

THE PROBLEMATIC FORMATION OF THE MODERN SELF IN LU XUN'S "IN  
MEMORIAM" AND DING LING'S "MISS SOPHIA'S DIARY"

by

SHUANGTING XIONG

A THESIS

Presented to the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Asian Studies  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

June 2017

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Shuangting Xiong

Title: The Problematic Formation of the Modern Self in Lu Xun's "In Memoriam" and Ding Ling's "Miss Sophia's Diary"

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Asian Studies by:

Roy Chan	Chairperson
Maram Epstein	Member
Bryna Goodman	Member

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
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Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2017

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

Shuangting Xiong

Master of Arts

Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Asian Studies

June 2017

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The crisis of the Chinese nation in the early twentieth century compelled May Fourth intellectuals to search for a modern self in order to modernize and strengthen the nation. They did so by self-consciously experimenting with literary forms and genres, from which the first-person narratives arose. This thesis explores how particular formal or generic characteristics produce, problematize, or even impede the formation of a modern self modeled on the Western Enlightenment notions of the self as autonomous, coherent, and bounded. I argue that despite the two authors' attempt to create an aspirational modern self, the selves constructed in the two texts are always fragile, split and fragmented. It not only reveals the limits of the Western Enlightenment epistemology of the self but also a more complicated processes of how the concepts of the self and subjectivity, as discursive constructs, are contested and negotiated in particular historical circumstance and social reality.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Shuangting Xiong

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene  
Renmin University of China, Beijing

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Asian Studies, 2017 University of Oregon  
Master of Arts, English, 2015 University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2013 Renmin University of China

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Twentieth Century Chinese Literature  
Gender and Subjectivity  
Genre Theory and Formalism  
Marxian Criticism

### GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Asian Studies, University of Oregon, 2015-17  
Asian Studies Graduate Award, Asian Studies, University of Oregon, 2015  
Summer Research Grant, Asian Studies, University of Oregon, 2015  
Graduate Teaching Fellowship, English, University of Oregon, 2014-15

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to my committee chair, Professor Roy Chan, for his unwavering support throughout my years in graduate school at the University of Oregon, devoting his time and energy to share his knowledge and expertise and mentor me as a scholar. I am also indebted to Professor Maram Epstein, who has generously devoted her time to read and comment on my thesis drafts, meet with me and discuss numerous issues facing my drafts. My special thanks also go to Professor Bryna Goodman who has guided me and given support to me for years. It goes without saying that without my committee members' constructive feedback, this thesis would have remained in fragments.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: DEFINING, THEORIZING, AND PROBLEMATIZING

#### SUBJECTIVITY, SELF, AND THEIR RELATIONS TO

#### LITERARY FORM

The use of first-person singular was not a modern invention. Many literary scholars in the China field have confirmed that autobiographical writings existed in traditional China;<sup>1</sup> some view Sima Qian's "The Self-Narration of the Senior Archivist" 太史公自序 as the earliest known autobiographical writing in Chinese literary history. Wendy Larson, for instance, in the prelude to her study of modern Chinese autobiographies, categorizes "The Self-Narration" as a "prototypical autobiography."<sup>2</sup> However, unlike a typical Western autobiography or novel that begins with the birth of the protagonist, such as David Copperfield, Sima Qian's name in fact does not appear until several pages into the text. Instead he first narrates at great length his family genealogy and history, particularly their positions as state scribe and archivist, his father Sima Tian, and the training and education Tian has received; he even faithfully reproduces an essay written by Sima Tian on Six Schools (*liujia* 六家). As Larson points out, the self which Sima Qian constructs in "The Self-Narration" takes its meaning and authority in the duty of transmission and other eternal elements such as the Feng and Shan Sacrifice and reordering of the celestial calendar.<sup>3</sup> Such a self is always defined and positioned "in relation to eternal phenomena, social structures and

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<sup>1</sup> A prominent example is Wu Pei-Yi's pioneering study of premodern Chinese autobiographical writings by male authors in *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (1990).

<sup>2</sup> See Wendy Larson, *Literary Authority and the Modern Chinese Writer: Ambivalence and Autobiography* (1991). Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker echoes Larson's observation in the introduction chapter in her monograph *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant "Other" in Modern Chinese Literature* (1998).

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of transmitting historical records and its relation to textual authority, see Stephen Durrant "Truth Claims in Shiji" in Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Achim Mittag and Jörn Rüsen eds. *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism, and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*. 2005.



institutions, and political ideology” (Larson 1991, 16). To summarize, the type of self in Sima Qian’s “The Self-Narration” is completely situated in contexts and defined by its relations and duties to external institutions (family in particular) and textual traditions.

