in those books —“Shangri-La is in your heart”—and Zhongdian happens to coincide with one of the many dreams. Zhongdian’s imagined relationship with Shangri-La takes place within a wider context of historical and global imagining. Yet a particular shared dream of Shangri-La could only come true when it grows from the real life condition of the distinctly non-utopian minority region of Zhongdian.

1.2 Shangri-La as the Original Home to Globalization

The construction of Shangri-La County is caught up in China’s politically informed aspiration to develop an ideal society. “The Chinese government tries to promote a utopian and harmonious image of the Tibetan region” (Llamas and Belk 3) and the development of the ethno/ecotourism in the Shangri-La County is fitting into this big picture. Elizabeth Bovair uses the term “neo-Orientalism” to describe Zhongdian’s assumption of the new identity; “it combines the promotion of culture—an inherently positive phenomenon—with movements aimed at eroding the cultural integrity of the Tibetans in the name of the Chinese drive for modernization” (340). In this context, neo-orientalism points to the government’s mixture of desires, to boost the local economy and to create a more plural, colorful, and peaceful image

of China for the outside. It also suggests that the vehicles for fulfilling the desires are minority cultures, the exploitation of which may result in contradictory outcomes.

Such a consideration brings us to the third, more compromising reading of *Lost Horizon*, which transcends the original text by virtue of the paradigm of *bentū quanqiu hua* 本土全球化, a concept sharing some similarities with “glocalization” though emphasizing local agency.⁹⁸ George Ritzer and Zeynep Atalay define “glocalization” “as the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographical area” (319). This way of reading vigorously contests the negative and assimilates the desirable qualities of Hilton’s Shangri-La through addressing the tension between the Western origin of Shangri-La and the local necessity to create economic opportunities. Rather than shying away from the orientaling overtones in *Lost Horizon*, this reading meticulously describes a unique experience of Zhongdian, a locality that adopts a “foreign name” as an active move to embrace globalization. Globalization here refers not only to the transnational movements of goods, but also involves the feeling and everyday lives of the local people.

⁹⁸ Glocalization is often translated into Chinese as *quanqiu bentū hua* 全球本土化 or *quanqiu zaidi hua* 全球在地化. According to Roland Robertson, the concept of “glocalization” originally describes a strategy of multinationals which adapt their techniques or products to the local market. Robertson’s use of the concept can reflect that the view of globalization as a process “overriding” locality “neglects the extent to which what is called local is in large degree constructed on a trans- or super- local basis. In other words, much of the promotion of locality is in fact done from above or outside. Much of what is often declared to be local is in fact the local expressed in terms of generalized recipes of locality” (26). Robertson’s explanation applies to the case of the promotion of the locality of Zhongdian, and it is on this basis that I treat it as sharing commonalities with *bentū quanqiu hua*.

The dialectical reasoning within China's developmental phrases we discussed in the last chapter assigns a disadvantaged position to the regions of "*lao shao bian qiong* 老少边穷" meaning "former revolutionary base areas, areas inhabited by minority, borders and poor areas," such as the Diqing Tibetan autonomous prefecture. Now the magic name of Shangri-La provides Diqing with leverage against the standardized language used to describe China's West. In *Lost Horizon*, Chang says to Conway, "We are less barbarians than you expected" (61); today, this is also Shangri-La County's response to the outside. The "glocalized" reading of *Lost Horizon*, not unlike the utopian reading, feasts on the combination of the spiritual and material blessings in the valley of Blue Moon. It invokes the law of moderation in describing the valley's restrained exploitation of a rich deposit of gold as a brilliant form of sustainable development. In other words, it stresses that selected content from *Lost Horizon* coincides with the local vision for Zhongdian's development.

The impetus for the promotion of Zhongdian's new identity comes from the inside, since it was the party cadres of Tibetan ethnicity in the Diqing prefecture who initiated the whole plan. They looked forward to a global expression of the local when seeing the global as a recipe for modernization. In an interview, a local cadre, Qizhala, says that:

"[the concept of] Shangri-La is actually a consideration of the scientific outlook on development (*kexue fazhan guan* 科学发展观)... whereas it does not sever the culture and history of the Tibetan people. It embodies

Buddhist elements such as compassion but it is a philosophical thoughts with benefits from Confucianism and Daoism. It is not a purely religious concept, though appearing in the Tibetan region. It is an experiment for building a harmonious society” (qtd in Z. Chen 43).⁹⁹

The Tibetan administrators use the Tibetan traditional culture as the defining principle of Shangri-La, hence further casting off the dark shadow of *Lost Horizon*. Buddhist compassion and Tibetan animism assist the transformation of the concept of Shangri-La into a development strategy, which values ecological harmony over the exploitation of the local culture and resources as capital. In theory, the Shangri-La concept privileges spirituality and ecological soundness, the two things that are arguably absent in Chinese society at large.

Shangri-La County assumes a path that converges with the general path to modernity as prescribed by the nation. By appealing to the utopian desires of the nation, it gleans support for local economic development. Yet it does not lose its particularity when tailored into a transnational symbol of utopia. Shangri-La, originally a “narcissist reflection” of the West (Tomoko 545), has now lost its “unmistakably colonial stamp” and comes to signify “any utopia” (544). Chinese scholars now proclaim it to be the original homeland (*yuanxiang* 原乡) of globalization (P. Huang 7), an ideal model of globalization that Hilton imagined in the 1930s, which embodies a globalizing dimension through the common human pursuit

⁹⁹ This is my translation. The concept of “the scientific outlook on development” was first introduced by Hu Jintao in 2003.

of “the Peach Blossom Spring” (Shu 51). In the words of the Chinese scholar Shu Jianjun 舒建军, Shangri-La “is itself local, but has the recognition of a globalizing society (ibid).”¹⁰⁰

Because of the fear of numbing homogeneity, it is reasonable to anticipate widespread retreat from the trend of universalism as caused by economic globalization. Within the paradigm of glocalization, the local becomes “the micro manifestation of the global” (Robertson 39); the local epitomizes but is not in the thrall of global complexity. In addition, the notion of an original home to globalization complicates the local desire to reclaim its distinction as an imagined home with beautiful natural landscape. In other words, the localized Shangri-La evokes a nostalgic sense of home, a place not yet contaminated by excessive urbanization.

Shangri-La County’s subscription to glocalization requires adapting “a global outlook” to “local conditions.”¹⁰¹ The Western origin of Shangri-La does not form a barrier to the formation of the local identity. The development strategy of Shangri-La does not see the globalization and the indigenous as necessarily opposite, pointing instead to an alternative path to modernization. It is also an outlook defining a new push to “transcend the dualism of Western and Eastern, and that of the developed and the backward” (P. Huang 7). Shangri-La County’s glocalizing move creates an

¹⁰⁰ My translation of “它自身是在地的，但它又具有全球化的社会认同。”

¹⁰¹ According to Roberson, glocalization is “a global outlook adapted to local conditions” (28).

“identity-space.” The identity-space, according to Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, is not “constituted through the pervasion and transmission of ideas, but instead through the structural nature of core-periphery relations” (6). This once obscure border town is now acclaimed for setting a more suitable direction for globalization with a potential to redress the downsides of economic globalization, such as uneven regional development (P. Huang 7). In light of “the core-periphery relations” embodied in the “identity-space,” the *bentu quanjiu hua* paradigm subtly implies the local’s initiative of anti-marginalization in China’s economic development.

According to Bovair, there are both positive and negative sides to neo-Orientalism, and the extent to which to the local can actually employ the Shangri-La strategy to preserve ecosystems and cultures remains to be seen. Though beyond the scope of my study, such a glocal outlook invites investigations of other aspects of local life besides the development of tourism from a microsociological perspective. For example, how is the local interaction with a globalized market manifest in the struggle for achieving sustainable development in agriculture and animal husbandry? More importantly, how does the glocalizing move affect the collective psyche of the local people?

At last, despite its active engagement with the global, the construction of Shangri-La County seeks to form a relationship with the great Buddhist tradition of Shambhala to mitigate the public impression that Shangri-La was “made in the West.” In the Kalachakra texts (*shilun jin ’gang fa* 时轮金刚法), the landscape of Shambhala

is described as being laid out like eight petals of a lotus blossom surrounding the central palace of Kalapa. The petal shaped regions are small kingdoms that are partitioned off from the capital Kalapa by an inner ring of icy mountains. The ruins of the town of Jiantang in Zhongdian contain some interesting details that suggest a connection to this mythical city plan. Historical documents indicate that Jiantang was divided into eight parts with roads radiating outward from the centre to the eight gate towers on the circular periphery. As a cultural memory, this layout provides the guideline for the architectural construction of the new county of Shangri-La.

Shangri-La's relationship with Shambhala ensures that the region is both mysterious and exhilarating for observers.

1.3 The Relationship between Shangri-La and Shambhala

Edwin Bernbaum's work, *The Way to Shambhala*, seizes upon an enduring question posed regarding *Lost Horizon*: was the novel "simply a romantic fantasy, or was it based on something deeper of which Hilton may or may not have been aware?"

(4). That "something deeper" here refers to Shambhala. According to Rosa Llamas and Russell Belk, "the image" that comes to mind for Chinese tourists who hear of Shangri-La is less the unfamiliar one of Hilton's novel but more the spiritual one of the Buddhist Shambhala"(260). It is likely that this observation is only partially true given that the rich tradition of Shambhala may not be a familiar subject to the wider public either. Strictly speaking, Shangri-La and Shambhala have their respective

historical lineages, and in the world of literature, Shangri-La and Shambhala can be differentiated or conflated in different contexts. Yet this perceived relationship brings forward our old question concerning what this manufactured myth of Shangri-La means to the Chinese reader. In what way do the consuming subjects in a disenchanted society develop an appetite for the myth that has meticulously bonded Shangri-La and Shambhala together?

Tourism is a demythologized endeavor which ties the actuality of the geographical landscape to economic pragmatics. The tourist process may get into the way of people's spiritual appreciation of Shangri-La as a symbol of utopian reverie. To combat this tendency of tourism, the localizing plan of Zhongdian situates the Shambhala tradition, with its heightened spiritual implications, in the cultural and historical milieu of the region. Only when the region is re-enchanted as such does Shangri-La become a vibrant sign with an esoteric charm, not merely a relic of Hilton's fictional lamasery. The Shambhala myth has added graphic and colourful touches to the scene of Shangri-La.

Tashi Dawa's piece "Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong" is concerned with Shambhala. In the story, the boundaries of the real and unreal are straining to contain the old myth in new forms. The seventh volume of the bestselling novel *Zangdi mima* pretends to disclose the secret of Shangri-La even though what it intensively invokes is the Buddhist Shambhala. These literary examples show how Shangri-La and Shambhala can be different or similar in form and meaning depending

on the momentum and the necessity felt by the writer or myth maker. Literature is a vector for fantasy. He Ma's Shambhala is the imagined unity of many smaller myths that are extant in the rich textual heritage of Shambhala, including Shangri-La. To put it another way, in *Zangdi mima*, Shangri-La is traced back to its alleged origin, a more spiritual, more ancient sphere. Llamas and Belk are right to associate Shangri-La with the conceptualization of the Peach Blossom Spring in the mind of the Chinese people (259). Whether called Shangri-La or Shambhala, this mythical place is simply a symbol of an idyllic utopia or hidden paradise for most people. These places are nowhere, formless, but are mythic entities that are constituted through adjustment of their shape in step with the agenda of the fantasy writer.

Shambhala is a Buddhist tradition developed in a substantial number of textual materials, a brief examination of which reflects this mythical place's very subtle resonance with Hilton's Shangri-La. The Sanskrit name Shambhala means "the Source of Happiness" (Bernbaum 9). A pure land on earth figuratively located on the way to Nirvana, where people who have arrived there or were reborn there get the promise of attaining enlightenment within their lifetimes or soon afterward. It is a mythical kingdom where law is most lenient, as there is no need for physical penalties given the prevalent high levels of virtue. In this land, people are still subject to illusions and attachments, but only to a minimum degree. With the support of advanced science and technology, the Shambhala inhabitants devote themselves entirely to studying and practicing for the sake of attaining enlightenment. Clearly, the

gentle rule, the pedant Lamas, and the comfortable living conditions in the valley of Blue Moon as described in *Lost Horizon* echo this Buddhist paradise, and Shangri-La's supposed role after future apocalypses also strikes an accord with the a messianic prophecy of Shambhala.

The prophecy forecasts a dark age of discord when truth and religion give way to “the ideology of brutal materialism” (Bernbaum 22). Shambhala “is guarding the most secret teachings of Buddhism for a time when all truth in the world outside is lost in war and the lust for power and wealth” (4). Barbarians or the followers of the ideology of materialism will be united by an evil king and will later come to attack Shambhala.¹⁰² A future king of Shambhala will lead his army to fight back, destroy the forces of evil, and bring in a golden age. After the war of Shambhala, the system of Shambhala will bless the whole world, which itself turns into a pure land characterized by affluence, peace, wisdom and compassion. Such a brief introduction surely falls short of doing justice to the rich tradition of Shambhala. Yet since our focus is the development of the old myth in contemporary Chinese literature, we will investigate a short novel “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong” written in the 1980s by Tashi Dawa. The novel questions whether the contemporary evocation of the war in Shambhala, or the prophecy, implies a pessimistic attitude towards the status quo and an aspiration for the future golden age as promised by Buddhist teachings.

¹⁰² “Barbarians” indicates those who follow foreign doctrines or religions and are at war with the true spirituality symbolized by Buddhism (Bernbaum 236).

2. Lost on the Way to Shambhala: “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong”

In the 1980s, works set in Tibet by writers such as Tashi Dawa, Ma Yuan 马原 and Ge Fei 格非 were a revitalizing literary force coming from the periphery region of “Chinese culture.” The periphery, in literary terms, quickly became the focus of much attention and permeated the literary trends of the Chinese avant-garde. Tashi Dawa’s adept application of magical realism, a literary mode that originated in Latin America, represents a search for suitable means to express “the marvelous reality” unique to the Tibetan culture as he experienced it. Tashi Dawa, pen name for Zhang Niansheng 张念生, was born in 1959 in a Tibetan autonomous county of Sichuan to a Tibetan father and a Han Chinese mother. He attended Chinese schools in Chongqing during his childhood years and then intermittently lived in Tibet with his parents. It was only after taking a job as a stage designer for the Tibetan Theater in 1974 that he truly grew acquainted with the land. As argued by Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani, Tashi Dawa’s literary production shows how an ethnically hybrid intellectual gradually “embraces his new Tibetan identity” (208). It may be argued that his early works, written within the parameters of socialist ideology, stiffly impose the Chinese language on an indigenous culture. The dissociation of his writing from the discourse of power only took place when he started to evoke magical realism in the mid-1980s, and one example is this well-known 1985 piece titled “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong.” The story describes a writer’s tour somewhere in a changing Tibet in the 1980s, which takes place in the real world as well as magically in a manuscript

that he creates, in which he gets into contact with his characters, two young people in search of Shambhala.

It came as a pleasant shock to Chinese intellectuals when a magical realistic work of fiction, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Colombian author Gabriel Garc ía Márquez, won the Nobel Prize in 1982. The triumph of fiction from a third world country greatly inspired Chinese writers. Thus it is not surprising that Tashi used his own fiction speak from the margins a few years later, making an artistic choice that was undoubtedly grounded in his ethnic identity and the literary influences to which he was exposed.¹⁰³ “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong” may not be a product of conscious imitation, but nonetheless pays tribute to Márquez and some other Western writers.¹⁰⁴ In Tashi’s own words, “Tibetan culture and traditions are able to provide a writer with all reality and magic s/he wants; we do not need to look for them abroad; we just need to look outside the window” (Schiaffini-Vedani 209). What lies outside the window is the historical and cultural heritage of Latin America, an understanding of which will shed light on the emergence of “Tibet magical realism,” a

¹⁰³ Tashi Dawa received a scholarship in 1978 to study at the Chinese Opera Institute where he got in touch with not only the scar literature that was popular at the time but also a rich body of translated works.

¹⁰⁴ Tashi Dawa, according to Schiaffini-Vedani, “points to Faulkner as one of the strongest influences” (209).

term used in China's academia presumably to highlight the literary association between Tibet and magic.¹⁰⁵

Magical realistic fiction is a literary mode sprung from postcolonial cultures which creates room for resistance to the imposed conceptual models, such as the European philosophical canon of metaphysics and epistemology. By way of integrating the magic into "the rationality and materiality" of literary realism, magical realist works aim to form "an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality" (Zamora and Faris 3). Though unsure about the legitimacy of the terminology "magical realism," Fredric Jameson admits that "it retains a strange seductiveness" ("On Magic Realism in Film" 302). The "seductiveness" of the literary mode may lie in its capability to weaves together the fantastic and the realistic, making the fantastic part of reality.

In particular, in "Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong," Tashi constructs a mixture of multiple spaces, real or fantastic, without establishing a hierarchy between them.¹⁰⁶ To "correct" what we perceive as reality, he draws on the Buddhist Shambhala and the mentality of the Tibetan people to "relativize" the hegemonic socialist discourse. If, for instance, the Buddhist space presents a worldview, it is to relativize rather than negate the dominant ideologies represented by the space inhabited by the Tibetans who are involved in the socialist modernization project. In a

¹⁰⁵ The use of the term "Tibet magical realism" (Xizang mohuan xianshi zhuyi 西藏魔幻现实主义) can be seen in works such as Xu Qin 徐琴.

¹⁰⁶ I borrow the word "relativization" from literary critic Amaryll Chanady (140).

word, the spatial and temporal complexities of the novel stratify the dichotomized imaginary spaces, or rather, different worldviews.

2.1 The Temporal and Spatial Complexities on the way to Shambhala

In the beginning of “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong,” the Peruvian folksong “El Condor Pasa” conjures up the scenery of the Pabunaigang 帕布乃冈 Mountains of southern Tibet in the narrator’s mind. Upon visiting the spot, the narrator realizes that what he believed to be his memorized image of the mountains is actually a landscape by John Constable, an English romantic painter. The peaceful mountain region is now dotted by an airport, a solar generating station, and many other types of technological facilities. The swift shifting of places, from the Peruvian Andes in the old song to the romantic English romantic pastoral painting of the 19th century to a mountainous area in 20th century Tibet, is tantamount to a tour in time and space. It makes an unlikely connection between the Pabunaigang with imagination that engages the narrator’s auditory and visual senses, modeling a writing pattern that recurs throughout the rest of the novel. Moreover, the unreliability of individual memory showcases the method of referentiality on which Tashi relies in writing a story about searching for Shambhala.

The first person narrator’s interview of a living Buddha imbues the story with a spiritual aura. The narrator describes Tibetan Lamaism as one of the most mysterious and profound religions in the world. He then admits to the uncanny, or the

seductiveness of the uncanny, in the legend told by the living Buddha. Upset that the Communists are terminating the system of selecting reincarnated heirs as spiritual leaders, the dying Lama declares that “the war has begun” in Shambhala, a reference to the Shambhala prophecy in the Kalachakra texts. According to the Lama, the religious revival and the rebirth of the world will happen after the last king of Shambhala defeats the devil and the gods (*shendi* 神祇) take a few people to heaven to save them from the disasters that destroy the old world. Here, the war in Shambhala implies a fight for faith when the living Buddha views Communism as a foreign doctrine that threatens Shambhala through its interference with the system of reincarnated Buddhas.

Tashi’s story is fundamentally concerned with the meaning embedded in the process of searching for Shambhala. In a hallucination, the living Buddha sees a landscape full of crisscrossing roads laid before the scared kingdom of Shambhala:

When you’ve crossed the snowcapped Kalong Mountain you will be standing in the palm of the Lord of the Lotus-Born 莲花生大师, do not seek, do not pursue. In prayer, you will find inspiration, and inspiration will bring vision. In all the crisscrossing lines of that palm, one line leads to earthly paradise. (Tashi and Batt 7)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ The translations of “Tibet: A Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong” are mostly based on the translation of David Kwan (1999) but there is one case in which I use the translation of Herbert J. Batt (2001).

This passage foreshadows that the novel will assimilate a space, i.e. the palm of the Lord of the Lotus-Born as an obstacle for those in pursuit of Shambhala.¹⁰⁸ At this point, the living Buddha mentions two young people from Kampa arriving in the Pabunaigang, and his account, surprisingly, turns out to be a word for word recitation of a manuscript the narrator wrote some time ago. Moreover, the living Buddha overlaps with an old man in the manuscript who, in a tavern, shows the direction of the palm land to the two pilgrims, a plot exactly solving the undetermined ending of the manuscript in which their destination is unknown.

The fictional space of the manuscript, independent of the living space of the narrator, features the two pilgrims, as well as a distinct social, cultural and natural landscape of modern Tibet. One of them is Qiong 琼, a girl whose father is a ballad singer of the epic of King Gesar 格萨尔王.¹⁰⁹ She always mistakes the monotonous sound of hoof beats and saddle bells of horses for a wordless song transmitting her desolate yearning in an “irrepressible life of the wilderness and loneliness” (12). The arrival of a strange man named Tabei 塔贝 makes Qiong’s yearning no longer repressible—Qiong slips under the sleeping rug of the stranger.

The next day, Qiong joins Tabei on his journey. Qiong has a leather thong around her waist for counting the days, with each knot representing each day that she

¹⁰⁸ The Lord of the Lotus-Born is a sage guru who is credited with diffusing Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth and ninth centuries.

¹⁰⁹ This epic poem of Tibet is dated to the 12th century. It tells the heroic story of the legendary King Gesar, the ruler of the Kingdom of Ling.

spends away from home. The knots on the leather thong call to mind a by-gone age when the mode of time measurement was still “primitive.” A sense of travelling back in time is activated by the leather thong, which bridges the past and present and compounds the dynamics of time. Almost as an antithesis to the knots, an electronic calculator a young villager shows to Qiong signifies a temporality on the path to modernization. The young man is surprised by Qiong’s ignorance of numerals and Marxist economic laws, wondering if she is from “the middle ages” or another planet.

The villages located along the way to the Pabunaigang are staging grounds for the encounters between modernity and antiquity, featuring a temporal interaction between the protagonists and a changing Tibet. Tabei seems to be from a legendary time full of religious fervor and zeal. Yet interestingly, he is in no way portrayed as an ideal and impeccable embodiment of the old times. A man who is merely concerned with his religious pursuit, he becomes rude to Qiong, growing weary of the girl and believing that “on his way to Nirvana, woman and gold were the stumbling blocks that he must rid himself of” (34). Unlike the Tibetans in the villages who appear to be eager to flamboyantly show off their new wealth, he loathes tractors and all kinds of machines that pollute a previously tranquil and clean environment. Tabei’s interaction with the new machinery seems to reveal that the ideologies of Buddhism and socialist modernity are incompatible. Nevertheless, Qiong finds all the mechanical curiosities and boisterousness appealing. After having been hit by Tabei, Qiong cries out “you are a devil” (32). Eventually, the determined and pious Buddhist Tabei readily gives

the disappointed Qiong to a young villager as a wife to help with the villager's farm work. The novel demonstrates an ambiguous attitude toward tradition and the new since, on the one hand, there is contradiction between spiritual and the materialist pursuits, and on the other, there is sympathy for the girl enchanted by the temptations of modern life.

The manuscript ends when Tabei crosses over the snow-capped Kalong Mountain and gets very sick. After he finishes reading the manuscript, the narrator decides to return to the Pabunaigang to find his characters. The fictional space of "Tibet: A Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong" is thus split into a textual space and an extra-textual space. Jon Thiem refers to the postmodern assumption that "text and world are synonymous" to explain textualization, "a distinctive magical realist topos" (235). To put it in straightforward terms, textualization occurs when a reader or an author enters or is magically transported into the world of the text. In discussing how a world is inscribed into another, Rawdon Wilson draws our attention to a textual theory in which "one world lies present, though hidden, within the other, just as one text lies latent within another text" (227). The narrator, an irresolute novelist, performs the action of composing and reading a text/manuscript within "Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong." The text is somehow endowed with magical power when the living Buddha and the narrator enjoy the liberty to travel across spaces, between the manuscript of the fictional world and the extra-textual space that stands for the narrator's world. The novelist is paradoxically present both within and outside

the story he narrates. In the words of Scott Simpkins, masters of magical realism, like Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges, belong to “the generation of textual magicians” (148). By the same token, Tashi is a magician exploring the spatial and temporal scales in fiction writing.

To connect the characters inhabiting the textual space and the novelist who is supposedly from the real world, Tashi Dawa sweeps away the boundary between the real and the fantastic. The narrator, assisted by modern mountaineering equipment, overcomes many difficulties to climb over the Kalong snow-capped mountain. On the foot of the mountain, he is overwhelmed by many unusual scenes leaping before his eyes, as well as the disorder of time. He states, “the calendar and the hands on my fully automatic solar-powered Seiko wrist watch were going backward at fifty times normal speed” (Tashi and Batt 121). As mentioned earlier in the novel, Shambhala is the origin of esoteric Buddhism. Do the reversal of time and the uncanny landscape signal the narrator’s return to the origin of Tibetan culture? If so, how come the narrator’s description of the scene always draws on his acquired knowledge of modern literature and visual arts? Seeing a huge elephant with legs like Jacob’s ladder, the narrator recalls Salvador Dali’s *Temptation of St. Anthony*, a painting known for its portrayal of eerie creatures as part of the supernatural temptation that Saint Anthony the Great encounters in the Egyptian desert. Considering the fact that “magical realism” is a term coined by German art critic Franz Roh to appreciate paintings with magical elements, to read the immediate scene against a painting may

well be an efficient way of transporting a feeling of “the seductiveness of uncanny” to the reader. Moreover, there is another layer of meaning attached to the painting’s theme of “temptation.” Summoning prior texts in the form of the written, printed or painted, the description of the magical landscape itself constitutes a “temptation,” tempting its visitor with that which lies beyond, possibly a utopia.

When appreciating the scenery, the narrator, jumping from one temporal dimension to another, disrupts the traditional timelines. A logically consistent narrative authority is missing, since the narrator assumes the identity of a writer to mediate between cultural tradition and the modernizing forces present in the Pabunaigang region. Textualization forms a different calendar through the exit of the author from the common behind-the-scene position, which opens the story to the maneuvering of time and space in two ways.

First of all, the aforementioned passage detaches the novel from the concrete linear progress which literary realism frequently utilizes. The rearrangement of the normal chronology gives rise to a temporal realm, yet at the same time, the narrator makes the temporal persistent by taking notes of the scenes before his eyes. This is probably the reason that Tashi Dawa chooses to create a manuscript/text within the novel, as it can preserve a spatial-temporal play casted by Qiong and Tabei. From another angle, the sense of persistence comes from the fabulous aura surrounding the Tibetan landscape, which echoes particular historical or folklorist time and space. The landscape contains a plain littered with “gold saddles, bows and arrows, rusted spears

etc” (48) which the narrator deduces to be an ancient battlefield of King Gesar. (Or is this an allusion to the war in Shambhala?) The metal of the ancient arms has been melting in the steam of a hot spring to form symbols like “Mayan hieroglyphs” (122). Here the narrator enters a place full of signs of a past time, and in this way, the reversal of time captures a lost place or a lost culture.

Secondly, this passage sheds light on the artistic freedom Tashi gains from the literary mode of magical realism. Schiaffini-Vedani wonders whether Tashi is “opposing the concepts of linear history and Marxist evolution, so often used by the Chinese authorities to justify their liberating and progressive presence in Tibet” (212). She also points out that Tashi “cleverly avoids being held politically and ethnically responsible for what happens there” (218), with “there” meaning the world of the supernatural and the marvelous. The novel is a product of Tashi’s conscious experimentation with textualization, which provides a different vision from that of the dominant historiographical narrative that the modern mind regards as reality. It is the ancient systems of belief and local folklore that underlie the logically unexplainable spectacle. The alternative produces meaning since it not only fictionalizes history when adapting facts to the fictional world, but also accentuates the strong presence of the indigenous past in modern Tibet.

Moreover, the novel ascribes Tibetan settings with cultural significance, yet concurrently and digressively refers to things that are not necessarily Tibetan, such as *Temptation of St. Anthony* and Mayan hieroglyphs. Tashi looks for an outlet through

which the ancient Tibet culture can survive in the contemporary world, situating his characters in a much broader spatial realm rather than confining them within a bounded territory. In other words, Tashi's understanding of modernization is not oriented by the socialist ideology, since he is aware of a more overpowering globalizing impact on the ancient culture of Tibet. Rather than hiding behind the magical for the purpose of criticizing any external forces present in Tibet, he simply expresses the uncertainty that a particular intellectual feels over the fate of Tibet caught between those forces.