What was a modern invention was to use “I” (*wo*) to construct a new type of self unbounded by traditions and filial obligations, a coherent and autonomous modern self that May Fourth intellectuals aspired to.<sup>4</sup> The publication of Lu Xun’s “Diary of a Madman” (*Kuangren riji*) in 1918 was probably the first step toward that construction. It has long been recognized as the first example of modern Chinese vernacular (*baihua*) fiction and marker of Chinese literary modernity.<sup>5</sup> Along with the subsequent proliferation of first-person narratives in the May Fourth era, there began an entire generation of intellectuals’ intense interests in the individual and modern self. May Fourth intellectuals were inexhaustibly questioning what it meant to be modern and endeavoring to conceive a modern self by self-consciously experimenting with forms and genres. This thesis chooses two canonical first-person narratives, Lu Xun’s “In Memoriam” 傷逝 (1925) and Ding Ling’s “Miss Sophia’s Diary” 莎菲女士的日記 (1927), as most representative of such endeavors of their era.

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<sup>4</sup> This type of self will sometimes be termed as “an aspirational modern self” later in this thesis. It particularly refers to a kind of self modeled on Western Enlightenment notions of the self as autonomous, coherent, independent, possessive, etc. Yet as this thesis argues, that attempt to discursively create a modern self’s never achieved.

<sup>5</sup> Later literary historians discovered that another vernacular short story, “One Day” (*Yiri*), by Chen Hengzhe, a female writer studying in the Vassar College in the United States, was published almost a year earlier. It first appeared in the journal *Students Abroad in America Quarterly* (*Liumei xuesheng jikan*), edited by Hu Shi and published in the United States. For a detailed discussion of Chen Hengzhe’s short story, see chapter one in Janet Ng’s *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century*.

I am highly aware of the contested idea of “modernity” and the controversies surrounding the question of when Chinese literary modernity began. Some scholars may identify Ming urban centers as the places where modernity occurred and point to Ming and Qing vernacular fictions (the *huaben* genre) as manifestations of literary modernity. More often literary scholars may regard the late-Qing period as the inception of modern literature. I, however, follow the convention that recognizes the New Culture Movement as the beginning of a new era because of the most fundamental self-induced transformation in the very form and medium by which literature was constituted. In other words there had never been a more self-conscious break from the past, innovations of literary forms, and creations of epistemological disjunction before the May Fourth era. My definition of the term modern reflects the self-conscious, always self-reflexive nature of the term as used in May Fourth literature texts in general. The difficulty of periodization is that there always remains some cultural residual in any emergent era, and thus any demarcations of “tradition” and “modernity” have various limits and always remain inadequate.

The two texts were also chosen for their formal and generic complexities that have been ignored by many literary scholars in the field. The two texts are fictionalized first-person narratives presented in the form of personal notes and a diary. Why did these two authors employ these multiply mediated forms rather than tell a straightforward story? What functions does a diary perform that cannot be accomplished by any other forms? What textual and cultural functions does the first-person singular “I,” a presumably optimal site to construct self and subjectivity, perform? Even though selfhood and subjectivity in modern Chinese literature is a much-discussed topic, little attention has been directed to the very medium that creates subjectivity, i.e. language.<sup>6</sup> Fewer have paid close attention to the intrinsic formal and generic mechanisms of literary texts. It is my intention to point out that mediation, or the form of the work of art, matters. Mediation, according to Adorno, is absolutely necessary for the work of art to exist and function outside of social reality.<sup>7</sup>

Thus instead of viewing literature simply as representations of the self and social reality, this thesis explores how particular formal or generic characteristics produce, problematize, or even impede the formation of a coherent and autonomous modern self modeled on Western Enlightenment thinking.<sup>8</sup> Through my close readings of the two texts, it is my contention that despite the two authors’ attempt to create an aspirational modern male

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<sup>6</sup> I am evoking French linguist Emile Benveniste’s classic formulation on the relation between language and subjectivity that “it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject” (221), a formulation I will rely on to perform literary analysis. The only existing scholarship that discusses first-person narratives from a linguistic perspective is the sixth chapter “The Deixis of Writing in the First Person” in Lydia H. Liu’s *Translingual Practice*. However even as Lydia Liu briefly evokes Emile Benveniste’s linguistic theory that it is through language that a subject is constituted, her consequent reading of “Miss Sophia’s Diary” focuses more on writing and reading as a gendered act and thus fails to fully engage with Benveniste’s theory and the function of a “I” discourse.

<sup>7</sup> See Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” *New Left Review* 1 87-88 (1974): p. 80. Adorno elucidates the dialectic relation between the work of art and social reality: it obeys the rules of social reality and maintains distance from it. That distance is the form of the work of art; the form mediates between art and social reality and guarantees the autonomy of art.

<sup>8</sup> I agree with Vera Schwarz’s main contention that the May Fourth Movement was the enlightenment movement of China for its iconoclastic stance, its interests in and celebration of Western Enlightenment values such as democracy and equality, and etc. See Schwarz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (1986).

and female self, the selves constructed in the two texts are always fragile, split and fragmented. It not only reveals the limits of the Western Enlightenment epistemology of the self but also exposes a more complicated processes of how the concepts of the self and subjectivity, as discursive constructs, are contested and negotiated in particular historical circumstances and social reality. A recourse to defining what a Western Enlightenment epistemology of the self is seems now necessary before I turn to the polyvalent formal and aesthetic innovations of May Fourth writers and form's dialectic relations to social reality. This task involves working out the semantic meaning(s) as well as history of contested ideas such as subjectivity, individuality, and individualism in their original contexts. The first step of this introduction chapter then is to achieve a certain degree of construction after numerous genealogical deconstructions.<sup>9</sup>