Upon leaving the Pabunaigang landscape, the narrator reaches the site marked by crisscrossing black trenches, or the palm prints of the Lotus-Born. He is surprised to bump into Qiong, who should have stayed in the village with her new husband. A dialogue follows, in which the narrator questions Qiong: "Why didn't you stay in the village?" Qiong answers, "Why would I stay there?...I never considered staying. Besides, he would never let me go. He took my heart and tied it to his belt. I can't live without him" (52). Qiong's appearance, once again, magically transgresses the assumed boundary between the fictional world and the "real" world. The plural worlds converge at this moment of Qiong's rebellion against both the fictional character Tabei and the writer/narrator's arrangement of leaving her in the village. On this account, there are two levels of textualization: the narrator's involvement in the world of text and the fictional characters' passage from one world to another. Qiong ceases to be simply a character created by the narrator, and instead, becomes an agent

speaking for her own choice. Through Qiong's agency, the world of text literally intrudes into the extra-textual world. The narrator, then, realizes that his "children" all have "life and purposes" (54). Moreover, Qiong's disobedience to her "master" not only sabotages the previous description of her submissiveness and easy subjection to temptation, but adjusts the manuscript's "unsatisfactory ending."

Following what is almost a norm in magical realism, there is limited psychological analysis of the characters, so the reader is left to figure out the intentions behind their actions or analyse their inability to express themselves. Thus we can only assume that, in this passage, Qiong embodies the hidden will of her master, the narrator/writer. Qiong's heart, in her own words, has been tied to the cord around Tabei's waist. The knots on the leather thong around Qiong's waist now total one hundred and eight, equal to the number of prayer beads on Tabei's cord. The number "one hundred and eight" is significant in Buddhist symbolism. Not only does it measure Tabei's journey (*jing* 径) with accuracy, but it is also the number of beads on a Buddhist rosary (*jing* 经) which represents one hundred and eight kinds of afflictions (*fannaο* 烦恼) of the mundane life. Compared to the narrator's high-tech watch, which fails to work properly, the leather thong has faithfully recorded the days the girl has been travelling away from home. In the process of experiencing emotional afflictions, Qiong, demonstrates more resolution or faith in the pursuit of love and idealism, as if having become a different person.

In the end, the narrator still tries to persuade a dying Tabei that “the place he sought all his life did not exist anymore than Thomas More’s *Utopia*” (54). But nothing could shake Tabei’s faith in Shambhala. At that moment, Tabei thinks he hears the voice of god, but is actually hearing the English broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 23rd Olympics in Los Angeles. The historical event brings back the sense of time, and the dials on the narrator’s watch all stop at “July, 1984, 7:30 a.m. Beijing Time” (58). Explaining to Tabei that god is not speaking, the narrator says “this is the bugle call that man challenges the world” (59), thus making another allusion to the “war” between antiquity and modernity.

Now that the disordered time is corrected, the narrator replaces Tabei but only leads Qiong back, and becomes determined to make her into a new woman. His determination shows that there are multiple ways to mould a personality, just as there are multiple perspectives from which to look at Tibetan culture when the narrator situates himself in a territory between or among worlds. The spatial and temporal complexities in “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong” reflect Tashi’s will in keeping an intriguing distance from the socialist center while also avoiding granting endorsement to Buddhist salvation narratives. If there is no utopia, Shambhala, or Communism, it seems that Tashi, in the liminal territory where transformation and metamorphosis are most likely to happen, is also lost in his attempt to bridge the space between the ideal and the achievable.

2. 2 Relativizing the Utopian Ideal of Shambhala and Communism

In the manuscript, there is an old man who talks to Qiong and Tabei in the tavern, the counterpart of the living Buddha in the world of the narrator. The old man recalls the situation when the People's Communes (*renmin gongshe* 人民公社) had just started in 1964.¹¹⁰ At that time, the Tibetans were confused by the meaning and locus of Communism, only knowing that it must be a paradise. As the old man describes, "No one had been across the Kalong snow-capped mountain so it had to be there. A few people sold all they had and went off to find Communism. They never came back" (41). At this point in "Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong," there is a clear relativization of the two conceptualizations of utopianism, Communism and Shambhala. In the old man's story, the Tibetans sought after the two ideals equally with a sort of religious fervor. They interpreted Communist ideology through the lens of their familiar worldview. In their minds, Communism, just like Shambhala, is a destination of pilgrimage, or an envisioned land of enchantment.

Then shall we share Gang Yue's feeling that the villager's identification of Communism with Shambhala is "incredibly amusing and heuristic," not because of the pilgrims' naivety, but because of how Communism, with its scientific leanings, could be "pasted" onto a "mythical utopia" ("From Shambhala to Shangri-La" 165)?

¹¹⁰ The People's Communes started in 1958 and had mostly ended nationwide by 1962. Yet Tibet experienced the system differently. The central government decided to experiment with building Communes at selected spots in Tibet around 1965 when the Tibet Autonomous Region was established, and later the system was widely spread throughout the Tibetan plateau. The movement in Tibet had its own feature which emphasised the socialization of land and husbandry resources.

As a matter of fact, Bernbaum (101) has given consideration to the ironic resemblance between the Communist and Shambhala prophecies. According to him, the contest between Communism and Capitalism is nothing more than a version of good vs. evil. The global triumph of the proletariat will ensure that all people live in an era of harmony and get an equal share of the abundance of wealth and resources. As a result, the principle of moderation in Hilton's Shangri-La, the rule of Buddhist Shambhala, and the prospect of the proletariat liberation may not be as different as they seem to be.¹¹¹ Fundamentally, they all carry the promise of transforming both the personal and the common fate of all through spreading their specific doctrine. Chinese scholar Zhang Qingyou 张庆友 has a similar opinion. He views the ideal society of Communism and the Buddhist land of Shambhala as "twin sisters," which "achieve the same results by different approaches" (*yi qu tong gong* 异曲同工) (43). Recognizing their difference in terms of the dichotomy between materialism (*weiwu zhuyi* 唯物主义) and idealism (*weixin zhuyi* 唯心主义), Zhang sees the Shambhala myth as providing solace for people living in the most severe natural environment. At this point, a suitable follow-up question would be as follows: to what extent can we use the paradigm of materialism vs. idealism to analyze the villagers' search for Communism as a tangible place in Tashi's novel?

¹¹¹ According to Meisner regarding the distinction between religious and secular forms of utopianism, "...there are few meaningful historical distinctions to be drawn—at least insofar as utopian or messianic religious ideologies demand human action in the here and now, and do not prescribe resignation in the present while awaiting a heavenly utopia located in an afterlife. Indeed, through most of human history the most profound transformations of secular life have been wrought by religious utopian doctrines promising the advent of the Kingdom of God on Earth" (24).

According to Zhou Ning, the 19th century utopian tradition in the West split in two directions: the aesthetic and the historical (204). The aesthetic then developed into romantic imagination of utopia, whereas the historical transformed into scientific socialism or Communism (ibid). As mentioned in the Introduction, scientific socialism also contains utopian visions for the future, yet that which differentiates Marx and Engels from the utopian socialists they criticized lies in their view of “how to engage with history to achieve that future” (Lynch 33). Keeping this in mind, we will arrive at an understanding of how Maoist Utopianism is considerably different from Marxism. Historian Maurice J. Meisner has noted that “The means of Maoism were themselves components of the Maoist vision of the good society of the future” (201). During the Great Leap Forward, the Communes, which essentially represented a heightened form of collectivization, were forms of “political and economic” organization. The Great Leap Forward was a nation-wide enactment of Mao’s identification of the ultimate ends of Communism with the means of achieving it. In other words, the utopian goal of Communism became the means by which Mao sought to resolve the social contradictions of poverty for which there was no solid material basis. Under the circumstances, socialism became an uplifted state of mind, a spiritual edifice that soon collapsed in the face of the devastating consequences of the utopian movements.

To come to terms with Tashi’s juxtaposition of Communism and Shambhala, we now turn to the Tibetan world. “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong” falls

within the body of “Tibetan literature in Chinese,” a term used by Gang Yue to emphasize the Tibet-based nature of these writings (“Echoes from the Himalayas” 74). Many of the writers who write about Tibet, whether ethnic Han or Tibetan, have worked in the Tibetan region and thus have grown to love “the roof of the world.” Some of them were sent to the plateau with the mission to modernize and change Tibet several decades ago, but the surprising change they themselves underwent prompts them to express an affective attachment or even a sense of belonging to this region.

Among these authors, Ma Lihua 马丽华 is an important figure whose travel writing has implanted in many Chinese a dream of Tibet.¹¹² In authoring books such as *Zou guo Xizang* 走过西藏 (*Traversing Tibet*), she has built a career of writing about Tibet, writing about the divergent forces at work in the heterotopia to shape and transmit the identity of its constructor.¹¹³ The discourse of building a harmonious society emphasizes that harmony is a personal feeling. In Ma’s work, the personal feeling of harmony is achieved not through self-cultivation in the Confucian manner, but through the experience of a pure and unrestricted life in the wilderness of the frontier. From the standpoint of Gang Yue, Ma is a “cultural relativist” who treats the different cultures about which she writes and from which she originates with equal

¹¹² Shen Weirong has quoted a somewhat exaggerated remark about Ma: “A hundred Tibetologists are not equal to one Ma Lihua ” (181) in terms of her contribution in introducing Tibet to a wide audience.

¹¹³ *Glimpses of Northern Tibet* is the English translation of *Zang bei you li* 藏北游历, the first book in the “trilogy” entitled *Zou guo Xizang*.

respect. Yue writes that “The voice of Ma Lihua... is simultaneously located within, and attempts to move beyond the conventional dualism of Tibet versus Han China, tradition versus modernity, and nature versus culture” (“Echoes from the Himalayas” 70). We can argue that Tashi Dawa has experienced a similar process of identifying himself with the land, or being “Tibetanized.” Moreover, Ma’s construction of heterotopia reverberates within Tashi’s relativism in approaching Communism and Shambhala. Ma, taking a step further, pursues a spiritual fulcrum which could be realized as one’s dream of utopia.

In *Glimpses of Northern Tibet*, Ma describes a town in northern Tibet as her “spiritual Eden, a utopia amidst the hard realities of life” (160), though Ma’s prose writing normally refrains from explicitly constructing Tibet as a material Shangri-La.¹¹⁴ Most often, she attempts to enter the spiritual world of the pastoral people on the geographical and cultural margin. In this book, she tells us that “Tibetans all seem to have heard the words of a Grand Living Buddha: the goal of Buddhism is ‘liberation of all from the endless cycles of rebirths and suffering’ and the goal of the Communist Party, ‘liberation of the whole of mankind’ is the same, only the method of approach is different” (178). Impressed with a sort of *guidan*

¹¹⁴ In a 2006 interview by *Renmin wang* 人民网, Ma Lihua says that in people’s understanding, Shangri-La and Shambhala represent the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, as well as the amicable inter-personal relationship. In these respects, she thinks that Tibet is approaching those ideals, especially in the eyes of the tourists. Then, she continues to comment on the feeling of the locals and those having lived in Tibet for long years that this understanding is far from being the truth, since they believe that the actual contents of the fairly-land facade of a Tibetan village are often poverty and backwardness.

yishi 怪诞意识 (consciousness of the uncanny) in this land of devotees, she uses fresh examples that naturalize the juxtaposition of Communism and Shambhala in the mentality of the Tibetan people. For example, she tells an anecdote that, in the new Norbulingka Palace in Lhasa, there is a portrait of Chairman Mao that was elaborately crafted by the master artist of a Grand Living Buddha. Ma writes of how the Tibetans are “Imaging the Chairman living among the many divinities in the tales of Buddha’s birth, now and forever. But to the Tibetans it is not incongruous for an atheist head of state to be revered as a god” (72). Political sarcasm aside, the anecdote conjures up an image of a Tibetan people characterized by romantic and mythical thinking, who live a life that is “an exception to the rule” (*chao chu le changgui* 超出了常轨) (“*Zou guo Xizang*” 30). Time and again, Ma feels as if she’s standing at the doorway of the metaphysical and spiritual room inhabited by Tibetan people, but her cultural background blocks her access and even forms a distorted image of the interior of the room. Admitting the difficulty in articulating the part of the Tibetan culture that originates from but goes beyond reality, she opens a window through which we can appreciate Tibetan magical realism.

The land of the palm line in “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong” is an example that speaks for the imaginative thinking of the Tibetan, whose worldview does not distinguish the physical from the supernatural. As mentioned, the old man in the tavern describes the creeks and gullies at the foothill on the other side of the Kalong snow-capped mountain as the imprints from the right palm of the Lotus-Born.

Once upon a time, the lord slapped his right hand on the earth to shove a demon down to hell such that his palm prints were left on the site. Modeled on the style of many Tibetan legends, this story represents the vitality of the literary mode of “Tibetan magical realism.” Tashi Dawa is not a pure imitator of the magical realistic works from Latin America, since Tibet itself has one of the richest stocks of mythical material, and, more importantly, Tibetan people actually live within a piece of “magical realism.”

The locals unshakably believe in the tales of the supernatural, those similar to the land of the palm prints, as the history of their living space.¹¹⁵ In the early 20th century, Western explorer David-Neel expressed a sentiment shared by Ma Lihua nearly a century later: “Tibetans do not recognize any supernatural agent. The so-called wonders, they think, are as natural as common daily events and depend on the clever handling of little known laws and forces” (291). In other words, the Tibetans are surrounded by mountains, rivers and prairies that are seen as gods and devils, possessing all kinds of human emotions. These beliefs help us appreciate what cultural relativism means in the Tibetan social context. Tibetans have a firm belief in the material existence of Shambhala and they would treat the ideal of Communism likewise, regardless of how outsiders may think of them as pre-rational. Shambhala and Communism are not so different as means of spiritual fulfillment or as placebo for the suffering soul.

¹¹⁵ The legend of the land of the palm prints might be Tashi’s creation modeled on certain Tibetan legends.

At last, we can view the landscape of the palm lines as a mindscape, or “the geographies of imagined worlds.”¹¹⁶ The crisscrossing roads represent that the way to Shambhala is a labyrinth full of uncertainty and obstacles. In a strange way, the trenches could almost impress a modern reader as the cortical folds on the human brain, or, shall we say, a mental map. As a matter of fact, the search for Shambhala in the Buddhist tradition symbolizes a spiritual and mental journey. Bernbaum uses the Western notion of subconscious to illustrate how the description of Shambhala evokes a world of symbolism. He claims that the journey to Shambhala is “a quest for the hidden aspect of ourselves and the world of which we have not been aware” (139), which is more likely to take place in one’s lifetime in the form of dreams or meditation than a physical expedition. The incredible wealth in Shambhala symbolizes the spiritual force in the depth of our minds that allows us to comprehend the true nature of reality, or to see through illusions. The harmony and peace in Shambhala represent the inner equilibrium that is achieved when one is no longer bounded by illusions caused by desires and attachment. Buddhist teachings emphasize that only those who have pure faith and adequate spiritual preparation can find Shambhala, the most ideal kingdom possible on earth. The impure and the unprepared will be thwarted by blinding storms, impassible mountains, or even death. In “Tibet, a Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong,” Tabei loses his way in the palm land, and his death seems to suggest that he is not spiritually prepared, as he is lacking compassion.

¹¹⁶ I adopt the term and its meaning from the book title, *Mindscales, the Geographies of Imagined Worlds* edited by George E. Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin.

In the next section, we will look at the recent popular novel *Zangdi mima*, which fruitfully imagines the panorama of Shambhala in an attempt to investigate how the quest for Shambhala inspires visions of transcendent splendour and spiritual fulfilment. The novel probes into the rich sources of the Shambhala fantasy, which survives and flourishes in the contemporary terrain of popular fiction. In this particular case, Shambhala remains a spot on earth that is far removed from the reader's native land, the pursuit of which is tantamount to locating an individual's place in the world.

3. Fully-Fledged Shambhala– *The Tibet Code*

Zangdi mima 藏地密码 (*The Tibet Code*)¹¹⁷ is a replacement title for the novel that was originally called *Zuihou de shenmiao* 最后的神庙 (*The Last Sacred Temple*) when first published on the internet. From the combination of the two words “Tibet” and “code,” the reader can feel the pulse of the market, which exploits popular fascination with a fictitious Tibet shrouded in layers of mysteries. *Zangdi mima* is a serialized novel of ten volumes, with the striking distinction of “selling well over 3 million copies” appearing on the cover of its seventh instalment, which shows the series' popularity when it was published between 2008 and 2011. The promotional packaging, as well as the front and back covers of each volume, are all printed with

¹¹⁷ *The Tibet Code* is the English name of the book printed on the cover. The title might also be responding to the extreme popularity of *The Da Vinci Code*, a novel with mystical themes that was published five years earlier.

the claim that this is “an encyclopedic novel about Tibet” (*yibu guanyu xizang de baike quanshu shi xiaoshuo* 一部关于西藏的百科全书式小说). This “manifesto” intends to impart a certain density and authenticity to the novel. Or, reading of this fictional journey to Shambhala is guaranteed as a way of gaining knowledge. Yet the so-called encyclopedic series is nothing more than a creative montage of the historically accumulated fantasies about Shambhala and, to a lesser extent, Shangri-La.

Though having attracted less academic attention than *Wolf Totem*, *Zangdi mimia* has been hailed as a *yingxiao chuanqi* 营销传奇 (a marketing legend) (X. Song 10). Its success is part of a business operation drawing on the allure of the Tibetan fantasy, which its publisher foresaw as having lucrative economic potential in the Beijing Olympic year. The publisher unearthed an originally inconspicuous piece of cyber literature to implement a new concept of selling books as “*kuaisu xiaofei ping*” 快速消费品 (“fast articles of consumption”), which aims to make books sell as fast as daily supplies such as toothpaste (11). The novel was then *made* into a popular online fiction through a multi-faceted marketing campaign, and the novel was serialized on several major websites. However, only parts of the story were posted as bait for interested readers in hopes that they would then purchase the complete printed version. The publishers also believed that “good criticism needed to be launched” (12) to make the campaign a success; thus positive criticism of the novel swiftly occupied web forums, further moulding it into a must-read exploration thriller in the eyes of

consumers. Moreover, while each volume of the print copy is advertised as containing a story independent from the others, the reader will only learn the final secrets of the series in the end. Thus, the reader is always hooked, hanging on for the next instalment. By all accounts, with ten discrete installments and well over a million Chinese characters in total, this voluminous fiction gives testimony to the sweeping thrill of mysterious Tibet as a literary topic, especially when combined with manipulative marketing tactics.

Not surprisingly, such a marketing strategy has incurred criticism for commodifying an art form to the greatest degree, valuing sales over the content of a novel. With this in mind, we might read the novel in the same mode, as if eating a pre-packaged burger stuffed with certain homogenized ingredients. These ingredients are the common metaphors and myths of exotic Tibet, especially those related to Shambhala. For some critics, it is easy to simply be scornful or condescending towards a novel that capitalizes on the Tibetan fantasy, since, “if a culture can be objectified and commodified..., it takes away from that culture’s agency to decide for itself what being Tibetan means” (Bovair 338). While acknowledging that the popular imagination may risk distorting real Tibet through a sort of “false promotion of Tibetan culture” (339), our reading of *Zangdi mima* seeks a more productive approach, focusing on why consumers are intrigued by this mythological work, especially in the demythologized Chinese social context.

Given the considerable readership it enjoys, *Zangdi mima* is not solely a product of marketing tactics. The publisher initially obscured the identity of the author, whose pseudonym is He Ma, as if to match the suspense of the novel itself. Aimed directly and overtly at an audience interested in Tibet, the publisher shared only the things that matter about the chef of a “fast food” book, such as the titillating facts that the author is a Tibetan cultural enthusiast (*Zangmi* 藏迷), has lived in Tibet for more than ten years, and has hiked across the hinterland of Kekexili alone.¹¹⁸ Though his persona is constructed in the service of market exigencies, He Ma indeed contributes to the evolving myth of Shambhala and has attracted many fans. In Tashi Dawa’s story, the realm of Shambhala is untenable and beyond conception, whereas the secrets of He Ma’s imagined Shambhala are readily disclosed. *Zangi mima* bespeaks the reception, circulation and reproduction of the Shambhala myth in contemporary China. As Bernbaum notes, “Even in an obvious fictional form, as in the story of Shangri-La, the [Shambhala] myth has been able to move and deeply influence the minds of many people” (51).

He Ma’s postmodern composition on Shambhala is an adventure story that follows the most rudimentary format, describing a group of people and their search for the earthly paradise. A Western explorer’s impression of Tibet in the early 20th century accidentally looks like a would-be synopsis of the novel:

¹¹⁸ Kekexili is known as China’s largest wilderness at 83,000 square km, Kekexili is a forbidden zone for human inhabitants on the Tibetan Plateau, with its average elevation of 5,300 meters and harsh atmosphere all year round.

The antique and the exotic, war and warlike adventure, chivalrous love and duty, the supernatural in many shapes, which...could only move on the strict assumption that they were real and even actual—that they had happened somewhere and to somebody, either in this world or in another.

(qtd. in Schell 16)¹¹⁹

Zangdi mima presses upon us afresh a twenty-first century version of Shambhala that reveals itself in a clash of stereotypes, yet at the same time, showcases a literalizing playfulness.

There is a route connecting non-utopian and utopian moments in the novel, which is reminiscent of the variety of readings nurtured by *Lost Horizon*. The paradoxical nature of heterotopia is even more explicit in *Zangdi mima*, since the novel revises the one-sided perception of utopia through exposing its shadowy and dark side. The adventure is entangled in the romance of frontier expedition and imbued with a mixture of hope and fear of the unknown. With the unfolding of the story, we will find that Shambhala is caught in contradictions, the tension between faith and greed, the seductive dream giving way to a nightmare, and the paradisiacal replaced by the hellish. We will also find that two seemingly incongruous approaches to evoke Shambhala--the global imagination and the Buddhist tradition--are not in strict opposition. Note that my discussion of the novel will evolve around the theme of Shambhala and overlook those unrelated and, often times, tortuous contents.

¹¹⁹ Schell quotes from Sven Hedin's *To the Forbidden Land: Discoveries and Adventures in Tibet* originally published in 1913.

3.1 Blending Myth with History

A sense of dread and fascination is evident at the beginning of *Zangdi mima*, when three lunatics appear in sequence. The lunatics may have had certain contact with a legendary sacred temple, which is later revealed to be Shambhala. The haunting fear in their memories weighs so heavily as to cause them various types of mental disorder such that they are unable to describe fully where and how to find the temple. A picture taken by one of these characters ignites an obsessive interest within the protagonist, Chomo Jampa 卓木强巴. Jampa, the owner of a company specializing in breeding and trading Tibetan Mastiffs, deduces that the phantom-like image of a massive variety of Tibetan Mastiff in the picture is the legendary sacred canine called Purple Qilin 紫麒麟. So limited is the information that no one could either verify or contradict the falsehood of the picture. On the strength of a religious sutra containing somewhat obscure information about the Purple Qilin, Jampa firmly holds that it is just as meaningless to debate the animal's existence as it is to discuss whether dinosaurs ever existed. He then persuades his professor, a canine expert, to join him in search of what he claims as his faith — the legendary creature, the perfect and strongest mastiff, which is the embodiment of all that is firm and persistent, indomitable and loyal.

All the clues indicate that the Purple Qilin is related to the Pabhala Fane 帕巴拉神庙, a mysterious treasure house that many powerful groups worldwide have been pursuing. With national support, an exploration team is assembled, with participants

including Jampa, scientists, representatives from the army, and Tibetan monks. To collect information, the team traipses around Tibet and as far abroad as the Amazon in South America and Russia. Slowly, the contour of the once-fabled territory of Shambhala slowly shows itself, only to be fully completed in the final instalment.

In *Zangdi mima*, myth takes precedence over history, and the novel has a tendency to de-emphasize the difference between the two. Though framed as historical in a not-too-serious manner, the novel's events refer to scraps of history, such as those related to Shangri-La. As mentioned, the rose-colored image of Shangri-La is becoming well-known in China and taking tangible shape thanks to the Zhongdian tourism campaign. In the novel, Shambhala and Shangri-La are treated as different transliterations of a Tibetan term (Vol.7: 9), and James Hilton is said to have been to Tibet and have written a *youji xiaoshuo* 游记小说 (travel fiction) based on the Shambhala legend (Vol.6:110). Note that no other scholars have secured any evidence that Hilton made it to that part of the world in his lifetime, and *Lost Horizon* is not a travelogue. This is just one example that sheds light on how Shambhala in *Zangdi mima* takes the form of a folder containing perfunctory overviews on this hidden kingdom. Hanging on historical events or anecdotes, as well as religious and folk myths, the novel creates a series of absurd literary fantasies, which, without doubt, are far from a representation of real Tibet. That being the case, it is debatable whether the mixture of history and myth is modeled on the magical-realist mentality of the Tibetan people. In the novel, the myths will prove to be valuable sources that

the team uses to decipher the route to Shambhala. The team members gradually adopt the habit of viewing myth in a realistic light.

The most conspicuous way that *Zangdi mima* uses history lies in its way of fabricating the origin of Shambhala. The novel draws its inspiration from the historical events pertaining to the King Lang Darma (r.838-842), the notorious persecutor of Buddhism who expelled monks and toppled religious statues, and was allegedly assassinated by a vengeful monk. According to historian Samten Karmay, the “consequence” of Lang Darma’s prohibition of Buddhism, “as is well known, devastating for the Tibetan empire” since “the country never recovered the unity of its former state” (57).¹²⁰ The King has become the subject of many Tibetan legends, which also give He Ma an open space for imagination. *Zangdi mima* varnishes on the event regarding the abolishment of Buddhism by means of providing a vision on the historical conditions under which the Tibetan empire went into chaos. Jampa recites a legend from a Tibetan Buddhist sutra, which has it that the King Lang Darma, who delighted in hunting and chasing wolves in the wild, was once awed by the Purple Qilin, the mount of the Buddha, whose manifestation was a warning to Lang Darma against his mistreatment of Buddhists. Jampa’s faith in the existence of the Purple

¹²⁰ It is well known that the abolishment of Buddhism in 839 gave rise to a state of chaos in Tibet, which lasted for almost a century. In his article “King Lang Darma and his Rule” Samten Karmay questions the way in which the King was historicized as the persecutor of Buddhism in late Tibetan Buddhist sources, and argues that the contemporary sources like the prayer script find in Dunhuang show that he is a practicing Buddhist. Thus “it would seem that the question of his ‘persecution of Buddhism’ did not concern his action against the religion itself as such, but against its institutions which were a powerful independent body enjoying special privileges” (61).

Qilin is derived from the legend, and his pursuit of the super Mastiff pieces together a larger picture that leads to the discovery of Shambhala, the home to a lost civilization. Shambhala, initially known as the legendary Pabhala Fane, turns out to be a storehouse for a large number of Buddhist sutras and rare treasures that people carried away to prevent them from being destroyed by Lang Darma. With the passage of time, the location of the fane was forgotten.

Moreover, *Zangdi mima* integrates the Buddhist tradition of Shambhala into its narrative. Jampa's faith in myth reminds us of the literary undertakings of Tashi Dawa and Ma Lihua, which dwell on the Tibetan tendency to conceive of the mythical as part of the natural order of things. As discussed, this tendency explains the Tibetan people's belief in the existence of Shambhala. According to Bernbaum, their belief is also derived from the Buddhist understanding of the world as "full of illusions which will distort our perceptions" so it is possible that Shambhala just appears to be non-existent (30). The Kalachakra Tantra, or the Buddhist doctrine of the "Wheel of Time," is the source of the belief in Shambhala. As the legend goes, the full Kalachakra texts are preserved in Shambhala, part of which appeared in India around the tenth century, and spread to Tibet in the twelfth century. In a nutshell, there is a prodigious amount of religious and legendary Tibetan literature on Shambhala, which *Zangdi mima* could use to delineate a route to its earthly location. In the novel, *Datian lunjing* 大天轮经 (The Doctrine of the Big Wheel of Heaven) is an allusion to the sacred and complex Buddhist teaching of the Kalachakra. The novel also takes

advantage of the religious conjecture that the full texts of the Kalachakra are in Shambhala in indicating that it as a sanctuary for Buddhist sutra and treasures, though, at the same time, associating it with the historically unrelated event of the King Lang Darma.