Decades ago Jaroslav Průšek in *The Lyrical and the Epic* already captured the subjective and individualistic feature of the May Fourth literature: "There can be no question that subjectivism and individualism, joined with pessimism and a feeling for the tragedy of life, along with an inclination to revolt and even the tendency to self-destruction, are the most characteristic qualities of Chinese literature from the May Fourth Movement of 1919 to the outbreak of war with Japan" (3). Even though Průšek later was criticized for interpreting Chinese literature through the lens of a Euro-American literary standard that privileged subjectivity, his foregrounding of subjectivism and individualism nevertheless had significant impact on later studies of modern Chinese literature, especially of the May Fourth literature.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> An entire generation of literary scholars in the China field trained in poststructuralism devoted their works to genealogical studies of an idea or cultural phenomenon. Some typical works include Lydia H. Liu's *Translingual Practice* (1995), and Haiyan Lee's *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Theodore Hutters later gives a clearer definition of Průšek's "subjectivity" as "interiority." He conceives "narrative interiority" as "one literary techniques among a range of possibilities" that does not confer indications of quality of a certain

Lydia H. Liu's early scholarship, for instance, is largely focused on the question of subjectivity and the self in modern Chinese literature. In the chapter titled "The Discourse of Individualism" in *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937*, Liu problematized Průšek's uncritical use of terms imported from the West, often via Japanese neologism, such as "individualism" and "subjectivism." In that chapter, she traces the creation and ever changing meaning of "individualism." As a translated discursive construct, "individualism" underwent various conceptualizations whose meaning was both historically contingent and discursively constructed: it was deemed compatible with Confucianism when first introduced into late-Qing China and later conceived as an antithesis to the nation-state. During the May Fourth period, it was defined against a Confucian tradition that was supposedly collective and prioritized familial and communal obligations over individual freedom; "individualism" thus was upheld and weaponized by May Fourth intellectuals to rebel against a repressive traditional society. In the 1930s, however, it came under attack by leftist intellectuals for its complicity in bourgeois ideology. Liu is right to point out the historical contingency and discursive constructedness of the term "individualism" in the Chinese context, yet after the deconstruction of a cultural term what we are left with is a nebulous constellation of meanings with all their poststructuralist indeterminacy.

In order to develop a working definition of such a contested idea such as subjectivity, a return to its definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary might be surprisingly useful and revealing. The first OED definition of "subjectivity" is "the quality or condition of being

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text (traditional texts were deemed "inferior" for their "lack" of interiority).

based on subjective consciousness, experience, etc.” The second definition is divided into “consciousness of one’s states or actions” and “a conscious being.” Based on these two definitions, we can observe subjectivity’s inseparable associations with consciousness. In other words, having subjectivity is predicated on having a consciousness or being conscious. The third definition is divided into two sub-groups: a) “The quality in literature or art which depends on the expression of the personality or individuality of the artist; the individuality of an artist as expressed in his work” and b) “The quality or condition of viewing things chiefly or exclusively through the medium of one’s own mind or individuality; the condition of being dominated by or absorbed in one’s personal feelings, thoughts, concerns, etc.; individuality, personality.” Here the definition of “subjectivity” gets conflated with “individuality” and thus acquires the meaning of individuality which can be summarized as unique attributes including personality possessed by a person that distinguish him/her from others—the first two OED definitions of “individuality.” This belief in the uniqueness of an individual and thus worthy of our undiluted attention underlies modern autobiographical writings.

“Individuality” also means “being indivisible” from which another key definition is derived: “*separate and continuous* existence as a single *indivisible* entity” (my emphasis). This definition best illustrates the Enlightenment notions of the self that define the self as a bounded and discrete entity with inalienable rights to privacy and time to develop.<sup>11</sup> As a result, its next definition easily slips into the meaning of “individualism” that denotes individual freedom, autonomy and independence: “The fact or condition of being free from the influence or control of a group, the State, etc.; individual independence or autonomy.”

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<sup>11</sup> Kant specifically emphasizes the importance of temporal continuity to the formation of a subject.

The Enlightenment discourse of individualism thus establishes a dichotomy between the self (private) and the political (public) and assumes the sacredness of the former.

The slippage between subjectivity, subjectivism, consciousness, individuality, and individualism bespeaks the difficulty of defining the meaning of a word or even confirms a poststructuralist circuitry of the meaning(s) of a word, an endless chain of signifiers that defies a final meaning. Yet it may prove to be incredibly productive because whenever subjectivity is evoked, it simultaneously evokes a semantic field. It also reveals certain underlying assumptions about what defines a modern/Enlightenment self—separate, autonomous, and independent, all of which have their roots in individualism.