The second source from the Buddhist tradition to which the novel refers is the most well-known guidebook to Shambhala, titled *Shambhalai Lamyig* or *The Description of the Way to Shambhala* (*Xiangbala Zhinan* 香巴拉指南) written by the sixth Panchen Lama, Lobsang Palden Yeshe 罗桑华丹益希, in 1775.¹²¹ This is arguably the most influential guidebook that defines the route to Shambhala in a great detail. In this guidebook, the seeker, on a magical journey to Shambhala, will have to conquer the ocean, deserts, forests with wild beasts, as well as rivers and mountains populated by gods and demons. Moreover, there are encounters in fabulous kingdoms and temptations of various kinds that may lead the seeker astray. Earlier in this chapter, we discussed the allegorical description of the journey to Shambhala in the Buddhist tradition. Specifically, as reflected in this guidebook, the obstacles that the seeker needs to overcome are the illusions and deceptions that originate from one's negative ego, aggressive impulses and desires (Bernbaum 212). Having gained periodic success in overcoming the barriers to enlightenment, the seeker will walk into a forest with golden fruits, which symbolize spiritual nourishment and inner calm. In *Zangdi mima*, this guidebook is far from being a mere reference because it creates

¹²¹ *The Description of the Way to Shambhala* is based on an earlier guidebook translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan in the 17th century.

an inspirational template from which the novel can develop its own version of the guidebook. In a sense, the novel is a modern day transformation of the old format of spiritual journey, or an update on the classical trials and temptations in a contemporary context. Later, we will discuss how it also explores the relationship between the physical and the inner journeys to one's dream of Shambhala in its own ways.

Besides referring to Tibetan literature, *Zangdi mima* also reaches to the Western tradition of imagining Shambhala. In a way, this act poses as a counterpoint to the very polarity of the global and local. In other words, it does not cast the Western imagination as a form of opposition to the indigenous myths, but rather, indiscriminately weaves it into Jampa's expedition. The inside front cover of each volume contains a titillating introduction to the novel, which mentions the Nazis' two expeditions to Tibet in 1938 and 1943, and volume 6 intensively engages with the Nazis' relationship with Shambhala. As a matter of fact, the expedition under the patronage of Himmler in 1938 is a widely recorded historical event. Isrun Engelhardt describes many of those recordings as "distorted historiography," because the expedition is frequently inferred to have been motivated by convoluted, occult beliefs held by the Nazi regime, aimed at recruiting supernatural powers for their use (62-64). *Zangdi mima* elaborates on the Western myth of the Nazis' interest in finding the pure Aryans, a superior race envisaged as the lost ancestors of the Europeans. Apparently He Ma does not care to take into account certain inconsistencies, such as that "it also

remains unclear regarding Himmler, how much he believed in the recondite myths of origin, according to which the Aryans lived in a place of retreat in or even beneath Tibet” (Brauen 65).¹²² Moreover, the novel ultimately leans toward yet another related unverified speculation that the aim of the Nazi expedition was to locate Shambhala, where the pure Aryans guarded the source of the immense power of the *axis mundi*, the world axis.¹²³ Jampa’s team secures the documents and maps made by the Nazi expedition in Tibet, which become keys that allow them to decode the route to Shambhala.

It would suffice to say that *Zangdi mima* creates a labyrinth of textual threads, with each thread bearing a certain imaginary relationship with Shambhala. This approach in pursuit of fun, fantasy and speculation, puts the novel in danger of losing its structural clarity and coherence. In other words, its style of unrestrained textuality crams the reader’s mind with voluminous unidentified references that cast serious doubt on the novel’s alleged encyclopedic touch. The author is too obsessed with creating suspense by piling up mysteries around Shambhala, thus posing a contrast to more down-to-earth ruminations on Tibetan culture, such as those by Ma Lihua.

¹²² Despite all kinds of speculations surrounding the Nazi expedition, the expedition led by Ernst Schäfer (1910-1992) in Tibet, according to Martin Brauen, was undertaken to collect “geophysical, meteorological, zoological, botanical, geological, ethnological and anthropological data—including data concerned with the study of race” (68).

¹²³ We shall differentiate Shambhala in the Buddhist tradition with the Western creation of the Shambhala myth that allegedly inspired the occult belief of the Nazis, since the goal of the latter was to construct Tibet as a hidden and mysterious site of spirituality. The *axis mundi* (the world center) symbolism appears widely in religion and mythology, normally suggesting the link between heaven, earth, and the underworld.

Camouflaged as providing some sort of specialized knowledge about Shambhala in particular and Tibet in general, the novel, under a close look, reveals less about the extant Shambhala-related myths (let alone real Tibet) than it does the spontaneity of a cyber writer who is motivated and manipulated by a profit-seeking entity.

That being said, *Zangdi mima* makes us aware of an evolutionary trajectory of the Shambhala/Shangri-La tradition. Bishop's delineation of the "archaeology of the imagination" of Tibet "is concerned with uncovering the past foundations of present fantasies" ("The Myth of Shangri-La"19), which illuminates the archaeology of the new Shambhala myth at work in the novel. The past fantasies that have been accumulating for centuries, including Hilton's Shangri-La and many others, prefigure and linger in this contemporary construct. Of course, it is not the goal of this dissertation to search for a root metaphor or a set paradigm in the coherent cultural enterprise of imagining Shambhala. Rather, what is at stake here is He Ma's postmodern collage of Shambhala's panorama and its implication for a Chinese readership.

The novel brings the reader face to face with the indigenous and the Western forces in shaping images of Tibetan landscape and culture. The writer's urgent desire to participate in the construction of the myth may come from the understanding that Shambhala is a utopian sign open for manipulation. Under close analysis, it becomes clear that *Zangdi mima* subscribes to, yet at the same time sabotages, the forms of representation that the patriarchal socialist state initiated, which portray old Tibet as a

feudal serfdom under the exploitation of Western imperialist forces. In terms of its submission, the novel, lingering only on the mythical aspects of Tibet, never gets into genuine contact with the Tibetan people, and when the Tibetans do appear, they are accompanied by an unmistakable air of nostalgia for the “noble savages.” Moreover, the novel is written under the paradigm that Tibet is a historically integral part of China, meaning that the team under the patronage of the state has to fight against foreign forces to protect the country’s treasure. In terms of its divergence, the considerable latitude the author is allowed in fantasizing about Shambhala is made possible by a more open-minded readership who has witnessed the fading out of the old image of Tibet in artistic representations. The contemporary Chinese fantasy of Shambhala takes place when frontier imagination comes to fulfill people’s quest for difference at a time when technology increasingly synchronizes the world. He Ma seeks to redefine this age-old myth and its meaning in relation to the readers’ lives, which are still infiltrated but less dominated by the political discourse. As we will see later, the very concept of the hegemonic country dissolves by the end of the story.

3.2 The Mythscape of Shambhala

If there is a material existence of hidden Shambhala, it might be, as Bernbaum proposes, located at a different time period or on another planet or even in the fourth dimension of the universe (47). Those creative speculations signal to the tremendous imaginative potentiality possessed by Shambhala. The basic purpose of *Zangdi*

mima's utopian construction is to create a "mythscape" in which old myth "survives" in this new age fantasy but does not supersede its new form. The mythscape means the "imagined landscape" that "invents stories" (McConnell 78), and in the context of the novel, it includes an entering path and a full blown view of Shambhala. The path to Shambhala fashions the archetypical imaginative route to the dreamlike kingdom so as to become an invention in its own right. *Zangdi mima* charts an alternative and most unlikely earthly route to Shambhala, along an underground river of great length. The channel, which is formed by layers of volcanic rock, is described in a guidebook as *minghe* 冥河 (underworld river). Here, He Ma uses the guidebook tradition, developed from the history and legends of Tibet, to correlate mythical instructions with the geographical actuality of the route that he designs. Drifting down the river on an ancient snake-shaped boat, the team members are literally descending into the underworld. Or, their journey is like crossing an elongated passageway from the contemporary world to a timeless realm.

Absolute darkness in the underground blurs the team's sense of tangible and objective place. Their sensation of chronological time slides away. In a world that seems homogenized and placeless, Jampa recalls a point that his father once made regarding the size of the universe. The father thought that Jampa was too constrained by the notion of time and space to comprehend that "the real world has no time and space." He turned to Buddhist cosmology to explain to a young Jampa that "the big and small are in the world of *samsara*, boundless and endless" (Vol.7:77); that the

Buddha can contain the infinite big in the infinite small and vice versa. The father's intention is to teach Jampa a way of thinking. He tells Jampa, "You are trying so hard to find a result, while ignoring the importance of the [process of] 'searching' itself. Why do you want to search for that answer, and the thing hidden between the question and answer? (ibid)"¹²⁴ Now that Jampa is in a situation in which he can feel for himself that "the real world has no time and space," he comes to question if the process of searching for Shambhala is what ultimately counts the most, since the value of the result, like the infinite big and the infinite small, is relative.

Jampa's recollection is a mental exercise that rebuilds his confidence in a state of desperation. The crisis of time and space cramps the perspective the team has developed on the historicism of Shambhala based on their collected Buddhist sutras, the guidebooks, and the maps through which the figuration of the legendary realm has become vivid and concrete. For a long time the hopeful expectancy for Shambhala is the faith that sustains their pursuit, yet the only sign they receive is a darkness that never varnishes. The eternal emptiness transforms their anticipation into horror when the river seems to sprawl over to a great distance and huge waves claim the lives of some of their peers. At this moment, it might be fair for the reader to ask whether Shambhala is a source of spiritual rejuvenation or a land of imprisonment in utter hopelessness.

¹²⁴ The quotes from *Zangdi mima* are all my translation.

When the team's journey into Shambhala is experienced as if moving downward into the core of the earth, Shambhala comes to symbolize a place hiding beneath the Roof of the World. Finally, what meets the eyes of the team members upon pulling away from the tunnel is, to their astonishment, an ocean, or, more accurately, a huge lake. The lake is the well-guarded doorway to Shambhala, a secluded realm surrounded by a rosary of snowy mountains. The ocean reminds the visitors of the scientific conjecture regarding the geographical formation of the Himalaya Mountains. The novel refers to the Tethys Ocean 特提斯古海 which geographers believe to have covered the Himalayan region in prehistoric times based on the marine fossils found in rocks. When the sea that resulted from the shrinking of the Tethys Ocean receded, the Himalayas that were originally underwater were pushed up by the land masses to gradually swell out and become the Tibetan plateau. Moreover, the novel tries to fuse the geology of Tibet with the Tibetan myth of how the goddesses ordered the ocean that originally covered Tibet to recede. Mixing science with myth, *Zangdi mima* uses science as source for its own additional mythmaking.

Many Buddhists believe that one can only cross the exterior ring of mountains to reach Shambhala by harnessing spiritual power and flying (Guiley 545). Thus, in a sense, flying is the most "traditional" way to get to Shambhala. *Lost Horizon's* hijacked airplane falters and finally crashes when landing at Shangri-La; similarly, in *Zangdi mima*, characters are faced with the small chance that parachuting from the top of the snowy mountain will result in a safe landing on the ground rather than a

disastrous landing in the ocean. Nevertheless, the team failed their attempt to identify an air route. Instead, they show incredible spiritual fortitude in crossing the underground river and the “ocean.” In return, the team is more solidified and prepared for more challenges.

Advancing from the river, the team enters an entirely new landscape, a valley that has two distinctive features. The first is its absolute seclusion, so that the geographical accuracy of its location on the grid of our perceived time and space is of least significance. He Ma must have learnt that the secluded valley as sanctuary appears in many Tibetan myths, since his online portfolio introduces that he has read over six hundreds Tibet-related books.¹²⁵ Moreover, the theme of the hidden valley corresponds to some earlier Western explorers’ imagination of Himalayas as a liminal zone. As Bishop writes, “In such a space one is neither here nor there: one has left but not yet arrived” (“The Myth of Shangri-La”84). This is a zone of transition between known and unknown. This is Shambhala but not quite, since more “demons” and “monsters” are crouching on the way to the Phabala Fane.

The second feature is that the liminal zone of Shambhala contains a boundary, as well as a center. As mentioned, the Buddhist Shambhala has the shape of the eight petals of a lotus blossom surrounding the central palace of Kalapa. The petal-shaped regions are small kingdoms that are partitioned from the center and each other by the inner rings of icy mountains. In *Zangdi mima*, the valley does not follow the classical

¹²⁵ See the entry of “He Ma” in *Baidu baike* 百度百科 (the Baidu Encyclopedia).

model but expands its dimension vertically along the soaring mountains. Above the ground, there are two higher terraces which are composed of volcanic rock, immense in size. The horizontality of each terrace, which is vertically separated from the other, creates the self-contained boundary within the valley and gives Shambhala an imaginative gradient. Ascending a level of gradients involves entering a different time zone with distinct natural and cultural elements inextricably enmeshed. The team encounters different ordeals and triumphs in the three distinctive zones on their quest to reveal what is hidden in this unexplored territory of great diversity. Jameson's notion on the "spatial utopias" corresponds with the novel's layout of Shambhala: "the transformation of social relations and political institutions is projected onto the vision of place and landscape, including the human body" ("Postmodernism" 160). The mythic landscape of Shambhala is a feeding ground for an exuberant more-than-human world.¹²⁶

The lowest terrace of Shambhala situates the explorers in a dematerialized world characterized by ecological sensitivity. This is a realm that contains a counter-cultural agency, or in other words, an alternative culture whose values are based on nature. The ground level stands for what nature was like before human domination and is described as crisp and fresh. The sky is like a silver lining with glittering color-changing clouds somersaulting beneath. It is the refraction of sunlight and the collision of positive and negative ions that produce the effect, like a magnificent

¹²⁶ "More-Than-Human World" is a term I borrow from David Abram.

lightening show. The huge valley has a self-contained atmospheric system, as its source of radiation is the light that enters through the ceiling of the steep valley, behaving like a fluorescent lamp and nourishing a world of rich flora and fauna. The explorers, standing within a land of majesty and splendour which defy description, are subdued by the wonders of nature. More importantly, with this scene emerges a recurrent pattern in the novel: whenever the team is confronted by a breath-taking view, some sort of danger is imminent, hidden beneath a peaceful appearance. As such, the beautiful scene evokes a sense of both serenity and terror, both fascinating and intimidating.

The past is recoverable in Shambhala. The team members are under the impression that they have trailed hundreds of millions of years backward in time. This is the dwelling-places of creatures that are similar to the three-dimensional reconstruction of species from the Paleozoic Era that their portable super computer demonstrates. It is arguable that the patrolling of the prehistoric giants is a theme fertilized by Hollywood blockbusters such as *Jurassic Park*, the reader's familiarity with which may prompt their visual imagination. Soon, the peaceful mood of the team members gives way to uncontrollable excitement and awe. It is the ferocity of those unknown creatures of incredible height that forces the team to confront them with modern weapons.

The ferocious creatures that soon turn into the team members' food bear little resemblance to the fruits, or spiritual nourishment, described in the sixth Panchen

Lama's guidebook. Nevertheless, the food chain in which the team members are threatened by and in turn threaten other creatures does indeed lead to their enlightened understanding on the nature of Shambhala. Replete with a collection of unidentifiable wild animals, the terrace is almost like a "Cambrian Park" in which evolution can be observed in its most elementary form. In the words of a team member, "monsters on a rampage, here is nothing more than an inferno" (Vol. 7: 170).¹²⁷ Facing an amazing profusion of unknown living beings, Jampa has an epiphany, realizing that people might have envisaged the heavenly nature of Shambhala in the wrong way. He concludes that Shambhala is actually heaven for plants and animals. *Zangdi mima* updates the mode of representation to make Shambhala ecologically relevant for the present time. Jampa's impression of "the beautiful hell, or the fatal heaven" (Vol.7:213) assigns contradictory properties to the ground zone, which adds new aesthetics to the old paradigms of Shambhala, a genuine wilderness aesthetic and an appreciation of it. Whereas species are dying at the hands of humans out in the native land of the reader, ecological harmony is in full blossom here.

Then what force could possibly halt the passage of time to keep the living beings unassimilated into the grand narrative of progress? The team infers that the air contains a high percentage of oxygen in Shambhala and is the source of nourishment for the local fauna. As we all know, at high altitudes like in the Tibetan plateau, air is thin and rarefied such that it is impossible to find a virgin forest dominated by huge

¹²⁷ My translation of "一个怪兽横行的世界，地狱莫过于此。"

ferns as described as existing here in Shambhala. Though the team did reach Shambhala by sinking down thousands of meters along an underground river, the readers do not need to accept the quality of air as a “scientific” explanation. What the novel truly conveys is how overpowering forces of nature can transcend reasoning, or that what happens in Shambhala does not have to be what we perceive as reasonable. Essentially, nature offers both “laws and surprises” (P. Anderson 3), which are attuned to each other on the first terrace.

If the ground level represents the supreme archaic in which nature reigns, the tribes on the second terrace facing devastating isolation epitomize civilization as it existed one thousand years ago outside of Shambhala. The inhabitants of the terrace, who speak the ancient Tibetan language, are in combat with an untamed nature, and their living conditions contribute to the primeval air of Shambhala. In many respects, the description of these people is inscribed in the existing stereotypes of ethnic minorities. For example, in an episode in which a team member develops a romantic relationship with a pure and beautiful local girl after catching sight of her bathing in a lake we see a clichéd encounter with an erotic and fantastic other. Moreover, the primitive tribes show an affinity for shamanism, or some sort of mysticism mostly unexplainable by modern science.

The tribes come increasingly within the purview of the visitors. They are like small kingdoms constantly at war with each other. The novel shares with *Wolf Totem* the reasoning that human history can be described as a fight for space. In the words of

a native, there are limited resources within this sealed valley of finite space and the growing population would inevitably cause uneven distribution, which then ignites quarrels and even fighting (Vol.8:122-123). Moreover, since previously there were a few “fortunate” earlier explorers who managed to land on the terrace by parachute, the locals desperately dream of going to the outside world where there are “big flying iron birds” and “running steel beetles” (81). Here lies the great irony implicit in this much-sought-after paradise which turns out to be a “besieged city”— people outside want to get in and people stuck within want to get out. In Shambhala, the team members witness what has been gained and what has been lost with the progression of civilization. Moreover, the residents of Shambhala live in a state of terror because of the ever-present threat from the beasts, the disasters and the brutality of the ruling Geba 戈巴 tribe— on the highest terrace. Under the persecution of the Geba tribe, they even face the ultimate danger of genocide.

The third terrace is the core of Shambhala where the sacred temple is located. Perpetually covered in mist and ice, its edifice seems utterly mysterious and invisible. The few team members that make it to this tier hear nothing but the incessant harsh and furious whistle of wolves (Vol. 10: 161). The formlessness and lack of dimension in this vast space would easily crush one’s will. Those descriptions found in the tenth installment of the novel finally unveil the quintessence of the Shambhala world, building on the foundation of the first nine volumes’ brooding over the shape of the

temple. At six thousand feet above sea level, this is a place where people have learnt to harness nature's power under a circulating air of occult mysteries.

Shambhala is essentially a secluded empire, and its clandestine center is capable of exerting supreme authority over the smaller kingdoms/tribes. The Geba are civilized, if medieval. Their civilization involves a strange mixture of mysticism, idolatry and technology. A “perpetual motion machine” that utilizes the energy from an active volcano creates the mist covering the whole terrace and regulates the climate. The Geba, who are born from He Ma's imagination, are the guardians of the Pabhala Fane. According to the novel, the Geba are known in history for their cohabitation with the wolves, and were incorporated into the Guangjun 光军 (He Ma's fabrication), the greatest cavalry of the army of the King Songts ̄n Gampo (569–649?/605–649?) of the Tibetan empire. They are a force specializing in training the fighting mastiff (*zhan'ao* 战葵).¹²⁸ Shortly before the assassination of the King Lang Darma, this army disappeared overnight along with a lot of treasures. It was those formidable warriors who brought away the treasures and settled in Shambhala.

In the first nine volumes, the gradual looming of the contour of Shambhala comes with many ominous signs, which lead up to and set the stage for a catastrophe

¹²⁸ King Songts ̄n Gampo is traditionally credited with establishing Buddhism in Tibet and having built many Buddhist temples. However, the fictitious Geba have their own religion, an indigenous shamanism (*yuansheng wujiao* 原生巫教) or animism which is the predecessor of Bon (the indigenous religion of Tibet), and due to their tolerant attitude towards all religions, the Geba accepted Buddhism when serving as the Guangjun. Their faith system is one of the novel's strategies of grounding sensational tales of magic and sorcery associated with the Geba. Moreover, the architecture of the Pabhala Fane, which we will discuss later, is not only Buddhist in essence but also has the elements of Bon and Shamanism, revealing the primal traditions of its constructors.

that occurs on the third terrace. The team's rapturous dream of Shambhala, a symbol of eternal paradise, is disrupted when the valley's utopian attributes are set in a dubious light with the exposure of Shambhala's enticing yet distasteful past. The team members are surprised to discover that the static zone covered with deceptive mist is literally a no-man's-land in deep freeze. They learn that a deadly endemic virus brought the glorious history of the Geba to an end. With technology and military strength on their side, the Geba had forced the weaker tribes to provide laborers to build the grand temples for the past few hundred years. Unfortunately, the Geba's agency of civilization turned out to be the cause of their destruction when a biological weapon that they developed backfired on them. The contagious virus causes untreatable and uncontrollable symptoms similar to those of mad cow disease.¹²⁹ Here, He Ma presents a dystopic vision that is generated from his concern with the crises of modern life, using an apocalyptic scenario as a cautionary analogy for how chemical pollutants, nuclear leaks or other forms of man-induced scourges could easily destroy our world.

As we may recall, the Shambhala prophecy in the Buddhist text describes the end of the world as a result of the encroachment of a wide-spread materialistic outlook. Similarly, the fate of the Geba is a prophecy that urges the reader to consider our own fate as a consequence of how we treat nature. After all, Shambhala is a heterotopia, a

¹²⁹ What is commonly known as mad cow disease is Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), which affects the nervous system and causes degeneration in the brain and spinal cord of cows and infected human beings.

mirror image of the polluted globe. Annexed to the wisdom and power of the Geba is the burden of technological advance and military ambition. Hidden behind the sense of wonder that the fierce warriors created is their internal decay and ultimate impermanence.

Moreover, the conflicts between the kingdoms in the valley seem to subtly replicate the Shambhala prophecy: “wars in Shambhala have started.” Though Shambhala is not tranquil, it remains a sacred place, a site with “paradoxical power—of destruction, and also of renewal” (Bishop, “The Myth of Shangri-La” 10).¹³⁰ Then is there a new world emerging from the virus holocaust? For years, the third terrace does not owe its immunity from the intrusion of other kingdoms to the strength of the ferocious Geba soldiers, but to the protection of the most loyal species—the Tibetan mastiff living in a post-apocalyptic no-man’s land. The combined pack of wolves and mastiffs under the rule of the Purple Qilin guards the architectural miracles of the temple. Time and again, the pack streams out from the third terrace to undertake their mission of purging and cleansing the tribes that had caught the virus, resulting in the mysterious overnight disappearance of certain tribes. More importantly, the condition of the no-man’s land both confirms and questions the natural supremacy of human beings; while the pack’s actions carry out the Geba’s

¹³⁰ Moreover, the conflation of Shambhala with the Pabhala temple is to erect the realm as a sacred place, or in other words, to add a spiritual color to Shambhala, and the team member later calls the whole valley as the “sacred realm” (*shengyu* 圣域) to make the differentiation.

orders as issued before their extermination, the pack has ultimately become a free agent as the master of the land.

Now the Tibetan mastiffs and the wolves have become the primary focus to convey progressive ecological values, as the saviors who have a closer relationship with the environment than their previous masters. As James Berger writes, “In many science fiction post-apocalypses, what survives is some version of humanity in the midst of the inhuman. Humanity in its essence—such is their claim—is what these apocalypses unveil” (10). When the defiant isolation of the third terrace strengthens the mythic power of Shambhala, whose inner sanctum turns out to be a wolf’s domain, *Zangdi mima* reveals its utopian tendency towards an ecological humanism. The novel describes how “Stepping over fluffy withered pine boughs, Jampa finds out that everything around him is so harmonious. Animals and plants form an independent world here, alternating in a natural cycle of life and growth” (Vol.10:13). Jampa’s feeling reinforces the role of the no-man’s land as a stage where the achievement of civilization is dramatically dissociated from its human constructors to reconnect with nature.

For years, Jampa has been driven by his faith in the existence of the super mastiff. He has been dreaming about the Purple Qilin, dreaming that one day he could proudly walk the mastiff on the street. Ironically, in the animals’ domain, Jampa becomes a wolf citizen after he makes friends with three wolves and learns to communicate with them in wolf language. Jampa’s submission to the Purple Qilin paves his journey back

into the wilderness and the experience reduces him, or, more precisely, restores him, to his essence as a commoner among the living beings. The process decenters the human subject and downplays his ruling status. This re-imagining of the relationship between the human subject and the animal object extends our understanding of subjectivity. Jampa's subjugation shakes the central position of humankind in the symbiotic environment, and the non-human emerges as subject. That the animal other acts as the recuperative power of ecological restoration forges a biological identity for the lost civilization stored in the temple.

One of the central themes of the novel is that Shambhala is a projection of the reader's world, which is anything but innocent and peaceful. It is a scheming world filled with hierarchy, war and violence. Arguing against the view that utopian art is "incapable of engaging with change," film critic Pat Brereton says that it "can promote a potentially progressive, even pro-active, agency" (23). The utopian values that the popular fiction *Zangdi mima* conveys may make an impact on its reader, and not only in the ecological sense. For the fictional explorers, going into the interior of Shambhala is also a journey of exercising agency, of finding the interior self. After reaching the heart of the temple that lurks on the highest point of the realm, Jampa and the other characters receive a spiritual baptism.

3.3 Relating Utopian Longing with Faith Seeking

For Jampa and his friends, Shambhala is not an incidental choice of destination. Their quest for Shambhala is a secularized pilgrimage, or a course of getting their bearings and finding their way in a society that is increasingly eroded by material desires. It is their pursuit of faith (though not necessarily in the religious sense) that unleashes their passion and propels them forward on their journey. As mentioned previously, the Buddhist Shambhala represents a phase on the way to enlightenment. To reach Shambhala, one must have done good deeds out of compassion and must acquire the wisdom to comprehend the true nature of things including the true self. After passing through many terrible ordeals, Jampa brings to his adventure an introspective dimension. The team's odyssey, in which they must traipse across the world surmounting obstacles, is one of life and death. The team members are not heroes standing on a moral high ground in a strict sense, but come to have an adamant faith in Shambhala, feeling that wealth does not bring happiness but results in negligence of spirituality and an indulgent lifestyle.

Of course, it would be an overstatement to interpret this fantasy work exclusively from the Buddhist perspective since there is no explicit indication that the journey is meant to confront the sources of human sufferings, namely, ignorance and illusion. That being said, it is helpful to use the Buddhist paradigm to chart the journey on two dimensions, the outer and the inner, which we can examine through how the protagonist Jampa acquires wisdom. Jampa, a robust and masculine Tibetan in his

forties, twice won the wrestling championship in the Tibetan region. He is naturally endowed with charisma, persistence, and an ability to communicate with animals. Jampa is not a Buddhist, yet he continuously broods on the meaning of religious faith. He has been skeptical of the merits of religions in that, he believes, they always claims spiritual truth yet only give rise to wars and disputes. On the underground river, on the brink of collapse from darkness, hunger and cold, Jampa is visited by hallucinatory or reminiscent dreams of conversations with his father, the symbol of wisdom in the novel.

In the dreams, the voice of his father tries to revise Jampa's overly simplistic view on religion. The father says,

“None of the sagacious leaders would oppose, refute or negate the existence of religion. Yet [the reason for its existence] has always been distorted as facilitating the ruler's enslavement of people, and this point of view is incorrect and incomplete. The true meaning of religion lies in its role as laws and regulations of the spiritual world for human beings.”

(Vol.7:125-126)

The view on religion to which the father makes reference resembles the socialist country's indoctrination of its people for the purpose of imposing its own system of beliefs. As a result, the father's idea deviates from the Marxist theory that religion is the spiritual opium that the ruling class prescribes to the working class. The father goes on to say, “Try to think about it, if the world has no soul, no incarnation, no

paradise, no hell, no alien advanced wisdom and unknown civilization, then how lonely is the existence of human beings” (126). According to him, the degeneration of those without faith is more threatening to society than people with religious faith. Jampa is one with faith in the father’s view, since he feels ashamed when telling lies, believes that he will succeed without thinking of the result in advance, and is fully confident that his success will come along with effort and persistence. He Ma offers this contemplation on the meaning of faith and on the measure of the spiritual void and consequent moral decay that paralyze contemporary Chinese society, especially when many caught up in the situation have no idea that a serious problem looms.

At one point, Jampa comes to study with the *mixiu zhe* 密修者, a sort of esoteric practitioner of tantric yoga. To motivate their inner forces, the yoga practitioners strive for the transcendental unity of mind and nature in the belief of the fundamental correspondence between the order of nature and the internal pattern of body. *Mixiu zhe* is one of the fabricated terms in the novel, referring to the descendants of the Guangjun who have integrated themselves into different sects of Buddhism over the years.¹³¹ Over time, Jampa gains paranormal powers and develops a higher level of consciousness. In other words, after going through physical and mental transformations, Jampa experiences a new kind of awareness of the true meaning of

¹³¹ At this juncture, it is worth pointing out that many of the terms that He Ma coins are now collected with detailed explanations on the on-line Chinese encyclopedia, such as, *Baidu Baike*. Among the entries there are the “Geba” and their glorious army “Guangjun” listed in an attempt to clear up the reader’s confusion stirred up by a text in which the fictitious are so entangled with the history and religion of Tibet.

Shambhala. At the same time, he builds himself up as a respectable team leader and forms the image of himself as trustworthy and hardened. From this standpoint alone, the journey of overcoming one's weaknesses is tantamount to one of striving for coordination between the material universe and the human mind, based on which Jampa grows to appreciate the ecological law of Shambhala.

The novel contains a subject-producing exercise through the clichéd mode of a treasure hunt wherein the bright side and the dark side of the human soul collide. A fight between justice and greed is played out between the team and a diabolic transnational underground organization called the Thirteen Knights of the Round Table. On the one hand, Jampa keeps asking himself what has driven him to undertake the endeavor, what he wants, why he is here in Shambhala (Vol.9:318), fighting those enemies, facing the pain of losing his friends, and carrying on without a bright prospect. Nevertheless, it is in this questioning process that Jampa's outer physical trial is conflated with his inner experience of a soulful pursuit. On the other hand, the covert operation of the clandestine organization involves a spy game and the recruitment of mercenaries. In this sense, the intrusion of the malicious invaders driven by monetary incentives also constitutes the ominous side of heterotopia Shambhala. The goal of the antagonist, the manipulator behind the scene, a man named Tang Tao 唐涛, is not spiritual but born out of selfish greed and even downright evil. As it turns out, Tang Tao is none other than the man who pretended to be psychotic at the beginning of the novel to enchant Jampa with the image of the

Purple Qilin. In order to find Shambhala, his organization has been planning to reap the fruits of Jampa's team's victory.

Tang Tao surrenders to his desire to build himself as an isolated ego and imagines himself with godlike powers. His vaulting ambition is to destroy mankind with the super virus. His reasoning sounds like that of a deep ecologist who accuses humans of anthropocentric behaviour: "The world was originally a natural and harmonious world. Every kind of living being had its own way of survival. The entangling food chains had a beauty of coordination. But the harmony was destroyed once you, a living being called the human, appeared" (Vol.10: 341). In his speech, humans are likened to viruses, parasites on the body of Mother Earth, which "are frantically self-duplicating, frantically encroaching on other domains, and then wreak havoc and mold the domains into a form that is only suitable for the existence of themselves" (342). As a result, his philosophy holds that mankind should be wiped out for the sake of saving the globe from being overly exploited. Ironically, his delusion of grandeur and his self-appointed role as "chief judge" of human sin is merely a camouflage for his wild ambition to dominate the world. He meets his eventual demise in the end, since the novel punishes the perfidious, the treacherous, the disloyal, and the evil.

In the last analysis, Shambhala presents a story that not only concerns personal identity and aspiration, but also the very survival and continuance of civilization, even humanity itself. At one point, the maniac Tang Tao claims, "the truth of the universe

is that lightness is ephemeral, while, darkness is eternal” (Vol.10: 363). Jampa’s counter expression is drawn from his father’s teaching: “Yet it is exactly the ephemeral light that gives birth to life and hope. Therefore, although we are all from darkness, we are doomed to spend our lives following lightness” (ibid). What he means is that faith provides light for people in the darkness of fear and obstacles and sustains them to accomplish the impossible. At this point, Jampa’s physical and psychological journeys finally converge into one when he comes to terms with that which he has been pursuing, namely, light and hope. Yet Jampa’s maturity as a faith seeker does not change the nature of Shambhala as an ephemeral dream and an illusion.

3.4 The Ultimate Illusion of Shambhala

Far away in the little-known temple there are things of value that fulfill each individual’s specific needs, be it a virus, jewels, or Buddhist sutras. In the end, Jampa’s team and their enemies walk into the Phabala fane. The description of the temple in *Zangdi mima* makes it a permanent palace of the orientaling fantasy. The temple is a treasure house of eastern civilization, in possession of items such as exquisite Tang porcelain vases, presumably the dowry of Princess Wencheng.¹³²

¹³² Princess Wencheng, related to the Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty, married Songtsän Gampo (605?–650 CE) in 641 in order to make peace between her people and the people of Tibet. According to legends, she played an important role in cultural conversations between the two groups. She is said to have brought medicine, technology and exquisite handicrafts of the Tang Dynasty to Tibet. Historians have been debating the details of the related historical records and legends.

Guarded by layers of technological and biochemical gears, the architectural wonders of the temple are a blend of craftsmanship and profound philosophical and religious wisdom. A Western mercenary soldier of the evil organization identifies Shambhala with the ancient orient, saying, “I don’t understand you Orientals. Why did you design so many tricks (*huayang* 花样)?(Vol.10: 223)” The flamboyant splendor of the temple bolsters an impression of Shambhala in *Zangdi mima* as an enlarged version of the Shangri-La in *Lost Horizon*, a quiescent valley abounding with riches. Likewise, *Zangdi mima* keeps the West alive in its imagination of Shambhala. Those trapped in an age of lack of belief can receive the greatest help in the pseudo-oriental space of either Shangri-La or the Phabala Fane when conducting a spiritual meditation. “Meditation,” here is a metaphor for the experiences of the team members, is a practice through which they will get a sense of the illusory nature of reality.

Shambhala is unreachable, a treasure trove to which people attach meanings, yet it is ironic that the team only witnesses its fall from its previously perceived meaningfulness. True, the state is the patron of the team, yet in the narrative, the state is reduced to an intelligent institution from which the team secures information and support. The position of the state renders it obscure and indecisive. In the novel, each individual assumes a plurality of identities that make his/her association with the state tenuous. A representative of the state in the team, a female drillmaster from the army, turns out to be a *mixiu zhe* i.e. an esoteric yoga practitioner who was born with the mission to secretly protect Jampa, since Jampa is the descendent of one of the Geba’s

religious chiefs. Another example is more telling of how the state does not assume its premier status in the mythologized world. When Jampa expresses the idea that the treasures should belong to the state, his long-time rival, who is affiliated with the clandestine evil organization, asks him “which country it should belong to? China? India? Nepal? Bhutan?” (Vol. 10: 290), since the liminal space of Shambhala cannot be mapped and does not fall within the territory of any country. This argument does not tempt Jampa into believing that anyone who sees the treasure owns it, yet it dilutes the significance of the state. Then does this imply that the realm of Shambhala is not tainted by politics?

In a word, the team’s entanglement with the state suggests that the political entity is not the primary topography in the novel from which the disparate spaces of Shambhala is imagined. The treasures belong to none, and are beyond the realm of control of any political institution. Such a statement from the liminal zone breaks up the hegemony of the state. Bishop has noted that “Utopias, tourist landscapes, everyday life and psychic realms all seem to have a timeless disregard for history and politics—at least, that is how they have been consistently imagined and constructed in the West” (“The Myth of Shangri-La”215), and this notion also applies to the Chinese novel *Zangdi mima*. The novel expresses divided allegiance to the nation for which the team members exert themselves to search for the temple, and a utopian vision that Shambhala shall enjoy freedom from “history and politics.” After the characters who have entered the temple get a brief glimpse of its magnificent interior, they realize

that their association with the temple is transient in that they can hardly make an exit alive let alone transport anything out due to the deadly gears blocking their way. In the end, the temple is immune to violation and the immunity will persist. The arrival of the explorers fails to bring startling transformations to Shambhala, a symbol of imaginative wealth and a place beyond political geography.

Finally, equipped with some knowledge about *Zangdi mima*, we can further consider the Chinese reader's experience of the hope and despair embedded in its utopian imagination. The novel presents a unique version of the Shambhala myth to a Chinese readership, yet it remains unknown how many fans of the novel would bother to differentiate it from other works that merely fulfill a public desire to know about Tibet. The Shambhala fantasy constructed in the novel is the commodification of utopian ideals, wilderness, and the discursive image of Tibet. Though the book may be a commercial gimmick in many ways, He Ma's idiosyncratic initiative to boldly reconstitute an age-old myth earns the novel validity on its own terms. As Bishop says, "The notion of myth-making must be deepened beyond simple notions of right or wrong, as if myth is just an obfuscation, a mystification or defilement of reasoned objectivity" ("Not Only a Shangri-La" 219). The novel extends to all sorts of spiritual matters, not only those of mythic Tibet and occult science. If we agree with John Fiske that popular culture is based on "socially located criteria of relevance" rather than "universal criteria of quality" (327), we can assume that readers would feel connected to *Zangdi mima* in one way or another.

In the novel, the portrait of Shambhala is exploited for projections, since it features normative utopian modes against which the problems of the existing world are exposed. As Film scholar Paul Coates writes about Jameson's theory on the role of mass culture in utopian imagination,

Ideology and utopia are of course virtually inextricable: the utopia of full meaning prefigured by the great artwork becomes ideological when access to it is restricted—as it always has been—while the shallow fantasies of mass culture can justly claim to provide their audiences with approximate conceptualizations of hopes of escape (6).

Zangdi mima is one such piece of “shallow fantasy of mass culture” which testifies to the appeal of Shambhala, a utopian beacon full of spiritual energies to encourage people's pursuit of a meaningful life. *Zangdi mima* sheds light on the loss of meaning caused by the failure of state utopianism, and the money worship that comes as a consequence of that loss of meaning. Jampa, as a business man and billionaire, is zealously responsive to the call of the Purple Qilin, giving up his career and making Shambhala the purpose of his life. Under the backdrop of the waning of faith and belief in the protagonists' living world, the novel stresses the spatio-cultural significance of the periphery in weaving a dream of alternate utopia.

That being the case, hidden within an aspiration for utopia is an uncertainty over the capability of human beings to sustain any utopian vision. The center of Shambhala is a no-man's land, or a heterotopia, in which a different type of global localization is

at work. *Zangdi mima* does not allow itself to indulge in the enthrallment of the old modes of utopian imagination, be it an apocalyptic scenario in the Hollywood style or the Buddhist symbolism of mythic pilgrimage. Instead, it has a true commitment to expose the contradictory nature of utopia/heterotopia. The Shambhala realm in *Zangdi mima* bears few signs of the hierarchical or colonial relations that are evident in *Lost Horizon*. It stands as a metaphor for a global village wherein the colonizer, i.e. the Geba people, caused their own demise through their military ambition. The novel stresses the tension hidden under any harmonious edifice and further infers that the edifice is an illusion. However, this does not make its attitudes towards faith-seeking cynical, since seeing through the illusion allows one to gain the understanding of the true nature of the world and oneself.

At the end of the chapter, it might be fair to claim that the localization of Shangri-La in Zhongdian, the anticipation of Shambhala in Tashi Dawa's story, and He Ma's novel are all globalized products. The global elements are the tools that allow the reader to "relativize" the condition of a society and an individual in relation to a larger world. These three projects all expand the reference field for the conceptualization of utopian harmony within the shifting boundaries of the Chinese aesthetics of utopian imagination. Communism and its recent expression through the language of Confucius' Great Harmony are part of a repertoire of utopian thinking, from which audiences can also choose other candidates, such as Shambhala or

Shangri-La, to articulate their aspiration for and/or suspicion of an envisioned different future.

In the next chapter, we will examine a new model of heterotopia, which continues to relativize the utopian movement mobilized by the political center. So far we have discussed two examples of masculinized constructs of heterotopia, namely, *Wolf Totem* and *Zangdi mima*, both of which are obsessively concerned with the issue of heroic masculinity. Though my focus has been the ecological value and spiritual hope transmitted by the wolf totem and Shangri-La/Shambhala, it is undeniable that there is a gendered aspect of the Mongol's fighting spirits that Chen Zhen admires and of the fraternal bond that unites Jampa's team. The unaffected wilderness has become an ideal spot to capture the masculinity missing in urbanity, which accounts for one of the utopian thrills of the frontier adventure. In their anthropological study "Macro Minority, Masculinity and Ethnicity on the Edge and Tibet," Ben Hillman and Lee-Anne Henfry note that the Mongols and the Tibetans, the formerly nomadic peoples of China's northern and western borderlands, are often masculinised in cultural representation partly due to their bellicose history. Yet the hyper-masculinity of the Mongols and the Tibetans can be considered two exceptions, since the theoretical parameters through which the masculine center views minority people as the feminine other has exerted quite an influence on the study of China's ethnic minorities in Western academia. Thus, this study will turn to the question of whether the feminized minority can also serve as site for a heterotopian space. In the

next chapter, we will explore the literary imagination of a feminized ethnic minority,
the Mosuo.

CHAPTER IV

LEAVING “THE COUNTRY OF WOMEN:” A REMOTE EDEN

Shangri-La is a spiritual heterotopia that only exists in the minds of believers, so the story of the search for it is ever evolving. Today, government representatives in the provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet have cooperated in marketing their combined territories as the Big Shangri-La region (大香格里拉地区), sharing and capitalizing on the brand name “Shangri-La” for the purpose of tourism. More than a half century ago, Joseph F. Rock, an Austrian American botanist and explorer, set foot in many places of this area, including the Mosuo territory, which is just a few hundred kilometers from the purported location of Shangri-La at Zhongdian. In this chapter, our emphasis is shifted to the Mosuo, who are referred to as “Yongning Naxi” in many studies since researchers like Rock have often regarded this unique population living in the Yongning 永宁 basin around Lugu Lake (泸沽湖) as a branch of the Naxi 纳西 people. Lugu Lake is “the mother lake” (*mu hu* 母湖) of the Mosuo. The Mosuo are also sometimes called the “Na” or “Moso” in other sources.¹³³

¹³³ Yongning is situated in Ninglang county 宁蒗, Yunnan province. The Mosuo have a total population of approximately 40,000 individuals, some of whom are also found in Sichuan province, on the other side of Lugu Lake. Rock considers the Mosuo to be “a branch of the Na-Khi tribe,” claiming that “they call themselves Hil-khin (people of Hil)” (358). They are often called the Moxie “磨些” or Mosha “么沙” in ancient documents, and Lamu mentions that “Mosuo” is also a way in which they refer to themselves (*Zou jin nü'er guo* 3). Note that “Mo-so” 麽些 (Rock Preface) refers to the whole Naxi population; thus, the names with similar sounds may not necessarily correspond with today’s Mosuo. Moreover, in some English sources, the Mosuo are referred to as ‘the Na of China’ because they are said to call themselves Na or Nari.

Between 1924 and 1942, Rock made several visits to Lugu Lake, which he described in his book *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of Southwest China* as “without exception the finest sheet of water in the whole of Yunnan; a more beautiful setting it is difficult to imagine... all is serene, indeed a fitting place for gods to dwell” (417). The current tourist boom rescues Rock’s ethnographic and geographical accounts and brings them to the attention of the Chinese public. The region’s history as described by Western explorers has suddenly become a beloved subject in popular travelogues and guidebooks.

Among such travel-themed works we encounter a photo album titled *Xiaoshi zhong de fengqing: Lian lian Mosuo* 消逝中的风情: 恋恋摩梭 (*The Passing of a Flavor: Invincible Attachment to the Mosuo*) by Lamu Gatusa 拉木嘎土萨 (b.1963), an ethnic Mosuo scholar affiliated with the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. Lamu revisits the hypothesis mentioned in the previous chapter, that Rock’s photography and articles published in *National Geographic* were the inspiration for James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*. As Rock’s expeditions were funded by various U.S. institutions, he invariably produced work that pandered to American Orientalist tastes.¹³⁴ This being the case, it is surprising that Rock’s external depiction of the

¹³⁴ Rock’s expeditions in Western China took place between 1922 and 1949. In an article published in 1939, he addressed himself as “Research Professor in Oriental Studies of the University of Hawaii” (qtd. in Qian 226). As introduced in the preface to *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of Southwest*, Rock was first an “agricultural explorer of the United States Department of Agriculture of Washington, D. C., then worked for the National Geographic Society.” Rock provided service during World War II to the United States Army Map Service as Expert Consultant and Geographic Specialist. From 1945-1950, he was a linguistic scholar at the Harvard-Yenching Institute. James Wilhelm in *The Later Cantos of Ezra Pound* 1977: 170) astutely notes that “Rock was interested in total culture: he did not divorce

“tribes” in the Southwest provides the substance for China’s internal representation of Shangri-La, as well as “The Country of Women,” the title by which the Mosuo community is always addressed. The Mosuo representation, which is shaped and perpetuated by economic development, is a reflexive practice of Orientalism within China’s border.

The relation between the myth defining the Mosuo territory as the Country of Women and the myth of Shangri-La as discovered by Rock meditates their shared significance that transcends stunning physical beauty. The Mosuo territory, now officially considered an organic part of the big Shangri-La region, has become a constituted heterotopia in the popular imagination, the people and culture of which are part of the land’s reputed unearthly beauty. Below is a set of pictures featuring the smiling faces of women of various ages from the photo album authored by Lamu, who writes:

In the Mosuo’s matrilineal households, the female has equal rights and obligations as the male. The basic common sense at home holds reverence for mother... Thanks to their special structure of family and mode of marriage, the Mosuo deal appropriately with conflicts between sexes. Even in regions with arduous living conditions, you seldom come into contact with a Mosuo woman with a gloomy and doleful face (*choumei kulian* 愁

geography from linguistics from botany from anthropology from art; he saw all things in a vast cultural ideogram” (qtd. in Qian 226). Specifically, he has made contributions to the study of ancient Naxi pictographic manuscripts.

眉苦臉) or one who feels depressed and lonesome (*youyùjìmo* 忧郁寂寞).

Invariably, they laugh heartily and live an optimistic life in confidence. (16)

Under a first impression, this is a rather grandiose description to declare the Mosuo land a feminist utopia. Lamu is an author who strolls between academic research and prose writing, building a career of constructing a harmonious vision of the Mosuo in both the academic and non-academic domains. This passage from Lamu's work could serve as an introductory remark for our exploration of the perpetual tension between scholarly underpinnings and literary representations of the Mosuo.

The question of literary representation comes to the fore in its ambivalent relationship with the political discourse, the bellwether of the ethnographic description of the Mosuo. Sleeboom has pointed out the “nation-centered” approach in China's academic arena— “The inherent handicap of nation-centric social science in attaining national self-knowledge, its tendency to conservatism, its failure to imagine alternative views of the nation and its political predictability” (142). Earlier in the 1980s, anthropological studies as expressive forms of representation merely treated the Mosuo as evidence of primitive alterity based on research that aimed to legitimize the role of the patriarchal center in solidifying social unity. In the recent, more open academic atmosphere, the trope of gender harmony in Mosuo studies is a trend that “imagines alternative views” of the established formulations of the self/other. This chapter deals with how the literary formulation of the Mosuo engages ethnographic perspectives for its own purposes. Towards that end, it is worthwhile to

acknowledge that the reputation of the praiseworthy Mosuo was not developed overnight within the broad Chinese cultural sphere.

1. From “Representational Violence” to the Construction of a Harmonious Mosuo Land

Many of the active participants in the construction of a harmonious image of the Mosuo are scholars from outside of the PRC and those of Mosuo (Naxi) descent. As judged by anthropologist He Zhonghua 和钟华 who herself is a Naxi, the Mosuo matrilineal structure is comprised of the harmony of *yin* and *yang*. The use of the Chinese yin-yang symbol is to express the core of the Mosuo’s matrilineal culture as “gender equality and sexual harmony” (*xingbie pingdeng liangxing hexie* 性别平等两性和谐) (16). She provides a female perspective on the positive female attributes of the Mosuo woman and how the Mosuo matrilineal family, in areas seeing rapid tourism development, may encourage a cooperative household in order to attract business.

Chuan-kang Shih, a Stanford trained anthropologist, condenses his twenty years’ research into the 2010 book *Quest for Harmony—the Moso Tradition of Sexual Union and Family Life*, in which “the notion of household harmony” is regarded as the “supreme value of the [Mosuo] culture” (20). The groundwork for this culturally valued harmony is the Mosuo’s “unusual gender system” (ibid) that values the female as superior despite the influence of Tibetan Buddhism and Han culture. Mosuo

astrology regards the sun as female since, in the words of a local Ddaba, “It is warm. It is bright. It brings about birth and growth to people, to crops, and animals. These are the characteristics of the female. The sun is female. It cannot be male” (Shih 227).¹³⁵ The distinct gender symbolism suggests that Mosuo sexuality can be made into a historical anomaly that signals the presence of a cultural mode running parallel to that of Han culture. According to Shih, the so-called walking marriage of the Mosuo is an “institutionalized sexual union” (73), which he addresses as the Mosuo language has it –“*tisese*.” The union in which a man visits a woman at night and each partner stays with their own matrilineal family bespeaks the uniqueness of the Mosuo culture.

Sociologist Zhou Huashan 周华山 describes the Mosuo society as one that favors female heirs but does not view them as better than the male ones (*Zhongn übu qing nan* 重女不轻男). Coming from materialistic Hong Kong, Zhou spares no efforts in celebrating this pure land of the Mosuo where he finds his Peach Blossom Spring at heart (10). Among so-called “backward” and “ignorant” people, he discovers qualities such as “gender equality and respect” (*liangxing pingdeng huzhong* 两性平等互重), as well as an “independent space for female sexuality” (*n üxing qingyu zizhu kongjian* 女性情欲自主空间) that is absent in a suffocating patriarchal society (12).

¹³⁵ Ddaba is the folk religion of the Mosuo which, according to most studies on the subject, is orally transmitted. In this way, it is different from the Naxi Dongba religion, which transmits religious rites and regulations through pictographic manuscripts. Shih also found that the Mosuo may hold contradictory views on the gender of the sun because of influence from external cultures.

The gender symbolism of sun and moon in Mosuo culture and the norm of female superiority and independency that the scholars delineate stand out, to say the least, as an alternative to patriarchal Confucianism. As Shih puts it, *tisese* is considered “the subject of ideological adversity from the larger society” (4). As a result, within the dominant Han Chinese cultural context, the images of the Mosuo can act as tool for “liberating” the minds of the majority. Moreover, the current socialist incarnation of Confucianism stressing harmony in diversity gives room for the Mosuo to demonstrate their difference or for external forces to sensationalize the difference.

In China, the construction of the harmonious Mosuo culture is an intellectual undertaking ardently advocated by ethnic Mosuo/Naxi literati, who, in a sense, could be an intellectual arm of the state’s discourse on social harmony. Yet this is far from being the whole story. The Mosuo are described as a harmonious community in a 1990 anthology of their folk literature, *Yunnan Mosuo ren minjian wenxue ji cheng* 云南摩梭人民间文学集成, which was compiled as part of an official ethno-literature preservation project. This discussion of Mosuo harmony was a rarity at the time. By the end of the 1990s, the “Workshop on the Marriage and Morality of the Mosuo” (Mosuo ren hunyin daode yantao hui 摩梭人婚姻道德研讨会) was held at Yunnan University in an attempt to prevent the customs of the Mosuo from being viewed pejoratively (Xiao 105). The academic negotiation of the contradictory images of the

Mosuo signals that the Mosuo were gaining opportunities to strengthen their ethnic pride.

Lamu categorized the self perception of the Mosuo into two stages in terms of how it is related with the knowledge produced by power (“Naxi xue lun ji” 107). He states that the position of the Mosuo has undergone two rounds of fixation and changeover (*jiaose dingwei he zhuanhuan* 角色定位和转换). By the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Mosuo had a strong aspiration to “catch up” with the more “progressive” Han *minzu* and had complied with the central government’s measures to minimize and eliminate diversity. Since the reform and opening-up, their ethnic consciousness (*minzu yishi* 民族意识) was awakened through reaffirmation of the vitality of the matrilineal family and *tisese*. Moreover, increased cultural encounters facilitated by tourism continue to enhance the confidence of the Mosuo in the merit of their native culture.

The changing self-perception experienced by the Mosuo highlights the interconnectivity of collective Mosuo self-knowledge and state ideology. During the People’s Republic of China’s ethnic classification project of the 1950s, the scaling of minorities along five-stage evolutionary stages — from primordial communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism to socialism — intensified the persisting notion that peripheral peoples are ancient and stagnant. The ethnic minorities were relegated to lower levels of socioeconomic development than that of the purportedly more advanced Han. Moreover, the ethnographic perspectives on the Mosuo heavily drew

on Friedrich Engels' 1884 book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* which adopts theory from Lewis H. Morgan's 1877 book *Ancient Society* with regard to the five-stage evolution of the family, each stage of which pairs up with a corresponding evolutionary pattern of social development.¹³⁶ Engels' book, which carries forward Karl Marx's ideas, is "a cornerstone of historiography and the definitive guideline for ethnography" (Shih 8).

Anthropological investigation in the Mosuo region started in the 1960s and the Han researchers' discovery of the Mosuo *tisese* "was considered a piece of crucial living evidence to reinforce the validity of the Marxist grand theory of social evolution" (Shih 7). In ethnographic studies published in the 1980s, the Mosuo were referred to as "living fossils of family evolution" (Yan 14). Anthropologist Yan Ruxian 严汝娴 likens the walking marriage relationship to how the Upper Cavemen led their lives (21). In other words, she considers the system as the residue of matriclan, a form of primitive communism, in which production and consumption were organized collectively based on matrilineal consanguinity. For the purpose of consolidating the truthfulness of the grand theory, the ethnographic works exaggerate the cases of consanguineous marriage and group marriage among the Mosuo. The methodology and thus the reliability of those studies are now questioned in, for example, Zhou Huashan's (67) and Lamu's ("Naxi xue lun ji" 98) work, which

¹³⁶ The first stage, or the consanguine family, "was founded upon the intermarriage of brothers and sisters, own and collateral, in a group," in the words of Morgan (qtd. in Shih 7). The second stage sees the emergence of a barrier between brother and sister. The third is the syndyasmian or pairing family, followed by the patriarchal and monogamian family.

echoes Sleeboom's critique of "the practice of tailoring research questions to items fit for national policy design" in China's social science research (143).

Moreover, the Mosuo's changing self-perception implies "cultural wounds," as their ethnic dignity has been severely damaged by misrepresentations conditioned and informed by the ideological parameter. The book *Shoushang de chenmo zhe* 受伤的沉默者 (*The Wounded People of Silence*) by Yang Lifen 杨丽芬 has a subtitle, *The Phenomenon of Cultural Research in the Eyes of a Mosuo Woman*. The book's autobiographical narration provides a trenchant criticism of the arbitrary and precarious cultural conclusions drawn from the external studies of the Mosuo, which became the sources of discrimination she experienced in her daily life. An expression she uses to describe these conclusions is worth quoting here: "*Doushi xuezhe re de huo* 都是学者惹的祸" meaning "all are the blunders stirred up by scholars" (129). Now Lamu calls for the faults to be rectified, straightened out, and redressed (*zhengming, qingli, pingfan* 正名 清理 平反) ("Naxi xue lun ji" 99). Lamu's comments bring to our attention the important role played by the Mosuo under the researcher's gaze in shaping the literary heterotopia. The following is my continued delineation of the prominent motifs, excluding that of the "living fossil," which may fall into the category of either the blunders committed by scholars or the scholars' efforts in making revisions that then might pervade the literary representation of the Mosuo.

1.1 A Society without Fathers or Husbands?

First of all, it is worth pointing out that Rock is now favorably remembered because of a selective memory of his record describing the cultural terrain of Yongning. There seems to be collective amnesia surrounding Rock's comment that the "moral standard of Yung-ning is anything but high" as it is a place where "the reverse of Chinese marital relation prevails among the lay population" and "the word father is unknown" (391).¹³⁷ In the biography of Rock composed by He Jiangyu 和匠宇 and He Laoyu 和镑宇, the authors interpret this statement to mean "the Yongning Mosuo have a high standard of morality," a misunderstanding that is commensurate with their positive evaluation of Rock. The unspoken words in the virtual memorial plaque for Rock reinforce the prejudices that the Mosuo encountered in Chinese classical documents, thus suggesting that the Mosuo we know are abstract and can only be made sense of through texts. Cai Hua's study, *A Society without Fathers or Husbands: the Na of China*, first published in French in 1997, shows a penchant for referentially connecting the Mosuo to the sexual practices of the Southwest "barbarians" as mentioned in ancient books. Moreover, Cai indiscriminately cites hearsay from Marco Polo, who wrote about how a native of what is today's southwest China is said to have readily shared his wife with guests (22-23). Without analyzing the differences between this practice and *tisese*, Cai

¹³⁷ This is not to rule out the possibility that there are scholars who have paid attention to Rock's concern with the morality of the Mosuo. .

presents this story as evidence that the Mosuo are sexually perverted and unchanging.¹³⁸

The perceived contribution of Cai Hua's work does not lie so much in its role as the first systematic introduction of Mosuo customs to the Western world as in its conception of *tisese* as an antithesis to the presumed universality of monogamous, heterosexual marriage, now that "marriage can no longer be considered the only possible institutionalized mode of sexual behavior" (474). Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to say that widespread knowledge of the existence of this most unusual kinship system had significant effects. Shih advocates the rewriting of textbooks to accommodate the discovery. This rewriting actually happened, though probably not as a response to Shih's call, in the newest 2012 edition of *Culture Counts: a Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. The chapter titled "Marriage, Family, and Kinship" is prefaced by an exceptional case of "a society without marriage: the Na of China" (152). Now, according to the textbook, the statement "marriage is a central structure in the formation of families and the linkage between wider relations" is only true for "almost all societies" (151).