To elucidate the meaning of individualism in the Euro-American context is an even more thorny question. It is impossible to parse out every meaning and every school of thought due to the scale of this thesis; instead I rely mainly on Steven Lukes, a historian of social theory and philosophy, for his elaboration on the basic ideas of individualism. Individualism believes in “the intrinsic value of the individual human being” shown in Kant’s proclamation that human beings are not a means to an end but in themselves an end (Lukes 45). Another key idea of individualism is the notion of “autonomy” or “self-direction,” “according to which an individual’s thought and action is his own, and not determined by agencies and causes out of his control” (Lukes 52). An autonomous individual arrives at decisions based on their own reasoning and critical reflection. In other words, as premised by classical philosophical discourse, an autonomous individual establishes the rational self as the ultimate source of authority. Individual freedom and autonomy is the central value of Western liberalism, and was championed by May Fourth intellectuals. Individualism,

originating from German Romanticism, also believes in the uniqueness and originality of an individual and thus emphasizes the individual's responsibility to achieve self-development and self-actualization.<sup>12</sup> Individualism also has its economic and political ramifications because Euro-American individualism is the cornerstone of free market economy that operates based on rationality (Lukes 88-89). It is essentially what Crawford B. Macpherson calls "a bourgeois possessive individualism."<sup>13</sup>

Enlightenment notions of a separate self rooted in individualism—the key source that profoundly influenced the modern discourse on the self in the Chinese context—stand in striking contrast with native Chinese models of conceiving the self. Many early China scholars agree that distinct from the concept of the self as an autonomous, discrete and bordered individual inherited from the Enlightenment, a traditional self was always embedded in a net of relationships and defined by those relationships. Sima Qian's "The Self-Narration" discussed at the beginning of this chapter gave us a glimpse of such type of self. Catherine Bell ventures further to contend that eventually in all traditional societies "individual identity is more likely to be experienced as the nodal point of a matrix of socializing and humanizing relationships" (qtd. in Brashier 212). Kenneth E. Brashier arrives at a somewhat similar conclusion through careful examinations of Han ritual texts, legal documents, inscriptions, court rhetoric, etc. Kinship, like names and age, served as the primary marker of one's status, power and social value. Not only common people were

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<sup>12</sup> See Lukes Chapter Two on individualism in the German context and Chapter Ten "Self-Development".

<sup>13</sup> The preeminent political philosopher Crawford B. Macpherson identifies the assumption hidden and underlying the theories of seventeenth century political thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke as the assumption of "possessive individualism." "Possessive individualism" is "a conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them the individual is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities. ... Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors. Political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange" (3). See Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism (Hobbes to Locke)* (1962).

constrained by filial obligations to their parents and ancestors, but also powerful rulers were deemed simply an inheritor of the ancestral shrines and the land under heaven and thus not free to do whatever they desired. In a ritual exchange on nuptial arrangement prescribed in the *Ceremonies and rituals* 儀禮 that Brashier examines, there is no first-person pronoun “I” and instead the interlocutors always refer themselves in third person. Personal agency thus was diminished, and the self only existed as “a conglomerate of ties and associations with others in the lineage lattice” (Brashier 214).

This model of conceiving the self as relational and embedded in a web of kinship and other relationships became the kind of traditional epistemology that the iconoclastic May Fourth Movement endeavored to dismantle. May Fourth intellectuals associated the weakness and ills of Chinese society to “tradition” and thus everything associated with it, such as filial piety, Confucianism, the hierarchical (including patriarchal) social structure, the traditional family, the institution of arranged marriage, and etc. Instead they embraced Western Enlightenment’s autonomous and bounded self as the first step toward modernization and building a strong nation.

As a result, May Fourth intellectuals’ intense interests in the individual, *geren*, were intricately tied to nationalism and the building of a strong modern nation-state. Their search for a modern self was not only an intellectual pursuit but also a political imperative to the survival of China as a nation and Chinese people as a species. As Lydia Liu states, “subjectivity in writing was thus translated into political reality and acquired an ideological significance that responded to a historical need: the reconfiguration of the modern Chinese man and *woman* as self-conscious subjects” (my emphasis, Liu 1990: 3).



The realization that the social self was gendered also focused attention on “the woman question,” which figured so prominently in the discursive constructions of an aspirational modern self and a modern nation-state. As Wendy Larson points out, women and literature were the two important sites for the construction of a modern nation in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century China (1998, 7). Women’s liberation and the status of women became the criteria to measure the civilization of a nation—a notion elaborated in the writings of numerous eminent nationalist intellectuals, including Liang Qichao (1873-1929); the New Woman became the trope through which a New China can be envisioned and articulated. To rebel against the traditional family and arranged marriage, to embrace free love and free marriage became the markers of being modern.<sup>14</sup>

The equation between romantic love and the quality of being modern reveals another key presupposition of the modern epistemology of the self: a modern self is essentially a desiring and affective self.<sup>15</sup> The centrality of sentiment in modern Chinese literature has been well argued by Haiyan Lee in *Revolution of the Heart*. Not only the popular literatures such as the Butterfly romance centered on romantic love, but also revolutionary and nationalist writers often produced and reproduced the so-called revolution plus love pattern.<sup>16</sup> It is typical of literature written during this period to feature a protagonist, usually female,

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<sup>14</sup> Such a value system seems to be true of people or cultures that wanted to embrace European notions of a modern enlightenment, such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intelligentsia. Irina Paperno, a prominent literary scholar in Russian literature, points out that marriage had its highly semiotic and cultural significance for writers like Chernyshevsky and his peers: it was deemed as “a stimulus for action”, “the ultimate realization of real life” (90), and more significantly an act of free will (108); it represented a man/woman’s self-assertion and ability to act that distinguishes a positive hero from the inability and indecisiveness of the superfluous man (115). In choosing one’s spouse, one exercises his/her agency and is regarded the marker of being modern. See Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: a Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (1988).

<sup>15</sup> Using theories developed by Western moral philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre who points the modern self as “emotivist self,” Haiyan Lee echoes that “the modern subject is first and foremost a sentimental subject” (7). See *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion of revolution plus love narrative, see Liu Jianmei’s *Revolution plus Love: Literary History, Women’s Bodies, and Thematic Repetition in Twentieth-century Chinese Fiction* (2003).

who embodies such an affective subject, whose subjectivity is largely constituted of sexual desires and romantic longings. To be desiring and longing for romance simultaneously got translated into the marker of being modern.

However when these aforementioned tenets and assumptions of modern (reads Euro-American) notions of the self/subject were introduced to a war-ridden, semi-colonial China that lacked the very material base on which individualism was presupposed and formed, their claim to universality would be sorely tested. Without the existence of a sovereign nation-state and a functioning capitalist economy, autonomy and freedom of the possessive individual could be something that May Fourth intellectuals only championed and aspired to yet never within reach. The signing of the Treaty of Versailles (1919) that catalyzed the May Fourth Movement was simply another awakening call to see the forced and humiliating encounter with Western and Japanese imperialism.

Lu Xun's literary career seems to bespeak a gradual disillusionment with Western Enlightenment notions of individualism. He transformed from a champion of Romanticists' individual genius in "On the Power of Mara Poetry" 摩羅詩力說 (1907) to a self-doubting post-individualist in the Preface to *Call to Arms* 吶喊 (1922). In "On the Power of Mara Poetry," Lu Xun extols European Romanticists such as Shelley, Byron, and Pushkin for creating great works of literature that are able to "[speak] with strength to stir new life in their countrymen and make their country a great one" (107). In his final impassioned calling for their Chinese equivalent ("Where are the warriors of the spirit?"), Lu Xun envisions himself on par with all those Romanticists as the national poet of China carrying out his historical mission. Lu Xun's attitude toward literature and the question of whether literature can bring

real social and political transformation becomes more ambivalent and skeptical in the Preface to *Call to Arms*. His self doubt and reflection begin: “I was no hero, no demagogue capable of rousing the masses with a single battle-cry” (18).<sup>17</sup> “In Memoriam” 傷逝 (1925), the subject of the next chapter’s analysis, casts a grimmer look on the type of selfhood engendered by individualism. The first-person narrator, Juansheng, an educated male intellectual, abandons his wife when their union as a result of romantic love and free marriage turns out to be economically unviable and impinges upon his individual freedom.

Ding Ling’s later conversion to a leftist/Communist politics best illustrated her abandonment of a bourgeois individualism.<sup>18</sup> Even though when Ding Ling was still very much enchanted with individualism, her attempt to textually create a New Woman, Miss Sophia, an educated woman with psychological depths as well as sexual and emotional desires, ends on the hint of her approaching demise. Sophia, who embodies many of the ideals upheld by May Fourth intellectuals such as leaving a traditional family and pursuing independence and love, can only reach an ontological impasse in the end. Thus both texts deal with the finiteness of life as well as fragility of the self; both texts interrogate the cultural ideals of their time. It is as if the Chinese modern self at its inception was fragile and under the threat of death. One of the objectives of this thesis is to chart out the tortuous processes of affirming and writing that fragile self into existence by two writers most representative of their time.

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<sup>17</sup>The translation of “Mara Poetry” used here is in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893-1945*. ed. Kirk A. Denton. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996. The translations of *Nahan* and *Panghuang* are from Julia Lovell’s *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: the Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*.

<sup>18</sup> For a thorough discussion on Ding Ling’s oeuvre and literary career, especially how her works changed in relation to her changing ideological commitment, see Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (1982).

Now I turn to the dialectic relations between form and social reality and the reason I place such primacy on literary form. It was by no accident that Lu Xun and Ding Ling chose first-person narratives to construct an aspirational modern self while simultaneously interrogating the epistemological assumptions hidden and underlying that self. The rise of first-person narrative form and narrative technique that extensively focuses on a character's subjectivity and interiority was a result of that particular historical moment. György Lukács in *Modern Drama* already pointed out the social nature of literary form and its dialectic relation to social reality: "But in literature, what is truly social is form .... Form is social reality, it participates vivaciously in the life of the spirit. It therefore does not operate only as a factor acting upon life and moulding experiences, but also as a factor which is in turn moulded by life" (qtd. in Moretti, 10).<sup>19</sup> This is particularly true for the discussion of May Fourth literature because the predicament of China in the early twentieth century spurred May Fourth writers' searching for new forms to capture the *Zeitgeist* of their time; this New Literature, with its formal and generic innovations, in turn would bring social and political transformations.<sup>20</sup>