Cai Hua describes the Na sexual "visit" as "furtive" (185), opportunistic, and free from any moral conscience. Cai does not use the term *tisese* that was adopted by Zhou and Shih, and instead writes that "the traditional mode of sexual life practiced by the Na is called *nana s é' é'* in which *nana* carries the extra meaning of being

¹³⁸ Song Enchang's 1976 article associates the story told by Marco Polo with the Mosuo. As a result, Cai may have drawn his inspiration in this regard from such ethnographies.

furtive and *s é é* means “walking back and forth” (185). Moreover, Cai Hua describes Mosuo children as born from “this sexual commerce” (20) of *nana s é é*. He emphatically delivers his discovery, claiming that “No term exists in this terminology for relatives by marriage” (149). In other words, there are no terms in the Mosuo language for “husband,” “father,” and “in-laws.”

Though openly criticizing social evolutionary theory, the undertone of Cai’s book is not so different from that of works produced within the Marxist theoretical framework. Among such works is Song Enchang’s 宋恩常’s 1976 article on how the Mosuo tradition exemplifies the residues of group marriage, in which the Mosuo are said to not know or have any need to know who their fathers are. The delineation of Mosuo social connections from nomenclature alone may generate partial or inaccurate knowledge, in that the lack of a counterpart of the term “father” does not necessarily mean that there is no role played by the male progenitor in childcare. Recent Mosuo studies center on deconstructing the preconception that those whose practices diverge from the patriarchal norms are inferior or backward. Their arguments hold that the Mosuo language does indeed contain a word or words for father,¹³⁹ thus denouncing

¹³⁹ For instance, Zhou Huashan points out that A Da 阿达 and A Bo 阿博 could mean father and papa respectively but are words that are rarely used. Instead, A Wu 阿乌 i.e. maternal uncle is a more common term to address father to avoid estrangement and contradiction between father and maternal uncle, when the latter actually takes on the role of caring for the children, as well as between “fathers” if siblings in a household have different fathers (86-87). He points out that the role of fathers is diminished in the Mosuo society, and a father’s involvement in childcare has a tendency to increase in places that are more economically developed.

the claim that the Mosuo are “without fathers” as a “cultural misreading” (*wenhua wudu* 文化误读) (H. Zhou 68).¹⁴⁰

Criticizing *A Society without Fathers or Husbands*, anthropologist Clifford Geertz throws out a list of questions that deserves our attention, asking “Can all this really be true? No-fault sexuality? Multiple partners? No jealousy, no recriminations, no in-laws? Gender equality? A life full of assignations? It sounds like a hippie dream or a Falwell nightmare” (3). The utopian essentialities questioned by Geertz hint at “the poetics and politics” of the anthropological representation, which, to various degrees, resonates with the literary imagination of the Mosuo. My study views the literary construction of the Mosuo heterotopia, or the Country of Women, as a process of compromising, negotiating or even contesting some of Geertz’s queries.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider the extent to which Cai drags his “cultural baggage” along with him to decipher the Mosuo, or to consider whether this is because intellectual interpolation is unavoidably dulled through the mediation of previous texts. Clearly, it was a thorny path from the views expressed by the title of the book *A Society without Fathers or Husbands* to Zhou Huashan asking the question *Wu fu wu fu de guodu?* 无父无夫的国度? (*A Country without Fathers or Husbands?*). How different is the effusive celebration of the harmonious Mosuo society from those accounts that demonstrate Mosuo divergence from the norms? The

¹⁴⁰ Zhou Huashan attributes the “cultural misreading” to the researchers’ incompetency in the Mosuo language and their dependence on some unreliable translators at the time. He also talks about the possibility that some researchers may have made generalized statements based on rare instances (67-85).

question mark in Zhou's title is indicative of a concerted effort to debunk the notion of *tisese* as the core of the Mosuo culture. If Cai's work and some Chinese ethnographies reflect anxiety about diversity, the studies on the harmonious Mosuo community have turned over a new leaf, presenting an aspiration to acknowledge the value of difference. It is suggestive of a trend to de-sensualize and moralize the Mosuo practice, or to redress the grievances of the Mosuo by emphasizing that *tisese* is not sexual promiscuity or sexual liberation in the sense condemned by conventional morality.

The question in the title *Wu fu wu fu de guodu?* is partly addressed by Zhou's discovery that allusions to sexual matters are not tolerable within the matrilineal household, which is a significant contribution in remolding the Mosuo's cultural image. Zhou considers the "culture of shyness" (*haixiu wenhua* 害羞文化) as the main part of the moral principles of Mosuo culture.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the "culture of shyness" provides an explanation for the ascribed furtive characteristics of *tisese*. The young man's practice of "going out late and coming back early" when he meets his lover intends to avoid confrontation with the elders in the two households for fear of making them embarrassed or uncomfortable. That no dating practice is allowed during the daytime or in public serves to show respect to the aged (158). Now scholars, in and outside of China, such as He Zhonghua and Siobhán M. Mattison, argue that *tisese* shall be seen as a cultural survival choice for the sake of drawing benefits from

¹⁴¹ There are other scholars, including Cai Hua, who have noticed this cultural phenomenon among the Mosuo, but did not articulate and value it in the way Zhou has.

the matrilineal family's cohesion and affinity of aggregation (*nei ju li* 内聚力) (Z. He 62), used by the Mosuo to adapt to an inhospitable geographical environment. The argument destabilizes the grand theory of Marxist "unilineal evolutionism."

Now the term "harmony" has gained momentum in Mosuo studies and representation. Zhou notes that "Ami" i.e. mother is the core symbol of the Mosuo culture, or a collective unconscious, and the common phrase "we are all your mothers" is representative of a society of harmony and sharing in which children are cared for by all the maternal aunts. Lamu gives a vivid analogy, explaining how the youth accompany the aged like stars circling the moon, like flowers surrounding a big tree ("Zou jin nü'er guo" 11). He crystallizes the characteristics of the Mosuo family as harmoniousness and amicability (*hemu* 和睦), respecting the old and loving the young (*zunlao aiyou* 尊老爱幼), and caring for the old and the sick (23). Those descriptions remind us of the utopian vision of the Great Harmony, where "people did not only treat their own parents as parents, and not just their own children as children. They saw to it that the aged found a place where they could die (in peace), that adults found a place where they could work, and the young could grow up (without interference). Widowers and widows, orphans and the childless and also the sick were all fed (by the community)" (Bauer 83).¹⁴² Scholars such as He Zhonghua, Lamu and Zhou Huashan, all agree that the Mosuo model of family can solve social problems

¹⁴² This is the translation of "故，人不独亲其亲、不独子其子，使老有所终、壮有所用、幼有所长、矜寡孤独废疾者皆有所养。" The concept also echoes Mengzi's idealist "老吾老以及人之老，幼吾幼以及人之幼" (People take care of their own aged parents and extend the same care to other aged people; People take care of one's own children and extend the same care to other children).

such as providing for elders and marriage crises. As they transition from “a society without fathers or husbands” to an exemplary harmonious community in cultural imagination, the Mosuo see a chance to be no longer coded in discriminatory terms.

Needless to say, the harmonious Mosuo in the recent cultural representation boost their ethnic pride and shake a sense of uncertainty over whether the nature of their culture is “backward” or “progressive.” It is noteworthy that there is no crystal clear turning point in the nature of the representation of the Mosuo as might be suggested by the two stages of Mosuo self-perception categorized by Lamu.

Admiration for the harmonious Mosuo community may start to remedy the Mosuo’s cultural wounds, yet does not completely shield them from the old, stereotypical ways of representation. That is to say, different views are coexisting and even overlapping and, specifically, the deployment of the Mosuo in literature showcases the complexity and variability of the Mosuo representation. That being said, it is arguable that the literary representations are united through the coherent theme of the Mosuo as sexually different, which invariably welcomes moral judgments, positive or negative. The bottom line is a fundamentally dichotomous perspective in which the other is defined by virtue of their contrast with the self.

1. 2 The Literary Imagination of the Mosuo

Fiction and autobiography that suggest ways of conceiving and structuring the self-other relationship is based upon, promoted by, and may, in turn, impact the

particular academic discourse. Inheriting an ethnographic outlook, the subtext of the literary imagination of the Mosuo is often a cross-cultural comparison, in which the Mosuo sexuality has the focal function of infusing difference with meaning. In the literary imagination, the Country of Women becomes a mythical space, a heterotopia. Yi-fu Tuan has categorized mythical space as either being at the periphery of the “empirically known” area or a conceptualized stage on which people practice the “localized values” (“Space and Place” 86).¹⁴³ The heterotopia of the Country of Women is a fine blend of the two categories.

The Mosuo are the mythologized other since their culture helps formulate criteria in defining normality and “perversion” in a society. A key element in the sexuality-saturated representation of the Mosuo is a preoccupation with labeling the Mosuo as morally degenerate from a Han point of view. To expose the cultural scars of the Mosuo, Lamu has provided evidence that they have been wronged in literary representation (“Naxi xue lun ji”), some of which we can legitimately call a sort of “representational violence.”¹⁴⁴ Such representation, aiming to achieve a degree of mystification, devotes energy to producing voluptuous descriptions for the sake of the reader’s relish in a libidinated space of otherness.

¹⁴³ Tuan defines “mythical space” as follows: “In the one, mythical space is a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known; it frames pragmatic space. In the other it is the spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities.”

¹⁴⁴ This is an expression used in Schick’s description of the “xenological discourse” of colonialism (101).

To prepare for our analysis of *The Remote Country of Women*, I single out a 2009 novel, *Mosuo mima* (摩梭密码 *The Mosuo Code*), from the flurry of recent Mosuo-related publications for brief examination.¹⁴⁵ The novel is replete with thrilling incidents set in the 1940s that, at first sight, may not irritate even a scrupulous reader. Under closer examination, it becomes clear that the book is a conflation of gender and ethnic stereotypes. The novel starts with a scene in which a Mosuo girl, Zhuoma 卓玛, is raped, which is intended to provoke revulsion towards the three male rapists and define Zhuoma's sexuality as nothing but pure and vulnerable. The three oversexed Han Chinese are vicious and particularly threatening to the minority woman, who becomes the passive victim of men's lust, an enticing object of desire. The description not only shores up traditional gender roles by assigning to the Mosuo woman the role of the weak. Moreover, the novel features fantasies of a destructive female character. The promiscuous character is the dangerous temptress who preys on and leads men astray, and she is then punished with venereal disease.¹⁴⁶ In all, the book attests to the extraordinarily compelling trope of the sexualized female body in the literary imagination of the Mosuo, or in other words, the objectification of the woman as an eroticized and ravaged body. The conspicuous ending of the novel assigns each protagonist a cadre position in the local

¹⁴⁵ It is obvious that the title capitalizes on that of *Zangdi mima* (*The Tibet Code*) due to *Zangdi mima*'s popularity.

¹⁴⁶ The book also renders the Mosuo as a society of hierarchy, offering an analysis that contrasts with Shih's comment that traditional Mosuo society is "status blind" (3).

government of the newly liberated Mosuo region of the PRC, associating the Mosuo history with the discursive production in which the CCP acts as the savior of the minority people.

The novel is one of the many that, on the one hand, purport to revise a preposterous myth, yet, on the other hand, deliberately construct the Mosuo as sexual others. As this chapter will demonstrate, the images of the Mosuo exhibit far too much variability to permit simple generalizations. Therefore it is merely potentially instructive to distill from *Mosuo mima* particular subsets in the repertory of the Mosuo representation. Depending on the context, the Mosuo can be vulnerable and/or seductive, alluring and/or threatening. The autobiographical voices of the Mosuo, such as that of aforementioned Yang Lifen, tend to address the evident disparity between the representation and actual experiences. The much criticized Yang Erche Namu's autobiographical books, which will be discussed later, show the cultural variation that a Mosuo represents. Namu both subscribes to and creatively revises the stereotypical Mosuo image.

As studies of the Mosuo become more diverse, the unquestioning reflectivity of the ethnographic outlook comes into question, since no single work can enjoy a monopoly over definitions of the Mosuo ethnicity. The popular imagination of the Mosuo is not only a result of the dissemination of "scientific knowledge" or discourse. A few powerful voices from the Mosuo community, especially those that speak from the perspective of an insider such as Lamu and Namu, redefine the Mosuo as "a

community brimming with harmony” (Lamu, “Naxi xue lun ji” 1) while they also contemplate the coexistence of “harmony and restlessness” (*zaodong* 躁动) (181) in the ever-changing socio-cultural milieu.

In all, the representation of the Mosuo creates a spatial myth of heterotopia, in which gender and especially sexuality are the defining essence. Foucault has argued that the power machinery defines the sexuality of the margin not for the sake of suppressing but for creating “analytical, visible and permanent reality” (“The History of Sexuality” 44). This comment may readily apply to how variegated tropes in relation to the Mosuo sexuality induce heterogeneity that works against the Han collective identity. Yet, in its goal of constructing difference, this trope plays polyvalent roles. In emphasizing internal Orientalism, or the orientalizing glances cast by the Chinese majority, we may leave a blind spot unnoticed in those artistic representations of otherness: the utopian impetus implicated in writings about the Mosuo. Is there a meeting ground for the disparagement of and the celebration of the Mosuo in the literary heterotopia? Let us go one step further: is there a possibility for an articulation of the power relation in the titillating accounts of *tisese*?

As demonstrated by *Mosuo mima*, when erotic images and public portrayals of sexuality are now integrated components of the media, the Mosuo way of life is still consistently eliciting a fetishistic desire from cultural producers who strive to fulfill social aspirations for difference. Yet earlier during the Cultural Revolution, a time seeing no toleration of heterogeneities, the political center aimed to exclude perceived

aberrant sexualities. This is an important theme in the 1986 novel *The Remote Country of Women*. Though the novel uses sexuality as the principal signifier of alterity, Bai Hua does not indulge in description of the sexual digressions of the imagined other. Mosuo culture is a context for staging intercultural contact and an alternate configuration of harmony. Again, the representation of Mosuo sexuality has more nuanced shades, and, above all, Bai Hua's use of the expressive trope of harmony to describe the Mosuo predates the state and the intellectual discourse.

2. Unrequited Love for the Remote Country of Women

Bai Hua's novel *The Remote Country of Women* is a creative rewriting of the expression of the masculinist center's possession of the feminine margin. The novel describes two parallel spaces, one replete with drab and hypocritical slogans and the political platitudes particular to the Cultural Revolution, another cut off from the troubles of the outside world. The former space invites disillusionment and trauma for a young man named Liang Rui 梁锐, while the latter space sets the scene for the enchanting coming of age story of a Mosuo girl named Sunamei 苏娜美. The heterotopia of the Mosuo acts an allegorical antithesis of the barbaric persecution of intellectuals that takes place during the Cultural Revolution. The two worlds nearly merge at the end of the story, when the male protagonist meets and marries Sunamei, only to find that the boundary between their two worlds is irresolvable after all.

The Remote Country of Women affirms the uncrossable line between center and periphery, but it may not conform to Wu Qingyun's view that the Country of Women is Bai Hua's idealist vision for the future (130). The paradigm of heterotopia, and in this case, the construction of a "sexualized space of otherness" discloses patriarchal repression.¹⁴⁷ That being said, the novel does not aim to remedy the masculinist neglect of the marginalized, the female or the minority; it instead reproduces the power relations of the self/other binary.

Bai Hua (b. 1930) is known as the screenwriter of a 1954 film, *Shanjian ling xiang mabang lai* 山间铃响马帮来 (*The Coming of a Train of Horses Ringing among the Mountains*). This was the first minority film in PRC history and the media lauded it as a Red Classic (*hongse jingdian* 红色经典) in recent years. The train of horses carrying goods used to be the common means of conducting trade with the highland population in Southwest China, and the film refers to one such train that was organized by the liberation army to help the Miao 苗 and Hani 哈尼 villages. The film celebrates the solidarity of the ethnic minority people in the newly established People's Republic of China, who cooperate with the liberation army to combat the bandit troupes made up of the remaining forces of the defeated Nationalists along the border.

¹⁴⁷ This is to borrow an expression from Irvin Schick (65), who uses a "sexualized space of otherness" to indicate to "spaces whose sexuality is interpreted, with the right ideological 'spin' to produce deviants from the norms so as to justify the colonial course."

Bai Hua attended the Central Plains Field Army in 1947. In early 1950, when his army marched into Yunnan, he received warm treatment from the local minority people. Many of his works testify to his positive sentiments towards Yunnan and its people. Specifically, *Shanjian lingxiang mabang lai* betrays an intellectual's optimism for the future of the People's Republic, an optimistic vision that would soon prove to be fragile. In 1957, with the expansion of the anti-Rightist struggle, Bai Hua became a target and consequently endured long years of persecution.

Bai Hua is known for his controversial screenplay *Ku lian* 苦恋 (*Unrequited Love/Bitter Love*), the theme of which reverberates in *The Remote Country of Women*. The two works share a concern for the politically-inflicted alienation of the Chinese intellectuals. The newly established People's Republic of China was like a magnet drawing overseas intellectuals back to aid in the construction of their beloved motherland. *Ku lian* features the fictional story of one such returning intellectual, an artist who originally left China in the 1940's to flee Nationalist Party arrest and later made a name for himself in the West. Still, like many other intellectuals, the artist's devotion to his home country is requited with cruel mental and physical treatment during the Cultural Revolution. The controversy over *Ku lian* centers on a question posed by the artist's daughter: "Papa, you love this country (*guojia* 国家), love this country so bitterly... but does this country love you?"¹⁴⁸ Note that the screenplay deliberately differentiates the protagonist's love for his motherland (*zuguo* 祖国)

¹⁴⁸ The daughter asks "您爱这个国家，苦苦地恋着这个国家.....可这个国家爱您吗？"when she has made up her mind to marry an overseas Chinese and live abroad.

from the politically and geographically defined *guojia* that appears in his daughter's question (Goldman 90). Towards the end of the film, the artist is dying in the wilds, using the last of his energy to crawl on all fours, inscribing a big question mark in the snow.

Ku lian ignited a nationwide discussion. The 1980 film *Taiyang he ren* (太阳和人 *The Sun and Man*) based on the screenplay failed to pass censorship and caught the attention of China's top leaders.¹⁴⁹ In a speech delivered on July 17, 1981, Deng Xiaoping singled out *Ku lian* as a sign of "the emergence of bourgeois liberalization." Deng was alarmed by the film's ability to besmirch socialism and the Party (C. Li 24). Deng asked "if you do not love socialist New China led by the Communist Party, what motherland do you love" (Goldman 95)? In this campaign against an individual piece of work, it was fortunate that Maoist-type struggle was not resurrected. In his July speech, Deng reinforced the spirit of Mao's Yan'an talk, claiming that literature should express an optimistic attitude towards the present and future (Goldman 97).

Apparently, *Ku lian* does not show enough faith in the socialist future, as it is too engrossed in the traumatic memory of the Cultural Revolution. At least this was Bai Hua's claim during his public self-criticism, which symbolically drew a period on the

¹⁴⁹ In March 1981, Deng Xiaoping gave the instruction to criticize the screenplay in order to uphold the Four Cardinal Principles (*Si xiang jiben yuanze* 四项基本原则). The campaign against Bai Hua unfolded through a series of articles in the *Liberation Army Daily* (*Jiefangjun Bao* 解放军报) denouncing Bai as "unpatriotic." The campaign filled many intellectuals with trepidation, but to an even larger extent, with repulsion and anger, as it awoke unpleasant memories of the past. In an effort to control the situation, Hu Yaobang warned, "Be mindful that the Cultural Revolution had begun with criticism of Wu Han and his play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*" (Goldman 92).¹⁴⁹ In spite of Hu's protection, the fire of accusation against Bai Hua was not immediately extinguished.

debate on the screenplay. At the early stage of the reform and opening, the sensitivity towards ideological matters in the literary realm reflects how the thawing phase following the political freeze could not readily accommodate reformist voices. Yet the debate over *Ku lian* predicated a new round of ideological relaxation in the 1980s. Thanks to a more tolerant environment, *The Remote Country of Women* could be published in 1986, in which Bai Hua finds a space for contestation on the margin of the multi-ethnic nation state.

The heterotopia of the Mosuo provided a speaking position for Bai Hua from which he could avoid being charged with advocating bourgeois liberalism as he was when he wrote *Ku lian*. Rather, the primitive is a detour for the narrative critique of self. This time, Bai Hua contemplates the intellectuals' identity through the construction of alterity with an awareness of the importance of gender and sexuality in establishing the self and the other. The fountain house of the novel's reflection on the self is the most primitive other in the large garden of the *zuguo*; and the freedom enjoyed by the other celebrated in the novel is not established through imported Western ideas that may be denounced as "spiritual pollution." That being said, the novel still does not show an "optimistic attitude towards the present and future." Or in other words, Bai Hua's utopian impetus does not present the utopian liberation promised by Mosuo culture as an attainable liberatory future for the self.

2. 1 Bai Hua's Resort to the Ethnographic Mosuo

In *The Remote Country of Women*, the Mosuo sexuality is an organizing instrument which aims at “the infusion of the human body with socially significant meanings, that is, to its ‘textualization’” (Schick 59). According to Wu (120), Bai Hua had read Zhan Zhengxu 詹承绪 et al.’s work: *Yongning naxi zu de azhu hunyin he muxi jiating* 永宁纳西族的阿注婚姻和母系家庭 (*Yongning Naxi Nationality's Azhu Marriage and Matrilineal Family* 1980), as well as Yan Ruxian 严汝娴 and Song Zhaolin 宋兆麟’s *Yongning naxi zu de muxi zhi* 永宁纳西族的母系制 (*Yongning Naxi Nationality's Matrilineality*). The textualization of the novel, or the ethnographic foundation of Bai Hua’s literary imagination, informs the hypothesis regarding the “living fossil” standing almost on the fore-end of the linear progression of society as representative of the Han’s past. The 1980’s Cultural Fever of looking to the other for artistic inspiration expresses intellectuals’ aspiration to recover a lost tradition. Though Bai Hua maps out the Mosuo’s spatial as well as temporal distance, the remote past in *The Remote Country of Women* is hardly conceivable as a memorable and retrievable past of the Han. Extant primitivism does not assume a nostalgic air but endows Bai Hua with a capacity to conjure up the sanctity of humanity.

The Remote Country of Women does not stand out as an instrument for validating and perpetuating the power imbalance between center and periphery. In the novel, the way in which the Mosuo are used to mirror the absurdities of the Cultural

Revolution is incontrovertible proof that the novel portrays the actions of people who engage in the movement as lamentable and despicable. Bai Hua's ethnographic approach to the Mosuo is unique, because in the mid 1980s, the subject of Mosuo culture had yet to be fruitfully pursued in the non-academic domain. The book adheres to the 1980's self-reflective trend in the cultural terrain, but it is also a "micro-practice" in its attitude towards sexuality in a time in which monolithic suspicion of the morality of *tisese* was the norm.

Based on correspondence with Bai Hua about his intention of constructing a "feminist utopia," Wu notes that Bai Hua does not consider his *Country of Women* a utopia, "insisting that he is a realist writer and that the *Country of Women* that he wrote about actually exists" (193). Wu's argument for the utopian nature of the novel is based on its idealization of the land through "artful selection" from those two Mosuo ethnographies, or as Wu terms them, the "scientific investigation" (ibid).¹⁵⁰ By saying that his book is realistic, Bai Hua refers implicitly to the "scientific legitimacy" gained from the ethnographic publications and his own empirical experience in the region about which he writes. Bai Hua paid two visits to the Lugu

¹⁵⁰ According to Wu, Bai Hai portrays the traits of the Mosuo "truthfully", only purposefully downplaying or covering up the "unfavorable" side of, to quote Wu's example, women's "overworking" and men's "psychological repression" in the region (193). Moreover, the "scientific investigation" of the Mosuo published in the 1980s would become the source of bemusement and debate in the years to come as mentioned above. The outcome of ethnographic research that started in the 1960s was initially released "under anonymous collective authorship for inner circulation" during the early stage of the Cultural Revolution. Only in the 1980s, the publications on the Mosuo reached a wide audience (Shih 10).

Lake region in 1985 and 1986 (Wu 193).¹⁵¹ He recognized that the ethnographically constructed Mosuo derived from the real Mosuo is a valid tool for making sense of the lived reality for both the Mosuo and the Han. Thinking from another angle, it is Bai Hua's intention to disclose the true nature of reality, which he delivers in an aesthetic of black humor through sarcastically presenting absurdity as normality during the Cultural Revolution. Confirming the novel's realism, Bai Hua emphasized that humanism is an embodied experience of the Mosuo.

If we accept Jameson's view that "utopia is the task for the future" ("Of Islands and Trenches" 3), we have to ask whether Bai Hua envisions the future of humanity through the model of the matrilineal Mosuo. Bai Hua rebelled against patriarchal institutions through a supposedly realist novel, yet the realistic facade of the novel may have indeed blurred the utopian nature of the uninhibited land, a land releasing desires for sexual freedom. In our attempt to fully comprehend the novel, heterotopia comes to our rescue as a literary model that is not future oriented. In the heterotopia of the Mosuo, faraway in space and time, all forces that inhibit the liberation of humanity are impaired. On top of that, heterotopia has the ability to relate to the reality of living in several locations at particular historical moments. The construction of the heterotopia in the novel is a play of space through the juxtaposition, incorporation and exclusion of the different spaces, namely, the Cultural Revolution and the matrilineal country of the Mosuo. Except for their brief encounters in the start

¹⁵¹ Wu points out that the Taiwan edition has picture illustrations of his "field study."

and the end of the novel, the two spaces occupy alternating chapters. The parallel nature of the two worlds causes the impression that they not only align with each other but may have an antithetical relationship.

It is worth differentiating and qualifying the spaces described in the novel. A consideration of the relationships between the layered spaces is crucial to an understanding of the “politics” of spatiality. The organization of the multiple spaces is a reordering of the status of privilege attached to the civilized and the primitive. The novel shifts the ground of hierarchy by assigning an equal amount of the narrative to the Mosuo world as to the “civilized” world. Moreover, the parallel structure is a projection of how we conceive the remoteness between the self and the other. In *The Remote Country of Women*, the difference of ethnicity is discriminately registered in the process by which the reader leaves a certain space/chapter and enters another. As bell hooks¹⁵² writes, “‘the politics of location’ necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practices to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision” (145). The play of spatialities in the novel is metaphoric. The irregularities across and within the different spaces are both an indulgence in and a radical rewriting of the opposing forces of Han chauvinism and Mosuo primitivism.

In the particular case of *The Remote Country of Women*, though description of sexuality remains key to creating an image of the Mosuo in a space of eternal stasis, it

¹⁵² The pseudonym of Gloria Watkins.

deviates from the conventional notion that a society's capacity for exerting control over sexuality is a gauge by which to evaluate the level of civilization and consequently mark the sexually different other as backward. As Freud states in his *Civilization and its Discontents*, civilization is like a double-edged sword, since it requires repression of instinct while pulling humans out of the threat of aggressive and unregulated sexuality. The undercurrent of the novel follows the ethnographic approach of evolutionism, yet it does not treat the Mosuo as mired in morality. The novel seems to echo a theory that poses an exception to the Freudian rule: "a wildly shared, unexamined belief that 'uncivilized' people, that is, primitives and certain marginal members of the lower classes, are exempt from the repression of sexuality and control of aggression" (Torgovnick 228).¹⁵³ Therefore, Bai Hua's choice of regarding the Mosuo culture as alluring is a culturally and politically deviant one. Moreover, the ambivalence in Bai Hua's depiction appears in the way that the Mosuo world is rendered enchanting yet inaccessible.

2.2 The Mosuo's Encounter with the Cultural Revolution

The first convergence between the two spaces in *The Remote Country of Women* takes place in the summer of 1975, when a team sent by the Central Committee comes to "clear up the Mosuo mess" (6) around the Lake Xienami (谢娜米), as Lugu Lake is

¹⁵³ The paring of the two theories can be found in Schick (168).

called in the Mosuo language.¹⁵⁴ The narrative contains quotations from Zhang Chunqiang 张春桥 and Yao Wenyuan's 姚文元 article as providing the team's guiding question: "in China, the most advanced and most revolutionary socialist country in the world, why haven't we rooted out this most primitive, most backward, and most barbarous lifestyle?" (6). The Mosuo are wondering if this time the soldiers will "drag" (*la* 拉) the Cultural Revolution into the region (Bai 5). The Red Guards had visited Lake Xienami previously, at which time local women had used their armbands as diapers, whose satin quality was denounced for its lack of absorbency. In the heterotopia of the Mosuo, the Cultural Revolution is nothing more than "laughable and terrifying anecdotes" of the outside only to be told to locals by the horse drivers (3).