In order to better attend to the specific formal and generic qualities of specific literary texts, this thesis draws on theories of genre, Russian formalist theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of double-voiced discourse, as well as a sociolinguistic approach to the discourse of the first person, a Marxist approach to literary form and subject formation, a poststructuralist notion of the self as textually produced, and so on and so forth. In other words, it is the

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<sup>19</sup> Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms*. Another Marxist literary critic, Raymond Williams echoes Lukács' formulation and contends that form is a social relationship, "a historical practice in the social material process" (184). See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

<sup>20</sup> Even though many intellectuals such as Lu Xun remained skeptical of whether literature, or even writing in general, could bring real social changes, they nevertheless kept writing. Lu Xun's writing thus is full of self-doubt and awareness of the limits of representation.

aesthetic idiosyncrasy of a literary text that determines which theoretical tool is more appropriate. I also occasionally draw on studies of literary texts from other textual traditions and of different national origins, including English, Russian, and French literature. In so doing, I am not suggesting there is an equivalency between modern Chinese literature and “Western literature,” nor am I suggesting that “Western theories” are universally applicable to texts from any tradition. What I am attempting to accomplish is to borrow illuminating methods from other fields within the same discipline of the study of literature in the hope of doing more justice to literary texts. It goes without saying that every theory has its limit, even for the study of texts from the same social and linguistic tradition. One way to overcome that, as discussed before, is to place primacy on literary texts and let the intrinsic aesthetic qualities of literary texts determine which methodological tool might be more fit to do justice to the text.

For instance, when reading “In Memoriam,” a first-person narrative dominated by the voice of the male narrator, Juansheng, we still feel such a strong presence of the often silent female spouse, Zijun. In order to make sense of it, Bakhtin’s theory of double-voiced discourse can be particularly useful in this circumstance. Double-voiced discourse, according to Bakhtin, is a discourse that is directed both to its referential object and to someone else’s discourse (whether that person is present at moment of utterance or not). It can be a dialogue conducted between the speaker and an *invisible* speaker whose words are not present but have “determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker” (my emphasis, Bakhtin 197).<sup>21</sup> This insight could fundamentally alter the way we read many of

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<sup>21</sup> I will discuss double-voiced discourse more thoroughly in the next chapter.

the much-discussed and canonical first-person narratives in modern Chinese literature—we can come to view first-person narrative as a *dialogue* and not simply as one voice dominating the entire narrative. As a result, Zijun, the dead spouse of the male narrator, can no longer be read simply as a silent and erased object; she influences and alters the narrator's discourse as well as self-perception even though he endeavors to affirm the self and erase her existence. This example illustrates how theory can help us to better attend to such dynamic and complex formal mechanisms intrinsic in a literary text. To recapitulate the main objective of this thesis, it is to attend to and examine how those formal and generic complexities of a literary text complicate and problematize construction of modern selfhood by drawing on various literary and cultural theories. It attempts to chart out the tortuous processes of affirming and writing the self into existence by two writers most representative of their time.

## CHAPTER II

### “I SHALL USE FORGETTING AND LYING AS MY GUIDE TO GOING FORWARD”: THE FAILED (RE)AFFIRMATION AND (RE)CONSTITUTION OF A COHERENT SELF IN LU XUN’S “IN MEMORIAM”

Theodore Hutters argues that due to the unbearable and monolithic weight of a literary tradition, modern Chinese literature, especially May Fourth literature, should largely be interpreted as a direct response to and confrontation with that tradition, and thus “univocal” or “monological.”<sup>22</sup> Hutters here uses Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of univocality or monological discourse to illustrate the presence of a single and strong authorial voice which is “determined to not dilute its control over a given text and all other voices within it” in traditional and modern Chinese literature (Hutters 271). In other words, Hutters suggests that premodern and modern Chinese literature lacks a plurality of voices and consciousnesses, or what Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia” or “polyphonic.”<sup>23</sup>

Univocality might manifest itself in the form of a didactic authorial voice as in most traditional narratives or in authorial solipsism as in many modern narratives. Mao Dun, a leading figure in the movement of reforming and revolutionizing Chinese literature, specifically attacks both Chinese literary traditions and his contemporaries for failing to pay attention to the objective social world and only investing their interests in subjective expressions: “In sum, our writers from ancient times on...only knew the subjective and did

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<sup>22</sup> See Hutters, “Lives in Profile: On the Authorial Voice in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature” in *From May Fourth to June Fourth Fiction and Film in Twentieth-century China*.

<sup>23</sup> Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics* establishes that the main characteristic of Dostoyevsky’s novel is its polyphonic nature: “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” is presented in the text, each with its own equal rights and its own world (6). Univocality refers to “the stylistic phenomenon [of writing] a direct and unmediated expression of authorial individuality” (267). See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*.

not know the objective” (qtd. in Hutters 276).<sup>24</sup> Hutters subsequently reads “Diary of a Madman” as a manifestation of that confining monological voice as well as a meta-fiction that points to the limits of that voice—the madman in the end fails to arrive at any meaning or to analyze his role in society, but eventually loses his identity as he finds out he is also complicit in practicing cannibalism; his attempt to establish himself as the sole source of authority eventually fails.