In the novel, a lecture given by team leader Gu Shuxian 顾淑贤, the director of the Provincial Women's Federation (*Sheng fulian* 省妇联), resonates with Yan Ruxian's ethnographic research: "Only cavemen living ten thousand years ago had lives like yours, so chaotic that a child knows his mother but not his father. This is the residue of group marriage" (8). To rescue the Mosuo from the "stone age" of moral deficiency so that they can merge with the modernized center, the team forces the Mosuo to live a "decent, monogamous, legitimate life" (*ibid*). A young woman named Bima 比玛, a Communist Party member, defends the harmony of the Mosuo society by saying,

¹⁵⁴ The quotations of the novel are from a translation by Wu and Beebee unless otherwise indicated. Bai Hua's original Chinese version is used in some cases to refer to Bai Hua's specific choice of words.

“I don’t see why the members of the central committee should give a damn about what’s inside the man’s pants or under a woman’s skirt! We have been leading a decent, peaceful life, not a speck of chaos in it. No Mosuo has ever committed a crime, and none of us ever goes to court or pick a fight with her neighbor. Why are you forcing us to accept marriage? Why are you trying to separate us from our own kin and break up our matrilineal families” (9)?

Bima’s defense is in vain, and Gu threatens that men and women who “sleep together” without the marriage certificate will receive reduced food rations or be jailed for being “hooligans” (*liumang zui* 流氓罪). The character Bima’s comment represents the beliefs of the author, Bai Hua, who takes a vanguard role in expressing the essential harmony of the Mosuo community.

Moreover, Bima’s defense raises the question of why the Cultural Revolution saw the need to regulate the sexual life of the Mosuo. As Wendy Larson notes, “marriage was conceptualized as one aspect of the revolution” (431) at that time and was thus under the oversight of authority. The socialist state regulates sexuality not only by disseminating knowledge about reproduction, but also through the imposition of certain sexual mores. According to George L. Mosse, the modern nation states regard the classification of normal versus abnormal, especially in terms of sexual behavior, as essential to the security of the nation. It is based on a similar logic that

the socialist state defines a set of morals, which classifies the Mosuo way of life as sexual abnormality that may shake the ground of patriarchal hierarchy.

In the novel, Gu refers to the instruction from the Gang of Four, which singles out the Mosuo tribe as a source of shame for socialist China. Therefore, her talk expresses the ideological foundation of the ethnographic perspectives on the Mosuo, or to some extent, the ideological interpretation of the ethnographically constructed Mosuo. The talk firstly suggests that sexual and cultural differences are overdetermined markers to distinguish the Han from the minorities. Secondly, the center is not solely content with using the Mosuo practice as a tool with which to assure the evolutionist superiority of the Han. The talk points to the authorities' intention to smooth out "sexual abnormality" in favor of the singular norm of "sexual propriety." "The One Husband One Wife movement," as a real historical event, was meant to assimilate the licentious barbarian in the name of modernization.

Quite unexpectedly, Bima's defense loosens "a screw" in the political machine (29) that Gu Shuxian represents. Overwhelmed by a sense of loss, Gu is defeated by the Mosuo, who refuse to "betray" (*weibei* 违背) their own bodies and souls (Bai 27). Gu's temporary victory over the Mosuo primitivism ironically awakens her desire, which had long been repressed. Gu is perplexed by how the defined backwardness of the Mosuo lifestyle coexists with its potential allure. The demeanor of the Mosuo people, which Gu envies, makes a contrast with the irony of the woman's life during the Cultural Revolution. Incidentally, Gu, a woman who is seemingly upholding the

correct political principles, is more threatening to revolutionary principles than the Mosuo are. At face value, Gu has been an exemplary revolutionary, a self-sacrificing and asexual woman cadre. Her self control and austerity is decried as hypocrisy when her “greed, calculation, vanity and ambition” (30) are revealed within the narrative. A political commissar of a school for army dependents, she has built her career on spying on others and reporting any instances of flirtation, adultery or infidelity. Gu is also a character who is shown to be in a repressive marriage arranged by the Party. Her hatred toward her husband who treats her with “a stony indifference and contempt” (31) explains her callous way of dealing with others, as well as her husband’s “sexual problem” (*zuofeng wenti* 作风问题). The Mosuo life leaves “sharp, sensual” images in her mind during her trip to their region. Gu thinks, “According to our social norms, [the Mosuo] should have been cursed as shameless women, yet a queenly pride shone in their eyes” (33). Gu eventually finds herself grabbed by an emergent burning desire that almost destroys her self-control.

After making a trip to the land of the Mosuo, Gu Shuxian returns to the first space from which she came. In the heterotopia, after the team has created a “six month storm” through their enforcement of the marriage movement, the Mosuo “soon consigned the second political encroachment of the civilized world to oblivion” (29). They are a nationality of “*tianzhen lanman*”天真烂漫 (simple and romantic) (Bai 26), who refuse to be restricted by the imposed marriage laws. Those forced into marriage

cannot wait to move back to their matrilineal households when the intrusion of the outsider comes to an end.¹⁵⁵

2.3 Multiple Confinements: the Imprisoned Body & Mind

The dystopian scenario of the Cultural Revolution is born out of the utopianism of the doctrine of the sublimation through asceticism. When saying that Gu Shuxian's body is not only "a screw" but blood and flesh, the novel resonates with Xueping Zhong's argument regarding the metaphorical nature of steel-like revolutionaries in artistic representation. To become steel-like requires one to betray one's own body, as "such a subjectless subjecthood indicates a fear of body made of flesh and blood, a fear that is at the core of the CCP's utopian ideal..." (Zhong 45). Here Zhong's term "utopian subjecthood" (45) calls to mind Ban Wang's study on sublime figures i.e. saintly heroes and heroines in socialist realism. Becoming a "screw" means giving up one's selfhood, becoming just one among many, a nameless member of an undifferentiated plurality of women.

In Foucault's articulation, heterotopia is an "effectively enacted utopia", or in another translation, an "effectively realized utopia" (qtd. in Ahlbäck 160). Then, following this definition, *The Remote Country of Women* demonstrates that the practice of a utopian vision could land on either a utopian or a dystopian scenario.

¹⁵⁵ Here is a brief reference of the 1975-76 "One-Wife-One-Husband Movement". By the time of mid-1976, "424 couples in the Yongning area were forced into registered marriage" (Shih 4). Moreover, Bai Hua's description of the Mosuo defeat of new marriage laws conforms to some historical and anthropological accounts by, such as, Zhou Huashan (104).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712-1778) utopian models as categorized by Judith N.Shklar (44) will shed light on the bifurcated experiences and destinies of heterotopia and the conditions that drive the dissolution of a utopia.¹⁵⁶ Specifically, the Mosuo world bears some resemblance to Rousseau's first two models, "the pure state of nature" and "the happy village."

The first model is Rousseau's speculation on how primitive humans live in rhythm with nature and practice self-interest to attain the purest state of happiness. In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau describes a world that knows no disease or rules, in which sexual encounters are casual and women raise children independently. Rousseau blames marriage for causing oppression and inequality, deeming that long lasting relationships give rise to the battle between natural desires and social expectations.¹⁵⁷ Inspired by Rousseau, we can consider the norms set in the Cultural Revolution as an example of how some are left out while others win when striving to meet the requirements of the state, hinging on qualities that do not matter in nature.

¹⁵⁶ Shklar has drawn on a list of Rousseau's scholarship without providing the reference, thus I will provide my speculations on some possible sources of the three models of utopia based on works by, for example, Alan Soble and Jonathan Marks.

¹⁵⁷ *Sex from Plato to Paglia: a Philosophical Encyclopedia* edited by Alan Soble reconciles the contradictions in Rousseau's notions on human sexuality by suggesting that Rousseau "believed that human sexuality was different in the primordial state of nature than it is among civilized humans. He also maintained that conjugal and familial love are on the whole beneficial forces in the modern bourgeois world, in which the praiseworthy citizenship that characterizes ancient republics like Sparta and Rome is no longer an option..." (939).

In the Mosuo community, marriage is happily nonexistent, thus paving the way for the literary imagination of heterotopia in *The Remote Country of Women*. In the novel, in contrast to the Mosuo way of life, Gu Shuxian must suppress her sexual instinct in an unhappy marriage. Her rise in political position grants her a chance to achieve a sense of superiority over her husband, who is held in an intellectual camp at the time. Though Gu and her husband pretended to be the perfect match, their relationship is characterized by defiance, mental abuse, hatred and ultimately departure. The evilness of monogamy seems apparent when marriage is the tool for social climbing, but not the domain where humanity and love reside.

In the heterotopia of the Mosuo, the uncontrolled sexuality as outlined in Rousseau's first model is modified with the seasoning of some elements from his second model called the unsophisticated village life. An attachment to rustic simplicity and self-sufficiency infiltrates Rousseau's works. In *The Social Contract*, he says that "Among the happiest people in the world, groups of peasants are seen deciding the affairs of State under an oak tree" (qtd. in Marks 79). In *The Remote Country of Women*, sexuality among the Mosuo is not subject to spontaneity and chaos but regulated by their set of rules in a rural setting so that they enjoy happiness and gender equality. The setting's geographical location in reality and its compartmentalization in the fictional structure both assure their immunity to contamination by the world of Gu Shuxian. As a result, we can understand the Mosuo

world created by Bai Hua's pen as a romantic development of the existing ingredients in the repertory of utopian imagination.

The third model of Rousseau's utopian imagining is developed based on Spartan culture which he repeatedly praises in his works such as the *First Discourse* and *The Social Contract*. The model centers around an attempt to temper the conflict between society and nature. In other words, apart from the route of returning to our natural origins, there is an alternative route of utopia blessed with scientific, social and moral advancement. The model of highly civic life relies on the collective endeavors of its citizens, who sacrifice all elements of their personal identities. The sexual energies of these socialized people are channeled into enthusiasm for public affairs. As Shklar explains, "this is the utopia of controlled passions, of discipline, patriotism, equality and justice" (45). In a way, Rousseau's vision echoes the sublime figures in socialist realism whose transcendence is based on a more metaphysical identification with the revolutionary cause. That which Rousseau envisions as a real republic has long been criticized as unpracticable. By the same token, the space of the Cultural Revolution in the novel is a testament to the perishing utopian idea that makes the collective override the individual's urge for personal happiness.

Gu Shuxian and some characters in the first space are the embodiment of the practical effects of fallen utopian ideals, when the ideals are abused in the service of totalitarianism. On the contrary, other characters in this space have come to a more sober understanding of the situation. Among them, the protagonist Liang Rui is a

former red guard and a student at a College of Fine Arts, who had ardently thrown himself into the movement of attacking the “Four Olds” and even denouncing his own parents.¹⁵⁸ In 1969, the once idealistic youth felt totally betrayed when he was sent to a reform-through-labor farm to live a half-imprisoned life. In his narration, Liang explains, “Mixed feelings of anger, grief, insult and a heavy sense of loss shattered all my belief” (15). As the stories of the two spaces are unfolding simultaneously, by 1975, Liang Rui has spent six years as a cowherd, reaching the age of 30 and squandering his youth.

Before coming to the dystopian aspect of the first space, let us pause for a moment to take a look at a self-constructed utopia within this space. In the novel, there is a hierarchy of spaces in which each space contains different levels of freedom and alienation. Within the first space, Liang Rui’s physical asylum is an apartment owned by his girlfriend Yunqian 芸茜, where he hides in the city and remains unnoticed. With Liang’s rejection and embrace of places, the asylum’s positioning within the first space marks the partial and illusory nature of their senses of belonging.

“I gaze at her window. In the past it was pasted over with black paper; now a cloth curtain with tiny blue flowers hangs there” (11), reads an italicized note that brings the reader into the politics of spatiality in Liang’s world. He and Yunqian believe that “Inside the window is the small jail, and outside the window is a large prison” (102). A cloth curtain with tiny blue flowers suggests warmth and hope

¹⁵⁸ The “Four Olds” include old ideas, old culture, old customs and old traditions.

compartmentalized in the apartment asylum. Liang exiles himself in “a snail shell” (Bai 94) hidden within the dominant power structure. The reclusive experience in the apartment is elicited by a desire to transgress, and it is an unmistakable suggestion of youthful indulgence. The curtain only creates a thin and precarious shield; hence Liang Rui is not impervious to his “self-criticism” and fear. As if living in “the Peach Blossom Spring in a dream” (Bai 104)¹⁵⁹, Liang Rui and Yunqian’s cohabitation, in which each consoles the other through bodily intimacy, tortures Liang Rui occasionally with questions like “what did our shared life mean? What moral standards should it be judged by? What consequences did it have” (110)?

Liang Rui’s moral quandaries grow out of his transgressive act of putting himself in voluntary confinement and the devious way through which he gains temporary relief from the suffocating “large prison.” He pretends to have caught contagious tuberculosis to enable himself to leave the farm for a period of quarantine. In a conversation with Yunqian, Liang justifies his dirty trick as “in perfect harmony with the gist of the drama” (114) of the Cultural Revolution, which is illusionary and deceiving in nature but has recruited each and every individual in the country as actors. One of the actors is Gui Renzhong 桂任中, Liang’s coworker at the farm, who is a figure that calls to mind characters in Bai Hua’s earlier work, *Ku lian*. Gui, a chemistry professor who returned to China from overseas, harbors a bitter love for the country which only transforms him into a weakling. Enthusiastically placing truth in

¹⁵⁹ “A snail shell” and the “peach blossom valley” are translated by Wu and Beebee as “cocoon” (102) and “utopia” (112) respectively.

the political propaganda, Gui is one of those who are “wolfified and pig-sized” under the state’s mind control (195). Feeling like a heroic saint having a “shining halo” over his head (195), Liang, on his regular trip returning to the farm to submit his false medical report, is determined not to keep silent. In a note thrust at Gui, Liang writes that every person has a “prison in the mind” (*xinyu* 心狱) and he encourages Gui to look beyond the iron bars to the light of liberation. In no time, Liang finds himself being arrested on the way back to his “snail shell,” having been reported by the very friend he wanted to emancipate and consequently being thrown into jail.

Bai Hua, a professional screenwriter, frames a complex political movement into a few theatrical scenes, thus concretizing the movement through a set of interpersonal relationships. The description of Gui’s betrayal is fraught with a deferred criticism that has retroactive significance. Earlier in 1979, Bai Hua had given a speech at the Fourth Congress of Writers and Artists in which he exclaimed, “What sort of socialist country is it where communists do not dare speak the truth at party conferences, fathers, sons, brothers, sisters and friends do not dare take notes and citizens are afraid to keep diaries? ... Shall we keep silent before a bureaucracy which ties hand and foot?” (Goldman 91).

If Gui is one who slavishly accepts their fate and suffers, there are others who are more liable to engage in various kinds of perversion, such as rape. Gui’s wife Jane, a previous Miss Hawaii of half Chinese blood, came to China in 1965 with her beloved husband only to be swallowed up in the destructive political movement. When trying

to convince a man with “enormous power” that her husband is not a CIA agent, Jane is raped by the man, who is assisted by his wife (40). This scene is so infused with a sense that desire is uncontrolled as a result of a political movement that discharges some people’s bestial urges. Lasciviousness and hypocrisy become the qualities of those in power, whose sexuality is *xing niuqu* (性扭曲 sexually twisted) or abnormal.¹⁶⁰ The scene also brings forward an irony lying in the contrast between the perceived abnormality of Mosuo sexuality and the actual perversion outlined in the rapist narrative. Moreover, it is difficult not to notice the metaphorical deployment of rape. The rape description betrays the perversion of sexuality when powers of the state penetrate personal lives. The notion of despotism is fundamentally sexualized when the oppression of women becomes evidence of moribund and decadent authority.¹⁶¹ The arbitrary use of power causes a disembodied ravishment of human dignity, freedom and even life. Jane in the end loses her mind and later dies in a psychiatric hospital. Under such abused power, Gui’s unconditional loyalty to absolute authority is ridiculous yet cast in a sympathetic light.

Drawn from Foucauldian concept, heterotopia in this study is the literary territory of some of China’s ethnic groups whose cultures are represented as outside the norm of the political and cultural center. Foucault’s heterotopia originally refers to

¹⁶⁰ This borrows from Xueping Zhong’s citation of an expression used by critics to describe how sexuality under repression is represented in some fictions of the 1980s (59).

¹⁶¹ In another instance, a doctor, Yunqian’s friend, who helps Liang to secure his medical report, witnesses a rape, which again displays the unrestrained and the unquenchable desire to abuse power.

places that serve different functions from most other places within a given society, such as, pre-modern European practices in establishment of prisons, hospitals and asylums to contain social outcasts. Given that the Cultural Revolution is called “the large prison” in *The Remote Country of Women*, both the farm and the jail are microcosms of the “great confinement” of freedom. Foucault’s quote “the walls of confinement actually enclose the negative of that moral city of which the bourgeois conscience began to dream in the seventeenth century” (“*Madness and Civilization*” 61) is illuminating for understanding the prison from another angle. That is, the prison that Liang is flung into is a walled confinement that contains the impetus and undercurrents of which people swept up in the political flood have been secretly dreaming. Those political prisoners in the jail are the embodiment of the “moral negatives,” absurdly charged with various kinds of bizarre “crimes.” The hegemonic production of the prison as a mechanism of exclusion functions in the novel as a magnifier for the repressed desire of the prisoners.¹⁶²

This political prison is a hideous space where desire is manifest in the form of physical starvation coupled with sexual starvation. Anne McLaren interprets *The Remote Country of Women* as a novel that addresses “the politics of erotism” by

¹⁶² Taking into consideration the history of incarceration in the formation of the Foucauldian term heterotopia, the political jail can also be called a heterotopia, one which parodies and destabilizes that which lies outside. In this sense, there is a multiplicity of heterotopias in the novel, which we have instead described as the interplay of different spaces to avoid confusion between the three models of heterotopia delineated in this dissertation. That being said, those spaces addressed are all the objects of the “mechanism of exclusion and inclusion, or centering and peripheralization, brought to bear by the economic or ideological requirements of power,” according to Schick’s paraphrase of Foucault (46).

exploring the “nexus” between political and individual repression” (60). Along this line of thinking, we can see the prison motif as creating a nexus between incarceration and resistance. To counteract the gruesome stories of sexual violence described above against the backdrop of the eroticization of the despotic power, there is a rebellious gesture in the novel through the recast of the rapist narrative. A particular incident reverses the sexual subjugation of women. One of Liang’s fellow inmates is described as being “raped” by three woman prisoners when he is sent to repair the window of the women’s cell, and his spirit of willingness and cooperation has quite facilitated the process.

There is a sexual economy in which power is entrenched and exercised without bounds in “the large prison,” where Jane and another female victim of rape described in the novel are both marked as objects of sexual desire. Remember that in the 2009 novel *Mosuo mima*, the Mosuo girl Zhuoma is objectified as a natural target of violation. Now we know that as early as 1986, the degrading effects that women experience through unbalanced gender relations were redressed through a “progressive” appropriation of the trope of rape in a jail setting. The three woman prisoners show signs of refusing to be instruments of male pleasure and an insistence on their status as desiring subjects, a theme that comes into full bloom in the Mosuo world.

2.4 Ideals of Freedom in “the Civilization of the Barbarians”

In the novel, the imaginative space of the Mosuo territory is organized through the ethnographic language and imagery. McLaren suggests that “when Bai Hua turns his dispassionate eye to the Han culture it is with the same anthropological interest” (48). Such an interest can be glimpsed through the title of Chinese scholar Liu Qianqiu’s 刘千秋 2012 criticism on the novel: *Wenming ren de yeman he yeman ren de wenming* (文明人的野蛮和野蛮人的文明 “The Barbarism of the Civilized People and the Civilization of the Barbarians”). The title guides us to read the Mosuo world against the grain of the dominant space.

During the Cultural Revolution, the de-feminized image of the Han woman was in wide circulation under the slogan of “Women hold up half the sky.” The state sanctioned morality at the time positioned the female body as the source of evil and sin, a notion related to China’s deep-rooted traditions of Confucianism and patriarchy. The socialist culture with the mark of tradition required woman to conceal physical reminders of sexuality or expressions of desire, to which the Mosuo world provided a contrast. The state propaganda set the modesty of the Han woman in inverse ratio to the sensuality of the Mosuo. In a similar yet reverse manner, *The Remote Country of Women* casts characters in the space of the Cultural Revolution in an anthropological light to project their collective mentality and practice. If the Mosuo women are threatening and alluring when cast under an anthropological gaze, Gu and others like her are at once passive and insatiable, oppressed and duplicitous, lamentable and sly.

“Our fantasies of sexual transgression as much as our obedience to sexual regulation” (Kaplan 148) unpack through the depictions of the women in two juxtaposed space.

Then how does the novel weave the fantasy of “sexual transgression” in the land of the Mosuo? “In the whole world, only Mosuo Women on the banks of Xienamei are women, not objects. They are women of feelings and heart, women of gratitude and love, women with souls, and women of beauty” (260), according to a Mosuo man who shares his feelings with the female protagonist Sunamei after travelling before to as far away as India. The novel is rather ingenuous about Sumamei’s sexual awakening. The ethnographic gaze on Sumamei’s coming of age story meticulously evades a sheer eroticization of the Mosuo world. The imaginative impetus of Bai Hua is the Mosuo he read about and met, which are conjured up in the style of an ethnographic fiction rather than that of a sexual ethnography.

The context of this fictional imagination is first of all composed by the ethnographic nomenclatures,¹⁶³ some of which are the transliteration of the Mosuo language but others of which may be the invention of anthropologists. Sparing the need to claim the possession of an authentic experience, the absence of the anthropologist distinguishes *The Remote Country of Women* as a work that does not necessarily abide by the code of objectivity or does not result from someone’s observations. That being said, though the perception and thought of the characters are inculcated through the writer’s concern, the novel’s construction of the heterotopia is

¹⁶³ To name a few examples, A Da 阿达 refers to father and Yishe 衣社 refers to the matrilineal household.

not floating free from the conditions under which the Mosuo people actually live. The imaginative freedom the novelist Bai Hua practices does not negate the self-proclaimed realist nature of his novel in that literature can become a valuable source of insight into the indigenous way of life.

Though it is likely that the Mosuo world is a “sexual idyll” from the perspective of those in the sexually repressive center, the book tries to differentiate the sexualized body of the Mosuo from a lascivious one. The Mosuo body described is the embodiment of nature wherein the human nature is not suppressed. The Mosuo cultural space is not a sensuous habitat which grants its inhabitants boundless sexual license, especially when compared with the corrupt and debauched space of the Cultural Revolution. In other words, the two worlds that are partitioned off from each other oscillate between the obscene and the pure. The difference between the two worlds is not so much in ethnic terms, but is subordinate to different attitudes towards sexuality and, by extension, humanity. Moreover, what ultimately constructs the Mosuo’s distinctive expression of humanity is a very important part of Mosuo civilization— ritual. The “civilization of the barbarians,” in Liu’s term, is the basis for the parallel unfolding of the narrative since only in this land of the Mosuo is life spontaneously corresponding with the rhythm of nature.

Each of the first few chapters belonging to the Mosuo space all starts with a poetic line. “*She was going on thirteen. Oh, beautiful Sunamei! A crescent was waxing into a half-moon*” (1), which is echoed by a line toward the end of the chapter,

“She was going on thirteen. Oh, beautiful Sunamei! A grain of corn was about to bloom” (10). The lines create a poetic frame for the Mosuo world, almost like a spatial boundary made of fanciful embroidery. The lives of the Mosuo are largely unaffected by the Cultural Revolution in the novel, for whom existence means harmony with nature. The nature metaphor suggests the correspondence of their experience with the rhythm of nature. In a way, the changes in nature are synonymous with Sunamei’s maturing sexuality, which is couched in nature imagery. The vibrant girl is now “an obscure little flower” (34) who becomes intoxicated when imagining wearing a pleated skirt, jewels, and a rainbow sash at her thirteenth birthday when she changes out of her unisex gown. When “a sickle-shaped moon” has waxed into a full boat” (49), Sunamei’s initiation, the skirt ceremony, comes.

The way in which the ceremony is portrayed resonates with descriptions of the ritual that can be found in certain ethnographic accounts. For example, the scene in which Sunamei stands with one foot on a bag of grain and the other on an entire piece of preserved pig is explained in Shih’s study as expressing a wish for the girl’s wellbeing (249), though some of other details might be Bai Hua’s fabrications. One of the more noteworthy aspects of the novel is how the girl’s psychology penetrates the ceremony. She experiences a complex sense of loss, curiosity, and expectation for her coming puberty that is now informed by the ritual. The novel’s difference from ethnography is inscribed in its investment in the subjectivity of Sunamei. It is Sunamei’s heart that dictates her comportment and speech within the ceremony,

showing that her womanhood is not just a passive identity that she acquires through socialization. The ceremony's significance in the girl's transition into puberty is rather nominal but the nominal maturation has an impact on the girl's conception of her identity. The recognition that "Now I am a skirt woman" (91) prompts the girl's active exploration of her subject position as a gendered being.

As if to echo Shih's thesis of the superiority of the Mosuo woman in their culture, the Mosuo women in the novel are said to be in charge of both the keys and the hearts of the household. They are proud of being woman since they are the producers of life, like the sun. On the night of Sunamei's ceremony, she receives sex education from her Ami (阿咪 mother) in the *huagu* (花骨 flower chamber), a private room prepared for girls after their skirt ceremony. The Ami says,

"The Mosuo (woman) work in the field during the day to produce clothes and food and make love at night both to continue their line and for enjoyment. They are their own masters during and day and remain their own masters at night. Only love and true appreciation of love produce joy. Lack of love and failure to appreciate love bring misery. You cannot be taught to love; you can only experience love, body and soul" (61).

Sumamei has then started her own trek towards maturity. It is not merely through rituals that she learns the cultural rules of her society, as she also comes to an understanding through experience. Here the sexual practices of the Mosuo are used as metaphor for freedom. A privileging of the freedom for the Mosuo youth to exercise

their rights to explore their awakening sexuality is Bai Hua's way of lamenting the lost humanity in his own world.

The novel revitalizes another form of ritual, the worship of the patron Goddess Gemu 格姆. The Mosuo regard Lion Mountain as their patron goddess, and hold "Circle-the-Mountain" festival to worship Gemu on the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month on the Chinese lunar calendar. On the day of the festival, Sunamei falls asleep on the mountain and has a dream that leaves her wondering "did flames burst from her inner body? No, her emotions weren't like flames but like the water of a thermal spring flowing through her body" (91). The sexual arousal is initiated by her curiosity about "the thing that a woman does not grow" that is mentioned in the myth of the Goddess, in which the jealous Mount Warupuna "cuts the thing off" the body of another Mount God, Hlidi Gemu's other *axiao* 阿肖 (*tisese* partner) (87). In the myth, Gemu tells Warupuna that "if a woman is not willing, stop your daydreams. No matter how much gold and silver you may possess or no matter how strong you are, I am my own mistress" (ibid). Gemu's unrestrained pursuit of pleasure with other mountain gods reflects an attitude that the Mosuo culture values.¹⁶⁴ Witnessing an obviously

¹⁶⁴ Bai Hua's creative rewriting of the myth of the Goddess of Gemu largely corresponds to the story line of the version collected by Lamu Gatusa in *Yunnan mosuo ren minjian wenxue jicheng* 云南摩梭人民间文学集成 (375). According to Shih (228), "the beautiful and powerful" Hlidi Gemu "has many admirers and is involved in multiple *tisese* relationships. Kuer Mountain on the north skirt of the Yong-ning basin and Warupuna Mountain in Qiansuo, Sichuan Province, are both *ecia* [i.e. *axiao*] of Hlidi Gemu."

sensualized scene in which pairs of *axiao* cuddle together under the stars after the pilgrimage, Sunamei's instinctual urge is awakened so as to have a sexual dream.¹⁶⁵

The Mosuo mythology is the source for as well as a reflection of the Mosuo culture. Incorporating the knowledge of the ritualistic ceremony, Sunamei concretizes the knowledge in physical perspective. Pierre Bourdieu argues that the body is the site that cannot be "perfectly socialized" (Moore 77). On the one hand, it is Sunamei's body that is constantly involved in the interpretation of the meaning that is informed by the culture and institutions of her society. On the other hand, the cultural norms of the Mosuo are a consequence of their day-to-day lives. Meanings are not inherent in rituals, yet Sunamei's acquisition of subjectivity is crucially dependent on the correspondence between the ritual and the human experience.