While I agree that “Diary” can be interpreted as a meta-narrative, a warning against excessive and thus confining subjectivity, I nevertheless find Hutters’s argument far too general and his conception of Bakhtinian univocality and polyphony a misunderstanding. It is precisely because modern Chinese literature was locked in a confrontation with traditional literature that it cannot be univocal but what Bakhtin calls a “double-voiced discourse,” or “discourse with an orientation toward someone else’s discourse” (Bakhtin 1984: 199).

According to Bakhtin, all works of literature to a certain degree can be double-voiced:

In every style, strictly speaking, there is an element of internal polemic, the difference being merely one of degree and character. Every literary discourse more or less sharply senses its own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself anticipated objections, evaluations, points of view. In addition, literary discourse senses alongside itself another literary discourse, another style. (1984: 196)

The other literary discourse is so patently present in the frame narrative of “Diary” written in classical Chinese, a language system that iconoclastic May Fourth intellectuals were endeavoring to dismantle.<sup>25</sup> A piece of literary work thus is always in a dialogue with its

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<sup>24</sup> Mao Dun, “文学和人的关系及中国古来对于文学者身份的误认” (Literature, Its Relation to Human, and the Misperceptions on the Identity of Writer) in 茅盾文艺杂论集 (*The Anthology of Mao Dun’s Literary Criticism*).

<sup>25</sup> The classical diction in the frame story I believe also illustrates what Bakhtin calls “parodic stylization” in the sense that Lu Xun appropriates the style of classical Chinese for a completely different purpose than that of the original style. Parodic stylization is of course a type of double-voiced discourse.



given literary tradition, or as Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker nicely puts it, “to write was an act that situated the self within an ongoing literary tradition, since writing was consciously conceived of as textual transmission and constituted by intertextual activity” (56).

In terms of the narrative’s internal structure, the discourse in the frame narrative can be construed as structurally as well as hermeneutically in dialogue with the voice of the madman: it provides a foreclosure for the story’s ending, a diagnosis of his symptoms, a guidance of how to interpret the madman’s words, and more importantly, a deconstruction of his words. Hence whether there is an actual conversation between two interlocutors has little bearing on whether the narrative is dialogical. Bakhtin specifically emphasizes that a character’s discourse can be double-voiced if they speak in a way that anticipates the reaction of another character who may be absent. He elucidates in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* on the dialogical nature of Dostoevsky’s novels that even if the narrative is conducted in the first-person, i.e. in the absence of an interlocutor, nevertheless that invisible speaker whose words are not present can have “determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker” (197).

To conceive of a first-person narrative as dialogical or double-voiced will fundamentally change how we interpret some of the much-discussed May Fourth first-person narratives that have been deemed solipsistic. Bakhtin thereby quotes another Dostoevsky critic Valery Yakovlevich Kirpotin to illustrate the polyphonic and thus anti-solipsistic nature of Dostoevsky’s fiction and calls Kirpotin’s reading “a correct understanding of Dostoevsky’s *polyphony*” (original emphasis, 1984, 37):

Whether the Dostoevskian narrative is conducted in the first person, or in the form of a confession, or in the person of a narrator-author—in all cases we see that the writer proceeds from an assumption of *equal rights* for **simultaneously existing**, experiencing persons. His world is the world of a multitude of objectively existing and interacting psychologies, and this excludes his treatment of psychological processes the subjectivism and solipsism so characteristic of bourgeois decadence. (original emphasis, qtd. in Bakhtin 1984: 37)

This is not to say that all May Fourth literature that later came under attack for its excessive subjectivism and solipsism are exactly like Dostoevsky's polyphonic fictions, that they contain no elements of subjectivism and solipsism, or that they grant "equal rights" to the voices of every character. But there is always certain degree of dialogization or double-voicedness even if in a most solipsistic text like "Diary of a Madman." The voice of the social Other always permeates into the discourse as well as consciousness of the narrating "I" and unsettles the boundary between the self and the other, between the subjective and the objective. Building on such double-voiced/dialogical nature of first-person narrative, the following part of this chapter turns to one of Lu Xun's canonical first-person narratives, "In Memoriam," and attempts to analyze how it attests to the difficulty of discursively creating and maintaining a purely subjective, bordered and autonomous self.

Lu Xun's "In Memoriam" written in 1925 is, according to Lydia Liu, not only "a story about the disillusionment of romantic love" but also an allegory for failed modernity (1993:2, 107). Lu Xun's dystopian story has painted such a grim portrayal of free love and free marriage that at his time were hailed as markers of being modern as well as part of the larger social engineering toward China's progress and modernity. In this sense Lu Xun was indeed ahead of his time for he had already begun to question ideals such as free love, free marriage,

and the establishment of nuclear family that had their roots in Euro-American individualism and were championed by both male and female intellectuals at that time.