The Remote Country of Women builds up a symbolic system within which Sunamei acquires her subjectivity. Jacques Lacan established his theory of "split-self" by developing Freud's reference to biologically-determined drives, proposing that an ego is constituted through making analogies to and then incorporating the images of self (in a mirror) and the other as part of the self-image. Sunamei identifies with the practice of the Goddess, and her ego accepts that as part of her through a process of digesting the aesthetics and significations of the ritual. Her maturity is insured by this cultural act in company with the biological and psychological changes that characterize puberty. She enlarges the local meaning of the ritual to make herself into

¹⁶⁵ This is an example of Bai Hua's sensuous description of the Mosuo custom based on his literary imagination.

an empowered sexual agent. Sunamei's case disproves the idea that primitive societies are irrational and undifferentiated. Though the book tries not to gloss the Mosuo as sexual promiscuous to shrug off the imprint of some of the early ethnographic records, it remains ambiguous whether some of the descriptions in the novel can be distinct from those of a sensual paradise. In the story, "Sunamei's Amiji 阿咪吉(aunt) Zhima 直玛 has had a lot of *axiao*. Every month at least three men go to her at night" (51). That being the case, Zhima's seductiveness reinforces the "independent space of female sexuality" enjoyed by the Mosuo woman, to borrow Zhou Huashan's expression (12), and Zhima is written as a living example from whom Sunamei learns of what it means to be an attractive woman. Sunamei, going through those different types of education, starts to accept her own *axiao*. Sunamei's story explains the failure of the de-sexualization of body during the Cultural Revolution when political ideologies distort social relations through misrecognition of human nature.

2.5 Between Heterotopia and Disillusionment

The juxtaposed spatiality does not obscure the feeling that it is from Liang Rui's subject position that the Mosuo are imagined and humanized. In other words, the "here" of the Cultural Revolution is the basis for the construction of the Country of Women, the "there." The "here" and "there" are inextricably related, mainly by contrast. Moreover, the juxtaposition prevents the novel from degrading to a narrative of voyeurism. The independent existence of the narrative space of the Mosuo

denounces the centrality of the here. However, Liang Rui only achieves his awareness of spatiality, or the vast distance between the here and there, towards the very end of the novel when the two worlds are intersecting.

When everything seems back on track with the end of the Cultural Revolution, the newly released Liang, abandoned by Yunqian, finds no redemption from his lost years spent in confinement. The flower patterned cloth curtain that replaced the black paper over Yunqian's window was like Liang Rui's vision of the advent of change, yet when changes indeed arrive, Liang is further exiled, excluded from owning the hope symbolized by the new curtain. His withdrawal to the vicinity of the Mosuo territory is not a story of pursuing the Peach Blossom Spring, but one of a journey of self-discovery.

If the Country of Women is a heterotopia, a "rhetorical construct," then does the heterotopia provide an alternative space for resistance? Mary Pratt has coined the term "feminotopia" to denote "idealized worlds of female autonomy, empowerment, and pleasure" (166). The Mosuo world under Bai Hua's pen can be a feminotopia, but heterotopia is a more inclusive expression that addresses an inherent signification of heterogeneity. Bai Hua adopts sexuality as a central trope for resistance to state ideology. The centering of sexuality as a force working for personal and social change is a deconstructive reinterpretation of the other, and the theme of displacement is a narrative device that brings the heterogeneities of space into play. In other words, situated in different forms of confinement, Liang consistently displays an

intellectual's displacement and alienation. His settlement in the border town is a means of escape, yet to some extent, is also a form of protest. He views exiling himself to the remote, to the primitive, to a utopian dream as a form of resistance, yet in the end he only receives a painful understanding of himself as rewards.

The cross-cultural encounter occurs when Sunamei is recruited to the county troupe as a soloist and meets Liang Rui, now a movie projectionist. With a full set of institutions as part of the state apparatus, the border town is almost fanatical in its rejection of difference. Since the Mosuo have a reputation for primitive promiscuity, Sunamei's co-worker spies on her and asks if her family has a father figure. People in this town treat her with apprehension and suspicion, as a target to be domesticated. Even this town far away from the political center has its own topography of sexual repression.

Liang Rui finally approaches his utopian dream through his marriage to Sunamei. On the one hand, he subscribes to the freedom and beauty embodied by Sunamei. Sunamei is like a fairy or a spirit, mitigating the dreariness and boredom of living in the town. On the other hand, the freedom he has been longing for cannot be reconciled with his patriarchal instinct, which is threatened by the seductive and unbridled nature of the girl. In other words, Liang displaced his utopian desire onto the Country of Women, only to be submerged in a fear of Sunamei's moral regression and its potential for defiling her body.

Liang Rui crosses the border and enters the world of the Mosuo with idealistic intentions, yet his arrival proves to be nothing more than another contamination of the Mosuo community by an outsider. The dream land he encounters is incomprehensible and disappointing. The heterotopia of the Country of Women strikes him as backward and dirty, a place that does not correspond to his dream. When confronted by Sunamei's former *axiao*, the anger of losing dignity as a husband poses a dilemma for Liang. His final surrender to his patriarchal ego results in his degradation to the roles of a hopeless husband who is eventually expelled by the Mosuo community. At the level of the personal represented by Liang Rui and at the level of the state, the patriarchal ideologies are equally deep-rooted. In the end, the layered spaces in the novel reflect the division, if not hierarchy, between self and other in Liang Rui's perception, given his longing for a world different from his own.

The Remote Country of Women was produced in the midst of the pro-humanism literary trend of the 1980s, in which writers frequently drew the equation between desexualization and dehumanization to reflect upon the Cultural Revolution. As Wu Qingyun points out, the novel did not receive much "critical attention" for political reasons (118). Though the book involves an urge to turn to the primitive and the rural to recoup lost humanism, it is not, strictly speaking, a "root searching" (*xungen* 寻根) work. Inspired by Xueping Zhong's argument that searching for the cultural "root" remains an intrinsically patriarchal practice, we may sense that there are other reasons

that may account for “the little attention” paid to the book at the time of its publication.

“*Gen*” i.e. roots, in the Chinese cultural context, has “patriarchal and patrilineal connotations” (Zhong 161), since the family lines are believed to be carried on through male heirs. The *xungen* literature normally evokes the “male-gendered symbol” *gen* as a male search for a masculine identity, which is seen as the “natural essential source for a renewal of the Chinese race” (ibid). In the words of Zhong, the masculine-gendered *gen*, which is also symbolic of Chineseness, is “exclusionary” of women (169). In contrast, the juxtaposition of two cultures in *The Remote Country of Women* subtly suggests the equality, if not superiority, of the matrilineal tradition of the Mosuo. The novel does not fall into the patriarchal order of *xungen* literature, an order that is reluctant to heartily laud a matrilineal tradition and a self-lamenting attitude. The novel discloses Bai Hua’s skepticism towards masculine power as the origin of the strength of the Chinese people, and his pessimism regarding the prospect of the rejuvenation of male-gendered cultural roots. Ultimately, *The Remote Country of Women* sheds light on the patriarchal ground of China’s ethnographic interests in the literary arena of the 1980s. In a more enthralling way, a Mosuo woman’s self-representation in more recent years demonstrates the firm conviction she controls the potential of Mosuo heritage to confront a patriarchal society’s penchant for taming women and eradicating difference.

3. The Controversial Writing Career of a Mosuo Woman

Yang Erche Namu creates a phenomenon titled by her own name (H. Zhou 249). The writing career of this minority woman has developed into a fantastic yet controversial spectacle. Namu's books are bursting with the pride of being a Mosuo woman. In a sense, it is as if Sunamei in Bai Hua's novel were incarnated in Namu. Or, we can imagine Sunamei and Namu merge into one on the Shore of Lugu Lake. The singing talents that bring Sunamei to the adjacent town also buy Namu's way into a transnational world. Both women are desiring subjects. Sunamei dreams of becoming a skirt woman who attracts the eyes of her country fellow, whereas Namu has a much bigger dream. Many years after leaving home to pursue her dream, Namu has put her Mosuo identity in the spotlight as she builds her career as a successful singer, writer, and businesswoman.

Namu's autobiographical narratives accentuate the position of a minority woman within China's grand ideal of harmonizing differences. Namu creates a textual realm which concurrently pertains to both the power paradigm and her private individual feeling. She develops a calculated relationship with the assumption that only in the Country of Women does sexual freedom gain its centrality and its claim to happiness. The reform and opening-up over the past thirty years have seen various moral and political actions, including the resurrection of Confucian culture, that aim to control vulgarity and spiritual degeneration. The Confucian concept of "*he*" does not drift away from the Confucian hierarchy of patriarchal morality, since it suggests a finely

tuned relationship based on cultivated elegance in familial and social settings. Namu's performance of ostentatious femininity which many consider "vulgar" and her commitment to the Mosuo's renowned filial piety combine in an interesting way to present her own vision of "Harmony-with-difference," a creative means to nurture a cultural heterogeneity.

"Erche Namu" in the Mosuo language means a "gem stone fairy", and is an auspicious name given by a lama.¹⁶⁶ Now a public figure, Namu narcissistically declares herself a fairy. She claims to be a celestial being with an otherworldly perspective on this hierarchically-structured world in which a minority woman from a rural background is relegated to a marginalized position. Namu behaves like a cultural ambassador of the Mosuo, despite the fact that she has also brokered misunderstandings of her fellow people. She creates a modern legend around her individual story, in which she makes a fulfilling life for herself that spans cultures but starts from and always ties back to her Mosuo origin.

Since minority song and dance have often been exoticized and commodified by the Han Chinese majority, a few minority girls have found musical ability to be their stepping stone to success within the world outside their community. This was the case for both Namu and the fictional Sunamei. Sunamei's story ends when she returns the Country of Women only to find that Liang Rui deems himself unfit for to the freedom

¹⁶⁶ In *Zouchu nü'er guo*, "Yang Erche" is addressed as a word meaning "gem stone" (Yang and Li 15), yet in other books Yang is referred to as the adopted Han surname of her family, for example, in the book coauthored by Yang and Lamu (59).

for which he previously yearned. Conversely, Namu actively adapts herself to fit into the unknown and the foreign. In 1981, not long after her initiation/skirt ceremony at the age of thirteen, Namu was selected to compete and won first prize in a national singing contest for ethnic minorities. This was the first time that Namu was exposed to Han culture and language. She returned to Lugu Lake with a restless heart. She eventually ran away from home even though her mother threw stones at her back, trying desperately to chase her down and stop her from leaving.¹⁶⁷ After passing through the virgin forest on her own, Namu secured a job with the Liangshan Minority Singing and Dancing Troup in Xichang 西昌, Sichuan province. Namu was illiterate, having spent her childhood years in the mountains herding yaks with her uncle. Her talent and courage worked wonders once again when she was accepted by a special minority program at the Shanghai Music Conservatory. During her college years, Namu studied music and Chinese language against the backdrop of the reform and opening up of Chinese society in the 1980s. Later, after becoming a singer in one of the best national troupes, the Central Minority Singing and Dancing Ensemble, she dared to dream bigger. A transnational marriage brought her to America in 1990 and a modeling profession granted her greater mobility. Essentially, her writing career is centered on her journey around the world, which laid the groundwork for her public visibility.

¹⁶⁷ This is an anecdote recorded in *Zouchu nü'er guo* (85), *Leaving Mother Lake* (205), and *Zouhui nü'er guo* (113).

3.1 Leaving Mother Lake in Pursuit of Fame

The reason that I address the writer Yang Erche Namu as Namu is because she is the protagonist of her books and thus a literary representation of a Mosuo. The relationship between the real and the discursive has been a consistent concern of this dissertation. This chapter will focus on the interaction between the ethnographically constructed Mosuo and Namu's self-representation through, first of all, considering the following questions. Is there such a person as a real Mosuo? Is it possible for ethnographic texts to construct a culture that is authentic? Does the Namu who appears in (auto)-biographical texts provide insight into the Mosuo?

Our previous discussion of the ethnographic formation of the Mosuo has paid attention to the "partiality" of "ethnographic truth" (Clifford 7) and "literary procedures" that "pervade any work of cultural representation" (4). According to anthropologist Vincanne Adam's study of the Sherpa, a Tibetan Buddhist population, the ethnographic text itself constitutes a reality and the text can "produce images that become potent signifier of who Sherpas are" (18).¹⁶⁸ Following this train of thought, the ethnographic texts, while informing each other, are purportedly drawn from but may later influence real experiences of the Mosuo. The Mosuo may act on the

¹⁶⁸ Adam's argument is drawn from his study of the Sherpa, a Tibetan Buddhist population. He notes that the Sherpa used to consider mountain climbing taboo because they believed that the mountains were gods and goddesses. The resolution to summit Everest is the Sherpa's accommodation of the Western interpretation of the landscape, or more accurately, the human-mountain relationship. The characteristics of the Sherpa are thus defined by their endurance and enviable skills as "tigers of the snow." "Intrepid climbers" is a description attached to Sherpas by the Westerners who wanted to overcome the mountain. The locals were first hired as guides and porters after climbing was introduced into the region, and they gradually incorporated the practice into the local culture.

perceived reality discursively produced by the texts and become intertextual when their practices make references to the textual world.

For example, Lamu's 2008 collection is published under the title *Naxixue Lunji* 纳西学论集 (*An Anthology of Naxi Study*) based on the political and anthropological premise that the Mosuo are a branch of the Naxi. The nationality classification project of the 1950s has truly influenced people's consciousness and representation of their ethnic identity. Lamu's active engagement with terms like "living fossil" "matrilineal" and "harmony" in her writing is also an intertextual practice. Adam describes the Sherpa culture as a "heterotopia" that is taking shape when the desired others start to view themselves in the way they are perceived from the outside. This description can inform our understanding of transformations in Mosuo culture. The "reality" constituted in the academic discourse is accommodated by the Mosuo and reflected in the manner of their self-representation. Because of the pressure to live up to the image of the exotic other desired by tourists and researchers, the Mosuo have had to face the pain of reconciling themselves with the external interpretations of their culture.

Zhou Huashan has noticed the consequences of such reconciliation—the new Mosuo generation has internalized (*neihua* 内化) the view of monogamy, and some even tend to use the word like "virgin" "chastity" and "monopoly" (*duzhan* 独占) in reference to the relationship between the sexes (251). Zhou singles out Lamu's *Zouchu n'ier guo* 走出女儿国 (*Walking out of the Country of Women*) as an example of how the mainstream media constructs the subject voice of the Mosuo (ibid). Since

the book is a testimony to the way in which Namu internalizes, or rather, is manipulated by, the views of the media, an analysis of Namu's story-telling can provide insights into the intertextuality of the real Mosuo and the textual Mosuo.¹⁶⁹

Thus I will read back to back, or intertextually, two versions of her autobiography, *Zouchu nü'er guo* and *Leaving Mother Lake—a Girlhood at the Edge of the World*. Both are concerned with Namu's childhood story; the former was co-authored by Han writer Li Weihai 李威海 and the latter by America-based anthropologist Christine Mathieu. These two autobiographies are said to be bestsellers in China and in the United States, respectively. It is worth pointing out that our goal is not to single out every misrepresentation or mistreatment of the Mosuo culture in *Zouchu nü'er guo*, but to bring to light the book's ironic and mendacious mode of representation in a broad manner.

Because she concentrates on Namu's girlhood, Mathieu does not idealize some sort of "original" sexual nature of the Mosuo, though she still invokes a sense of utopianism in her cultural translation of the unique society. In contrast, the subheading of *Zouchu nü'er guo* betrays its features that appeal to a sensation-seeking market — *Yige Mosuo nihai de chuandang jingli he qingai gushi* 一个摩梭女孩的闯荡经历和情爱故事 (*The Adventure and Amorous Story of a Mosuo Girl*) -- with an amplification of a sense of eroticism and the interaction between the primitive and the modern. Strictly speaking, the two texts are both biographies, in that they are products

¹⁶⁹ The written accounts on the Mosuo life are not the only examples of intertextuality.

accumulated through interviews, communication and sharing. As a matter of fact, Li Weihai identifies Namu as “his first reader” in the prescript (2).

The two books both reflect upon what has driven Namu to leave Mother Lake. Mathieu writes that Namu is born into the Mosuo culture and learns the conditions of being a Mosuo woman through cultural education and socialization; then emphasizes Namu’s defiance towards the local views of what sort of woman she is supposed to be. *Leaving Mother Lake* depicts a vivid tension in the mother-daughter relationship, as the daughter must bargain for boundaries and expectations with her mother after she competes in the singing contest in the outside world. Beneath the book’s autobiographical approach is an anthropologist’s endeavor to acquire the subject, or in other words, get inside the mind of the subject. Similar plot lines in Namu’s stories could be rendered strikingly differently in *Zouchu nü’er guo*. For example, in Mathieu’s work, a pair of red shoes, a gift from Namu’s father, indicates the paternal involvement in her childhood. Mathieu notes that, to Namu, the red shoes are reminiscent of the “sweetest thing my mother could have told me,” that her feet were like those of her father, whom her mother loved so much (63). In the Chinese book, the father figure totally disappears, explained away with the statement made earlier in the book “kids only know their mothers but not fathers.” Another anecdote in the book relates how the father’s identity will only be revealed at the time of the child’s initiation ceremony (1, 5, 48). Under Mathieu’s sentimental polish, the first pair of shoes Namu ever owned in her life represent paternal love, while in the Chinese book,

the same shoes are a mere indication of Namu's childhood memory of material scarcity and her only early connection to an unknown outside world (36). This particular example leads us to other instances of controversy in *Zouchu nü'er guo*.

Zouchu nü'er guo describes the Mosuo settlement as the mysterious Country of Women, or a Peach Blossom Spring, where people are simply ignorant of all world issues (40). This is a sealed off, remote, primitive society that is not subject to historical change. It persists in a state of "primitive communism," where notions of capital and property are absent, an egalitarian spirit of sharing pervades, and a feeble concept of family is the norm of living (8, 1).¹⁷⁰ It is not hard to see the imprint of ethnographic works based on Engels' theory. Though the book exaggerates the seclusion of the Mosuo region, it does not accordingly trivialize the impact of the Chinese grand historical narrative. Reminiscent of *The Remote Country of Women*, the book showcases the Mosuo's insistence on their way of life during the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, as if to counteract the essentialization of the Mosuo's ignorance in *Zouchu nü'er guo*, our friend Joseph Rock enters *Leaving Mother Lake* in a scene in which Little Namu is fascinated by legends of a man with blue eyes

¹⁷⁰ The utopian imagination of the Mosuo community with a tone of primitivism is toned down in Mathieu's *Leaving Mother Lake*. The author makes comments like, "In those days people did not use money and it seemed natural to get together to help each other" (Mathieu 33) rather than analyzing Mosuo behaviors through an ideological lens.

whose good deeds to the region and little glass palace on an island in Lugu Lake have brought the distant country of America into the Mosuo imagination.¹⁷¹

In *Zouchu nü'er guo*, people who live in the deep mountain are said to have “no marriage, no family responsibility and restraints, and lots of sexual partners” (6), a description that fulfills the curiosity of those in search of the exotic other. Moreover, the primitive power that Namu inherits from her Mosuo culture is eroticized and defined as the source of her courage to take initiative in courtship. The portrayal of her romantic and sexual encounters with a series of foreign boyfriends is meant to sustain an erotic image of the Mosuo and their open attitude toward sexual love. According to the book, the blood and essence of the Mosuo ethnicity endows Namu with a *fangdangbuji* (放蕩不羈 unconventional and uninhibited) personality and *zhizhuo* (执着 persistence) in pursuit of love, or rather, in situating men as the target of her desire (354).

Namu's aggressive femininity as a cultural given finds resonance with the budding values of utilitarianism in China's market economy. In her self-evaluation in *Zouchu nü'er guo*, she says, “How can I describe myself... to say it sweetly, I am hardworking, aggressive and have a pioneering spirit..., but, to say it harshly, I am restless and infatuated with fame and wealth...”(139). Seen from another angle, Namu's embrace of a modern identity is accompanied by her anxieties about her poverty and her awareness of the perceived inferiority of her rural background.

¹⁷¹ The glass palace refers to a house with glass windows that was built where Rock stayed, which was later destroyed by the Red Guards.

Envy the carefree and colorful life enjoyed by city dwellers, she laments the injustice of being born into the most undeveloped spot in the world (81). When the primitive society is described as the undifferentiated and the naive, it is plausible that a girl jumping “from the primitive society to the modern civilized society” (72,247) would awkwardly and ardently assume a type of individualism characterized by an obsession with material gain. The book is set in a time when many people pursue materialism with a “revolutionary zeal,” an outlook that the Namu of *Zouchunü’erguo* embraces to an extent that implies that the values of the contemporary Chinese majority can easily “civilize” a minority woman. In this literary instant, the Mosuo land becomes a heterotopia, an “imperfect utopia” that Namu only wants to leave, and gradually her experience with the world cannot be fully possessed or contained by the Mother Lake.

Namu has brought the name of the Mosuo to the world, which in turn, brings tourist dollars to her hometown. This fact is even readily admitted by her fellow Mosuo, many of whom criticize her for sabotaging the Mosuo image. A Mosuo native wrote an article “Xiang gaosu ni yi ge zhenzheng de mosuo” 想告诉你一个真正的摩梭 (“Want to tell you about a real Mosuo”),¹⁷² in which Namu is blamed for proudly selling her private life, right or wrong, without thinking of the consequences (A Han 195). As this author implies, the performative and essentialized nature of the

¹⁷² A Han ·Gong Bu Ha Mu 阿罕 贡布哈姆’s criticism of Namu is collected as a supplement to Lamu’s 2009 book *Tiantang zhi ai: Mosuo limian de qingai shenghuo* (天堂之爱: 摩梭里面的情爱生活 *Love in Heaven; The Amorous life among the Mosuo*), given the fact that Lamu has previously cooperated with Namu.

description in *Zouchu nü'er guo* is likely to be regarded by readers as description of the true cultural traits of the Mosuo. Even worse, some of the descriptions may correspond with assumptions about the promiscuous Mosuo under a certain ethnographic gaze. Namu's first book is almost a commercialized pulp fiction, which, in a way, caters to the vulgar taste of certain segments of the market. Therefore, it might not be an exaggeration to say that Namu indeed has a hand in the representational violence inflicted upon the Mosuo. Later, in her 2003 book *Ni ye ke yi* (你也可以 *Namu Can Do, So Can You*), Namu has a rare introspective moment in which she would "blush" at the thought of the "unreal" (*bu zhenshi* 不真实) contents of *Zouchu nü'er guo* (123). Playing with the real and the unreal in her first book, her daring tell-all strategy provokes a voyeuristic peek into a sort of sensuously-colored private realm, and unfortunately also exacerbates the cultural scars of her fellow Mosuo.

If the intellectual model has the ability to constitute the real in its effect on representation and life of the Mosuo, then what kinds of role do the fictive and the autobiographical play? To Anthropologist Michael Fischer, the fictive components in ethnic autobiographical fiction are capable of "using the narrator as an inscribed figure within the text whose manipulation calls attention to authority structures, [...] encouraging the reader to self-consciously participate in the production of meaning"

(232).¹⁷³ In this sense, Namu's autobiographies can be materials for the study of the meaning embedded in a cultural phenomenon in view of the reciprocal contexts in which Namu is at once a participator and the manipulated. Namu made her writing debut with *Zouchu nü'er guo*, and she continues to cultivate her career of self-construction by means of narrating her "real" journey in a cross-cultural milieu. The Mosuo culture is enmeshed in her narrative in diverse ways, and thus starts to uncover and illuminate not the Mosuo, but herself.

Zouchu nü'er guo presents only one of many representations of Namu. In her book *A Passion for Difference*, Henrietta Moore points out "the notion of the subject as the site of multiple and potentially contradictory subjectivities" in post-structuralist thinking, a notion useful for our understanding how "self-representations" constitute "subject positions" (55). A record of producing over ten books within roughly fifteen years is Namu's demonstration of her multiple subject positions, which undermines any unified or authoritarian understanding of the woman, let alone the Mosuo.¹⁷⁴ A

¹⁷³ In Fischer's anthropological study, "autobiographical fiction was also included because the modalities of veracity in our age can no longer (if they ever could) be limited to the conventions of realism" (198).

¹⁷⁴ Except for those that are co-authored with others, Namu's single authored books that are not mentioned in this dissertation include *Nüren you: feng yan kan shijie* 女人游: 凤眼看世界 published by Beijing's Huawen chubanshe 华文出版社 in 2001; *Nüren pin : wen xiang shi nüren* 女人品: 闻香识女人 published by Beijing's Chang'an chubanshe 长安出版社 in 2003; *Yi hui er jiu huilai: wo de shejiao xinde* 一会儿就回来: 我的社交心得 published by Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe 北京十月文艺出版社 in 2004 and *Qi nian zhi yang: Zhongguo hong bie le Nuowei lan* 七年之痒: 中国红.....别了挪威蓝 (*The Seven Year Itch*) published by Beijing's Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe 中国青年出版社 in 2004.

series of her autobiographical stories features the theme of urban adventure while actively engaging with how the Mosuo are represented elsewhere in ethnography and fiction. Namu's experiences capture the sense of complexity and fluidity of "the roots and routes" of personal identity, to use John Storey's expression. Her autobiographical stories constantly reveal that the search for a single coherent Mosuo self is a fruitless one. It is worthwhile for us to think of Namu's story (of course, not only her girlhood) in the words of the co-author of her English autobiography, Mathieu: "the story of Namu's girlhood among her people is in every way an extraordinary one, telling of a unique experience, a unique destiny, and an inimitable personality. It is not the story of all Moso" (Yang and Mathieu 272).

The question of how to evaluate Namu's books through the lens of ethnography emerges as problematic, especially when many tend to deduce the collective identity of the Mosuo from this single individual history. For Namu, her enactment of the subject position of being a Mosuo demonstrates her idiosyncratic perspective among the collective singularity of the Mosuo women. In other words, we do get a glimpse of the shared experiences of Namu and other Mosuo people, but the observable variability in the experiences of the Mosuo is the premier base for this chapter, a study of literature, which is non-anthropological by way of deemphasizing collectivities.

As my analysis will show, for one thing, Namu's self-representation fully draws nutrition from her Mosuo root. In contemporary society, what it is to be a Mosuo woman is subject to a matrix of economic and social forces that filters into Mosuo life

through tourism, the media, or migration. Namu's work is imbued with tension and concern about whether the Mosuo tradition can exist in harmony with invading external values. For another, her ethnicity does not take priority over her other subject positions, and it is probably for this reason that many, such as Zhou, consider her self-representation as a Mosuo woman inauthentic. I would like to argue that the value of her self-representation lies in her route of striving to find a voice and style in her writing that accentuates her ethnicity and gender without erasing her characteristics.

3.2 A Balanced Life in Two Dimensions: "Living Fossil" and "Fashion Icon"

Given the fragility and the partiality of the Mosuo subjectivity in a plethora of representations, Namu identifies herself in a spectacular way. If the Mosuo representation is a site of difference, the image of Namu itself is already an exhibition of competing subjectivities. It is through a series of books that Namu works and reworks her identity as a Mosuo woman. Her image is seductive and engaging, and she is selective in her attempts to reclaim an exuberant type of femininity.

The positions and subjectivities that Namu takes up are multidimensional, but at the same time, constituted as an ensemble in her practical experiences of exercising agency. The types of agency that she develops in the process include compliance with and resistance to the changing ethnographic perspectives on the Mosuo. As mentioned above, China's ethnographic work on the Mosuo in the 1980s labeled them as living fossils to justify the necessity for the intellectuals to speak for the primitive other.

When the thesis of the Mosuo kinship system as the living fossil from human evolutionary history puts on a popular outfit, it becomes a solid form of difference to which Namu subscribes. This thesis appears frequently in her books to emphasize her relevance to her Mosuo origin for public consumption. When her primitive identity filters into her commercial campaign, the primitive becomes something mysterious and desirable. Seeing the potential for agency that her Mosuo identity grants her, she strives for balance between the rhetorical figures of the primitive and the modern.

This potential turns into commercial reward through Namu's effective and conscious investment in a selected collection of identities. Namu creates a "glocal" identity, which, in this context, means that Namu tailors her identities to navigate an increasingly glocalized market. According to Jari Kupiainen, "The concept of glocal identity refers to a state of mind in which a person's consciousness of the rest of the world genuinely shapes his or her old local identity and gives to it new qualitative ingredients" (19). In addition to her membership in the living fossil of a matrilineal society, Namu is a global citizen. The Lacanian concept of a split self is not only useful for looking at the acculturation of Sunamei through her identification with the symbolic and the signification in the rituals. Having studied and integrated images attached to different cultures, Namu's self is split or exactly unified as a jigsaw puzzle in the sense of an ego's capacity to interlock each piece into a whole.

As mentioned, the Mosuo girls' initiation ceremony is a way of incorporating and internalizing the culturally expected images. In the case of Namu, she has

undergone a series of modern rituals after crossing the borderline of the Country of Women, who “moved from the primitive to the socialist, and then to the capitalist civilization” (Yang and Li 158). Namu’s contradictory subjectivities are set up in a culturally inscribed universe replete with materialist desires and fantasies. Her principle of agency is faithfulness to a strong self-image that gradually builds confidence in a dazzling world. Through the practice of writing and attending TV shows, she participates in the construction of herself through a self-representation which is marked by her uniqueness as a modern and stylish Mosuo woman.

Namu’s beauty or sense of fashion plays a role in her social and transnational mobility. Most of her books are inundated with her portraits. Her visually-recorded history and memories seem to exist to bolster the truthfulness of her stories of roaming in the Western world. Her literary identity combines with the portraits to craft a star-cum-writer, an entertainment celebrity. Or, it might be said that her pictures as illustrations in her autobiography are “paratexts” that “surround” and “present” the text (Genette 1).¹⁷⁵ The pictures reflect the authorial and/or editorial opinions that set up a marketing strategy. The reading of the pictures is pertinent to Namu’s transition from an innocent rural Mosuo girl to a sophisticated metropolitan woman. As a professional vocalist and model, Namu’s deliberate showcase of her narcissistic sense of self erodes the commonly held assumption that the primitive is inherently backward.

¹⁷⁵ In the words of Gérard Genette, paratexts are “a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations” (1).

In other words, the hyper-visibility of her femininity for self-promoting purposes may not only possess exchange value but has implications for the popular conception of the Mosuo. One series of Namu's portraits, probably shot in the 1990s, is titled *I love Tiananmen Square*. In this series, Chairman Mao's portrait shines in background while Namu parades in stylish clothing and is proudly watched by the Chinese in comparably drab dress.¹⁷⁶ In summary, her physical appearance in print is constructed as a text that is read and studied by the public. The lofty stance of a "living fossil" coupled with a high profile image smashes the myth of the unchanging and inferior other.

In some of her books, the composition of Namu's multiple identities serves the purpose of helping her readers deal with their daily lives. Her pleasant-looking image, which is mainly associated with Westernized leisure and luxury, constructs a fantasy featuring cosmopolitan lifestyle. The recommendation Namu gives is drawn from her experience, which is often parallel to the desires of her readers. Her books are visual spectacles and are urban in focus. She is a social actor and many of her books teach girls gracefulness and proper demeanor at social functions. Her mantra is also the title of her 2003 book *Namu Can Do, So Can You*, in which she encourages girls from humble origins to pursue their dreams. From her perspective, her rural background is a favorable attribute or a prerequisite for her success. Her beauty and dress in pictures affirm her self-esteem and sexual appeal, suggesting her desire to be looked at with

¹⁷⁶ One of the four pictures is featured in *Zouchu nü'er guo* and *Zhongguo hong yujian Nuowei lan* (170). The full set is collected in her picture album, *Namu Huazhuan* 娜姆画传.

envy. Yet when appearing in the context of tips on attire and social etiquette, her constructed fantasy is at best deceptively hard for most rural girls to copy. Namu is just paying homage to her own individual trajectory, her incredible time-travel from the primitive to the modern, now that primitive and modern are mutually imbricated in her works and create a productive tension.

In all, the personal representation of Namu is the best example of locating multiplicity and contradiction in an age of globalization, or the blend of the local and the global. The official formulation of the concept of “Harmony with Difference” purports to counteract the homogeneity and universalism brought by a form of globalization that is dominated by Western ideas. Namu’s writing echoes the social ethos of pluralism so as to expose cultural-homogeneity as a surface value of globalization. What is emerging in her writing are the moments of difference that her subject positions selectively and correspondingly act out, which capture the potentiality of the heterogeneous representations of gender in a globalized world. In terms of difference, Namu is an Asian or a Chinese in the eyes of Westerners, a minority woman in the eyes of the Han. She leaves home and steps into the world of “civilization” to encounter what her ethnicity brings to her, showcasing a changing concept of self moulded through her travelling and homecoming.

3.3 Homecoming

Namu's way of speaking about and relating to the Mosuo is through the language of homecoming. The home forms an important part of her sense of self. Her 1998 book *Zouhui n'ier guo* 走向女儿国 (*Walking Back to the Country of Women*), coauthored with the Mosuo scholar Lamu Gatusa, contains her cultural rumination in conjunction with a de-sensualized rewriting of many of her stories from *Zouchu n'ier guo*. In this 1998 book, a modern world replete with strife awakens Namu's nostalgia for her harmonious Mosuo home, which, upon her return, does not conform to her beautified memory. When coming home to rest from her journey, she knows more intimately the oppression and discrimination she faces as a woman, as a minority in China, and as an Asian (22).

On the other hand, Namu laments that the muddy trend of modern civilization brought in by tourism has polluted the Mosuo's crystal clean Lugu Lake, which gives her the wild sense that "our mother lake is being raped" (3). The metaphor of rape betrays the infiltration of or the conflation with the coauthor Lamu's perspective and concern in this semi-autobiographical or, rather, biographical work. Most conspicuously, several paragraphs praising intergenerational matrilineal households in the section "Yidianyuan zhi ge" 伊甸园之歌 ("The Song of Eden") of the chapter "Nü'er guo yimeng" 女儿国遗梦 ("The Remaining Dream of the Country of Women") (47-52) are directly taken from Lamu's 1998 book on Mosuo culture, *Zoujin nü'er guo* 走进女儿国 (*Walking into the Country of Women*) (10-14).

Yet in a glaring instance of internal contradiction, *Zouhui nü'er guo* does not continuously present Namu's household as "harmonious," which is plagued by familial conflicts. This instance echoes Zhou Huashan's comments on the tension and potential crisis within the Mosuo culture in relation to the social discourse of familial harmony (350). In *Zouhui nü'er guo*, Namu's mother was a rebel in her young age for breaking up from the big matrilineal family. Having tasted the bitterness of raising a family of six children without the support of female kin, she, in old age, announces that "the big family is better; the walking marriage is better. Monogamy is not a good thing" (8-14).¹⁷⁷ In insisting that her children practice *tisese* to save them from the suffering she has been through, she ruins the marriage of her older son and develops a tense relationship with the younger one. In this book, the family is the site of competing interests and obligations at moments of rapid social and economic change. Namu's family members have less than harmonious interactions when her mother wants to preserve tradition and control the household condition.

Moreover, Namu's 2001 book *Zhongguo hong yujian Nuowei lan* 中国红遇见挪威蓝 (*When the Chinese Red meets the Norwegian Blue*) contains a reflection on her relationship with her mother in the midst of chronicling her time living with a Norwegian diplomat in Europe. Away from home, now accentuating her Chineseness in Diaspora by calling herself the Chinese Red, Namu ponders her connection with

¹⁷⁷ In this book, Namu's mother is described as having experienced marriage, a piece of information that *Zouchu nü'er guo* and *Leaving Mother Lake* do not mention. In fact, there are many contradictions within Namu's different accounts of her life story.

her mother from a new perspective, gaining inspiration from Mathieu, with whom she cooperated on her English autobiography *Leaving Mother Lake*. Speaking from her inability to hug, to communicate heartily with and to verbally express gratefulness to her mother, Namu acknowledges the culturally inscribed particularity of the mother-daughter bond. When the thesis of the harmonious matrilineal household is frequently evoked in academia, Namu registers a sense of regret that there was not an opportunity for her to develop a habit of sharing work with her mother, who had been beleaguered by heavy housework for years.

Though her books speak to the dark undercurrents of a “harmonious” community, and despite the fact that she left home in rebellion against her culture, Namu constantly uses her inherited values to reflect on her experience and on what kind of person she believes herself to be. Her Mosuo roots are a central reference point for her from which to experience the world. Living abroad, she likens her sense of belonging to a kite that is tied to Lugu Lake by a string (Yang and Lamu 29). The deepest cultural imprint of the Mosuo is her sense of obligation to care about home. Over the years, she has demonstrated her filial piety not only to her mother but to her hometown through actions such as building a private museum for cultural preservation.

3.4 Displaying Difference by Mimicry

Despite her investment in a particular identity, such as that of a filial Mosuo daughter, is not lacking in emotional commitment, Namu's image does not correspond with the traditional female image, for which success is recognized in a domestic setting. She is a spokeswoman for a particular type of femininity that counteracts domestication. From her transparent aggrandizement of self and the way in which she triumphantly accepts other's criticism of her narcissism, it is clear that she knows how she wants to be seen by others. Her demonstrated femininity is maneuvered in wider social economic contexts. In other's sight, the primitive aspects of her identity explain her wildness and boldness, which, in turn, act as the key to her fame in a highly competitive market economy. The readers also accept her modern side, to which they can easily relate. As if using an ethnographic double-sided mirror, Namu never gets tired of narrating her experiences with "other" cultures, be they Western or Han. In her attempt to harmonize different cultural elements, there is an established link between her inclinations to draw close to or gain distance from the Han culture. When her public image suggests what kind of successful feminine self one can be, Namu's brand of femininity becomes the creative resource that authors and vitalizes her book project that "accidentally" parodies the Han culture.

Her desires to relate herself to the Han culture are best displayed in her 2005 book *Anxiang: Zhongguo nüren de xìnggǎn yǔ chuānqíng* 暗香:中国女人的性感与传情 (*Dim Fragrance: The Sexiness and Sultriness of Chinese Women*). This book is

dedicated to the culture of the *xiongdou* 胸兜, a diamond-shape piece of lingerie that loosely covers a woman's chest. Namu believes that the *xiongdou* is reminiscent of China of the past, in that it is like a veil that hides a type of subtle seductiveness. Her book is a collection of pictures featuring her personal collection of embroidered antique *xiongdou*, an illustrated delineation of the history of the *xiongdou*, and a compilation of different views on the sexiness of the Chinese woman. In *Anxiang*, the sexualized visuality apparent in her former books now assumes a dignified air to showcase the cultural tradition of the Han. Her appreciation of the *xiongdou* adopts the manner of a male-identified connoisseur whose view is heavily influenced by Western conceptions; this is, again, the result of her absorption of diverse cultural traditions.

In the book, the tradition of the Han Chinese is sexualized with an ancient, ethnic look, or from another angle, an Oriental look. Employing a Western point of view and gaining a position of interpretation, Namu considers herself both an insider and outsider vis-a-vis Chinese culture. Her hybrid identity creates a space for her to mimic the exoticizing tendencies of the civilized center, which she repurposes as a “subject of difference.” For decades, the Mosuo have been imagined by the center as a sensuous other, yet Namu, acting as a cultural relativist, holds onto the belief in “difference in equality” in a practical way to treat the Han culture on an equal footing. Her borrowed poetic expression in the postscript of the book is a fitting illustration of the notion of “Harmony with difference,” which sings the praises of “the spring with a

riot of colors over the lonely blooming of a red flower” (*yi hua du fang hong yi dian , wan zi qian hong cai shi chun* 一花独放红一点，万紫千红才是春) in a globalized world (138).

Namu abandons the convention of the ethnic other as the mythical and unchangeable for a counter-expression that eroticizes the tradition of the Han woman. In paying homage to Oriental femininity, Namu cultivates a comparative gaze through which to look at feminine beauty, as if she is an obsessed Orientalist. After expressing her humbleness and ardent admiration for the Han culture in the Forward, she introduces her first interviewee, a foreigner, a manic collector of the *xiongdou*, who praises the Chinese women for their way of caring for (*kuandai* 款待) their breasts with a cover which languishes for wooing and is eloquent, with an implicit air of *sao* 骚 /coquettishness (9). Moreover, Namu portrays the subtle eroticism of the Chinese woman in contradistinction to the frankness of the Western women, as well as to her own boldness. On the one hand, the comparison between the appearance of the *xiongdou* and the western-style brassiere prefigures an ethnographic gaze. On the other hand, as Namu laments, the full figure of a minority woman (i.e. herself) does not fit with the shyness of the *xiongdou*, which further explains her infatuation with the item. Imaging the beautiful beasts and beautiful hearts and the beautiful aspirations for life that are hidden under the *xiongdou*, Namu is moved and aroused by the dim fragrance of the Chinese flavor (10-11).

A contemplation on lingerie's subtle sexiness is the climax in Namu's consistent search for a literary style that experiments with the connotations of certain Chinese words, such as *xinggan* 性感 (sexy) and *fengsao/saobao* 风骚/骚包 (coquettish), which she appreciates as the beautiful invention of the Han people and laments for their derogative tincture ("Zhang de piaoliang" 115). Oftentimes, Namu describes herself as being *saobao* to reclaim the word, using it to describe a personality that is outgoing, admiring of beauty, and full of zeal. In her 2006 book *Zhang de piaoliang bu ru huo de piaoliang* 长得漂亮不如活得漂亮 (*To Live Pretty is Better than to Look Pretty*), she uses the word sexy to describe a Mosuo woman from her childhood memory (116). In her memory, the woman was in a long blue skirt, her face glowing with the light of fire pond as she distributed scoops of food to the children, who were utterly stunned by her charm. The sexiness of the woman is radiated through the process of giving. As a matter of fact, Namu's books describe her personal journey "from Carmen to Mother Theresa" ("Nüren meng" 29), a trajectory from her hedonistic consumption of youth to her embraces of a type of femininity that stresses social responsibility. According to Namu, a woman who embodies true sexiness shall accept and value herself as a woman and enjoy making love, giving birth, and nurturing others ("Chang de piaoliang" 115). Her fantasy of what constitutes a sexy woman is, for example, a female government official in a patriarchal society who manages to ignore patriarchal forces to express her wisdom in a manner that is neither aggressive nor conciliatory (116).

As for *Anxiang*, the book makes the type of femininity that Namu assumes distinctive in that she does not forget to devote a chapter to Lugu Lake, which is ushered in by the lyrics of a song titled *Shangri-La*, where the heart of a wanderer is tethered to the brilliant colored flowers and sweet smelling mud of the land that has nurtured generations of mothers (108). The Country of Women is Namu's Shangri-La. Namu claims to share many of the good attributes to her fellow Mosuo, including extreme filial piety toward elders. Filial piety, a Mosuo characteristic that is often celebrated in the academic discourse, is concretized by a wanderer's sense of caring for her mother, her family and her hometown. Namu disassociates her cultural root from hints of erotica in this book exploring the sexuality of the Han woman.

Namu's construction of femininity and her subjective representation of femininity are departures from the dominant gender ideology and are leveraged through self-Orientalism. Said's Orientalism describes how Westerners, from a privileged viewpoint, visualize the Orient as a static and monolithic site where colonial power dominates. "Internal Orientalism," a term used by Louisa Schein, refers to a discursive practice in China that exists to justify the superiority of those in the civilized center over the ethnic other, the majority of whom inhabit the rural areas of China's vast west. Bhabha's critique of Said inspires us to locate a potential for subversion in Namu's self-representation under the parameter of "internal Orientalism." Bhabha suggests that Said falls short of investigating the differentiated and changing experiences of the colonial subject. Bhabha redeems the role of the

other from that of purely “being imagined” to something more substantial by describing the other’s act of “colonial mimicry,” an “ironic compromise” with the Westerner’s “desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (122). Likewise, Namu’s counter-imagination of the Han culture blurs lines between deference and disobedience. Namu’s self-representation, while fulfilling the Han’s desire for a “reformed” yet somewhat different other, creates a parodic effect in the midst of her expression of eagerness to learn about Han culture.

Anxiang is such an example of Namu’s self-representation, which adjusts the center’s representations of the other. The book is a revelation of the contradiction and ambivalence within the discourse of “internal Orientalism.” A minority woman has an epiphany through a Western perspective when appreciating and admiring the Han culture. Namu reverses the power hierarchy of internal Orientalism by casting an orientalizing gaze on herself, mimicking a Han woman wearing the traditional lingerie, *xiongdou*. An ethnic other is empowered through her liaison with the West, which has cultivated her personal fantasy to orientalize the Han culture. In other words, she gains an ambivalent position between East and West, or a resistant position from which she is able to destabilize the perceived inferiority of the ethnic other.

The Han culture has “reformed” Namu, only in an incomplete fashion. On the one hand, she has to be like the Han. Time and again, she reinforces her Chineseness, expressing her patriotic pride in being a Chinese woman in her Diaspora. “My roots

are in China” she states in *Zouchu n ier guo* (2). “Mimicry” in this sense involves resonance with the national sentiments of the overseas Chinese, with special consideration for the public acceptance of her books. In the West, she presents herself a representative of Chinese culture and believes that her penchant for Chinese embroidered dress can accentuate her identity while allowing her to gain favor among Westerners. On the other hand, she has to distinguish herself from the Han so that she can become a deserving recipient of the profound Han culture. Nevertheless, the ambiguity embedded in her cross-cultural encounter does not necessarily mean that she has intended to polish the rough edges of her personality.

3.5 “A Woman Blossoming in the Season of Criticism”

Namu’s 2008 book *Daihua de n ieren* 戴花的女人 (*The Woman with a Flower*) is written to both clear up and commemorate the scandals that plagued her career as a judge on a singing competition show, “Joyous Voice of Boys” (*Kuaile nansheng* 快乐男声). In the book, Namu calls herself a five-star Gypsy, because a Gypsy does not have roots, or has roots that follow one’s body (158). Jumping back and forth through many cultural modules (*wenhua bankuai* 文化版块), Namu says that she has formed superficial relationships with the primitive matrilineal society, the Han culture, and the Western concept of life (*ibid*). A Gypsy is always set between the worlds, the hometown which she left turns into an object of nostalgia, and the one in which she is currently present may fail to give her a sense of belonging. This new recognition is

quite different from her earlier claims of attachment to Chineseness. As she seemingly comes to terms with her changing concept of self, Namu admits that being a Mosuo has put great pressure on her and that she is gripped by a strong “ethnic complex” (*minzu qingjie* 民族情结), which enters her dreams in ubiquitous forms of dreaming in her native language of Mosuo. She proclaims that “Yang Erche Namu has become a cultural symbol,” which she interprets as a proud contribution that she makes on behalf of her fellow Mosuo (160). As noted earlier, her “contribution” under others’ judgment could be flipped to the other end of the spectrum and viewed as “blasphemy.”

Thanks to her distinctive style as a judge for the singing competition, she has won many accolades from the media. Namu quips that she is “A woman blossoming in the season of criticism” (在骂声中开花的杨二车娜姆) who takes delight in receiving the title of being the “Topic Queen” of 2007 TV entertainment shows (2).¹⁷⁸ Without explicitly referring back to her “living fossil” origin, she remarks that she is “really evolved in the world of entertainment” (*ibid*) which is as chaotic as that of the Stone Age. A judge who insists upon wearing a flower(s) on her head has being deemed by some as a disharmonious component on the Chinese TV screen, while being appreciated by others. Then what kind of statement is Namu making with her trademark flower?

¹⁷⁸ The English preface has it as “A Woman Blossoming out in scolds” (6).

Are we to understand that the flower brings her artificial self and her natural self close to each other, if the flower suggests her rural upbringing? Does the flower empower or dethrone her when she has entered the public sphere?

Beauty criteria are socially constructed. Women's looks have long been under the surveillance of patriarchal institutions, manipulated to satisfy the male gaze either through the mediation of rules or through exterior or internalized pressures.

According to Naomi Wolf's understanding of the beauty myth, "in assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves" (12). On the one hand, the visibility of difference showcased by Namu satisfies the public desire for colorful feminine images, a desire that is driven by the market economy. Since Namu seeks to take advantage of her position as an object of spectacle, she actively maintains a high profile image from which to radiate the glamour of her multiple identities. Given the changing ideologies on femininity, there are always publicly-acknowledged or media-sanctioned ways of looking that are supposed to be consistent with good taste. The red flower asserts Namu's subjective criteria for beauty, which problematizes the equation between the gaze and masculine power. The décor of a flower in hair is inconsistent with the beauty ideals that are currently valued in mainstream Chinese culture. More accurately, the flower itself is intrinsically innocent, but wearing a red flower in one's hair carries seductive overtones, or at least is an attention-grabbing

frivolity. Thus the flower might be considered inappropriate when worn by a middle-aged woman, reinforcing the impression of Namu as kitschy and ostentatious.

Namu became a target of scandals and was besmirched by the media, the same media that had constructed her as a pop culture icon. The State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT) banned (*fengsha* 封杀) her from attending any television broadcasting, or as described in the English prescript of *Dai hua de n iren*, she was “forced out” (5). Though Namu never does explicitly explain the exact reason for the decision made by the SARFT, we can infer through her books that the decision is a matter of identity and politics. When it comes to the arena of artistic creation, “to force out” is a hegemonic way of curbing the dissemination of different voices and images in the name of building a harmonious society. From early 2007, SARFT launched an anti-vulgarity campaign (*fan disu hua* 反低俗化) targeting TV entertainment programs.

In contraposition to *jingying wenhua* 精英文化 (elite culture), the Chinese word *tongsu wenhua* 通俗文化 (popular culture) implies its perceived affinity with the masses, the low-grade, or vulgar taste (P. Chen 1). In actuality, the borderline between the high-brow (雅 *ya*) and the low-brow (俗 *su*) is rather fluid and obscure. A phony flower in a vase on display in a museum may be considered *ya*, whereas that same flower can instantly transform into *su* if it is in Namu’s hair. The unspoken word is still a suspicion on the capability of a “reformed” or “civilized” minority woman to gain the sensibility of “*ya*.” As a matter of fact, Namu’s zeal for fame and attention

which people can easily dismiss as *su* unabashedly saturates her speech and writing. *Zouchu n ier guo* reveals that in Namu's time as a student at the Shanghai Music Academy her commercial performance incurred criticism— her teachers told her that the arts should not be corrupted by the “foul odor of money” (142). In addition, fine material objects always stand as important thematic and narrative connections to her journey around the world. Just as she turns the “primitive” into the hyper modern, Namu's self-decoration essentially plays with *ya* and *su* through which her maverick deeds play a hand in defining fashion. Namu juxtaposes *su* elements with the so-called *ya* to expose the hypocrisy of a materialistic society that denies her honest utterance of desire and value.

Considering the public's consumption and rejection of the “*su*” aspects in Namu's image, we shall ask whether the political quest for “Harmony with Difference” is a camouflage for “Harmony without Difference.” *Daihua de n iren* attributes Namu's inability to sustain her TV career to her sharp, and what she terms as a “*yuan shengtai*” 原生态 (“original ecological”) style of commentary on TV shows (116). According to Namu, her ecological language, or her way of imagining a piece of music into a story in a natural setting, is beyond the comprehension of some. Her courage to fight with “one after another sissy male judge” (6) implies an act of fighting a patriarchal order. The media then deems her uncompromising and unreserved manner the embodiment of “*su*” as opposed to the proper behavior of a “*ya*” or elegant woman.

Namu's book *Daihua de nüren* might have beautified and glossed over the events surrounding her censure, yet its ridicule of the policing power of the media is still poignant. The damage to her reputation is the outcome of a media game ascribing social significance to practices that transgress the comfort zone of the patriarchal culture. Due to mediated efforts of the market and the SARFT, the crisis in her self-representation arises from her insistence on her outstanding and outlandish taste at the cost of official approval. In her Sina blog, she writes on April 15th 2011 that "Born into the Country of Women, I live in the ocean of patriarchal metropolitan. I tell myself to...live without depending on the government, depending on men, or depending on family so that dignity will be in my own hands."¹⁷⁹ Today Namu is no longer active on the TV screen, but she has found other means, such as writing on-line blogs, of expressing her self-esteem of being a Mosuo woman, a "woman blossoming in the season of criticism."

In conclusion, Bai Hua's novel and the textual profile of Namu not only testify to the trajectory of the Mosuo's mindset from self-abased to proud, but bring to the fore their creative and playful usage of the intellectual language. Bearing the influence of ethnography, the Mosuo in the literary imagination develops its own accounts of making the Country of Women either an exemplary harmonious

¹⁷⁹ My translation of "一个出生在女儿国的我，生活却在一个充满男权都市的海水里，我每天都告诉自己要手背朝上的活着，不依赖政府，不依赖男人，不依赖家人，尊严就会在自己手上。" See Namu's blog article "Wo bu shi zazhong" 我不是杂种 ("I am not a Hybrid").

community or a perpetual element of difference in China's vision for a unified
harmonious society.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Each of the three previous chapters has described a different type of heterotopia; each chapter both functions independently and builds connections with the others.

As mentioned in the Introduction, in Foucault's analogy, heterotopia is a "mirror" through which the reflection of reality constitutes a "virtual space" that occupies the realm behind the surface ("Of Other Spaces" 24). In my dissertation, heterotopias do exist in virtual space within which the mirror image of China's utopian past manifests in the textual creation of three minority regions. My use of heterotopia also corresponds with Adam's explanation of the virtual other, which, first of all, bears the meaning of "virtual" in Middle English as "possessed of certain physical virtues" (20). Drawn from the renewed utopian impulses in post-Mao era, the spaces of otherness under my examination negotiate the stricture of China's grand visions of Harmony. The perceived virtues they contain are paradigmatic of an intellectual search for the spirituality that is intended as the foundation of a sound man-society-nature interaction. In other words, heterotopia located in the different order of time and space has physical and, by extension, spiritual virtues, and thus has the potential to stand on par with grand utopianism.

Moreover, Adam points out that "virtual" in contemporary English means "some degree of being unreal, in a simulated sense — emergent from an interplay of imaginations or technologies, or creative representations" (20). The three spaces

discussed in my dissertation, as “creative representations” of China’s borderlands, are all posed between the real and unreal in different ways. The debates on the veracity of *Wolf Totem*’s portrayal of the natural history of Inner Mongolian steppe, Shangri-La’s transition from fiction to reality, and the Mosuo’s internalization of ethnographic viewpoints suggest that the relationship between heterotopia and its references transcends mere representation. As demonstrated in literary and artistic patterns, the imagination of China’s ethnic frontiers is partially developed from textual traditions such as the Shangri-La/Shambhala myths or the ethnographically constructed ethnic minority. But at the same time, the literary imagination could work in reverse, becoming viable means by which to mould the intellectual discourse and even the real.

In his study of America’s Nature Fakers Controversy, Lutts expresses the belief that “The authors who were called nature fakers probably had a much greater impact upon the public perception of wildlife than did the more scientific writers” (187). This comment may apply to *Wolf Totem*, as can be seen from not only its ability to attract an army of followers and imitators in the publishing arena, but also in the local wildlife protection initiatives it generated in Inner Mongolia. In recent years, the implementation of the Endangered Species Act that sought to revitalize the number of wolves does not take into account a ravaged food chain in which human activities have severely diminished the number of the Mongolian gazelles. Then something quite unexpected occurred: the starving wolf pack, facing harsh winter weather, has

been left with little choice but to raid livestock.¹⁸⁰ When well-intentioned attempts to regenerate ecology introduced detrimental consequences for herdsman due to a lack of understanding of the philosophy of the big life and the little life, we need to consider how to balance ecological interference born of good or even utopian wishes with pragmatism. As a successor to *Wolf Totem*, *Zangdi mima* also cries for environmental conservancy. Furthermore, the novel's popularity boosts a plethora of fictions that feature the theme of Shambhala. This pervasive Shambhala-themed literature could be the topic of another study that would further complete the picture of how the indigenization and circulation of the Shangri-La/Shambhala myths in China integrate social and environmental concerns.

As illustrated in the body of this dissertation, my application of heterotopia suggests that the literary imagination of China's ethnic frontiers does not neatly assume either eutopian or dystopian functions. Rather, it operates at different levels, as a means of retreating from state-led utopian schemes and debunking the idea that visions of a harmonious world are homogeneous. My discussion underscores the transformability between, or in some cases, the asymmetrical mutual containment of utopia and dystopia. The construction of heterotopia entails processes that bring about the enacted scenarios of "Harmony-with-difference" through identifying with different social groups in a pluralistic society. In a differentiated social sphere,

¹⁸⁰According to a news titled "Yelang dou e feng le—Neimenggu langhuan beihou de Shengtai kunju" 野狼都饿疯了——内蒙古狼患背后的生态困局 ("The Starving Wild Wolves—the Ecological Dilemma behind the Wolf Plague of Inner Mongolia) published on Jan 18th, 2013 at Xinhua net (新华网).

heterotopia's relationship with grand utopian visions does not come close to calling for the dissolution of hope for a better society. Rather, heterotopia's counteraction of a languishing state-sponsored idealism addresses the necessity of nurturing utopian dreams as a resilient and highly personal form of faith that allows individuals to navigate frustrations and disillusionment with the status quo.

In all, fascinations with the three spaces of otherness outlined in this dissertation provide vivid examples of "topophilia," a term coined by Yi-Fu Tuan in 1974, which means the investment of emotion in realizing one's dream about a place (4). In my study, the fictive contexts featuring three minority regions work out original ways of commenting on the world and gratifying speculations on alternative routes to cultural ecology and spirituality. The writers of heterotopia have developed affective ties with their "virtual spaces" as a way of withdrawing from a life under imposed utopianism. Strictly speaking, this is not escapism, but a desire to ardently prepare, if not purely for the future, then for the birth of a constructive attitude towards building a more sensible and liveable world.

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