Yet to simply summarize what the story is about would fail to do justice to such a complex text. It can be easily noticed that throughout the text the voice of the male narrator, Juansheng, dominates the narrative and is able to manipulate it to his advantage while his spouse, Zijun, for the most part, remains silent and forever under erasure. Both Rey Chow and Lydia Liu have pointed out that most women in Lu Xun's fictions are devoid of agency and subjectivity.<sup>26</sup> Yet the presence of Zijun is keenly felt in the text despite Juansheng's heavy mediation, such as willful omissions and eclipses. He fails to obtain an acquittal he so desperately seeks from a jury, be it his own conscience, Zijun or us as (un)intended audience despite all his rationalization for what he has done to Zijun. Drawing on Bakhtin's theory of double-voice discourse and attending to other generic and aesthetic features of the text, such as visuality, this chapter explores how Lu Xun deploys a speaking subject "I" in "In Memoriam" so that the narrative is able to work to the advantage of the narrator while simultaneously disclosing the cruel and selfish nature of the speaking "I." How does Zijun exist and occupy a narrative space even though Juansheng's narrative endeavors to erase her? How can a narrative dominated by the male narrator still create an ontological space for the female Other? I argue that Juansheng's seemingly dominating voice is in fact double-voiced; Zijun as the (in)visible Other inevitably imposes pressure and haunts the narrative. Thus the male speaking subject's self is never autonomous or coherent, and its attempt to affirm the living self and exorcise the dead female alterity is bound to fail.

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<sup>26</sup> See Rey Chow's chapter "Narration and Modernity" (p.84-85) in *Women and Chinese Modernity*, and Lydia Liu, "Narratives of Modern Selfhood: First-Person Fiction in May Fourth Literature" (102-123) in *Politics, Ideology and Literary Discourse in Modern China*.

## Generic Signals and Functions

In his study of the function of genre in literature, Alastair Fowler contends that the main value of genres is not classificatory but identifying and communicatory. As Fowler nicely puts it, “in literary communication, genres are functional” (38). Identifying the genre of a work provides guidance to the interpretation of the work. In other words, how we perceive and decide the genre of a work fundamentally changes how we understand and interpret that work. The title and beginning of a literary work usually signal its genre, and those are what Fowler calls “generic signals.” Clustered at the beginning of a work, those generic signals have “a strategic role in guiding the reader” because “they help to establish, as soon as possible, an appropriate mental ‘set’ that allows the work’s generic codes to be read” (Fowler 88).

The title of the short story reads “伤逝,” meaning mourning for the lost or dead. It is translated as “In Memoriam” in Julia Lovell’s translation. The memorial genre is essentially the writing about the dead and what’s been lost. Since every genre is functional, we have to ask: what is the function of a memorial? And for whom is it written? In her study of female suicide in China, anthropologist Margery Wolf points out that people believed women who killed themselves would become angry ghosts and haunt the living, especially those who had done them wrong; revenge is constantly associated with suicide.<sup>27</sup> A prominent literary example is in *Honglou Meng* where Jia Baoyu makes an offering to Jinchuan who had drowned herself in a well after being accused of flirting with Baoyu and humiliated. Almost ten chapters later, Baoyu secretly goes off to a temple to make an offering to someone whose

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<sup>27</sup> See Margery Wolf, “Women and Suicide in China” in *Women in Chinese Society*, p.111-141.

name is never mentioned. Even though Baoyu's actions are never explicitly explained in the text, there are several hints and allusions that point to the death of Jinchuan as the motive. For instance, the temple in which Baoyu makes the sacrifice is a water spirit temple (洛神廟), and the day on which Baoyu does it is Jinchuan's birthday; on his way home he finds Jinchuan's sister crying and attempts to initiate a conversation with her about his secret action; the chapter ends with a reference to "The Wooden Hairpin" 荆釵記, a play in which the husband makes an offering to his drowned wife.<sup>28</sup>

In premodern memorial culture in general, writings such as literary creations and ritual liturgies were used to conjure up the spirit of the dead and serve as sacrifices to them.<sup>29</sup> A memoriam then is written and has a ritualistic function to appease and exorcize ghosts so that the living can go on living. Seen in this light, I agree with Lydia Liu's contention that the act of writing for Juansheng serves to "exorcize her ghost from his memory" (112); it is "a therapeutic device for the reconstitution of a coherent self" that is shattered by her death (107). Yet just as the abandonment of the dog prefigures the fate of Zijun, the return of the abandoned dog is the metonymic return of Zijun and the best proof of the failed exorcism of this memoriam.

There also has been a long tradition of male literati writing about dead women as vessels for expressing their own frustration and other emotions. Xiaoqing 小青, for instance, a concubine and a female poet who was abused by the first wife and died young sometime early in the seventeenth century, became the subject matter of a great many male literati

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<sup>28</sup> The plot mentioned here is in chapter 43 in *Honglou Meng*.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Nylan for instance contends that the various biographies in the *Shiji* are essentially sacrifices to the dead people recorded in those biographies. Nylan cites one chapter on sacrifice in the *Liji* 禮記 to illustrate the definition of sacrifice is to visualize the dead and make sacrifices to them. Through the "sacred act" of writing, imagining, and visualizing the life of those people, Sima Qian accomplishes the ritual visualization called sacrifice and fulfills his religious duty to them. See Nylan, "Sima Qian: A True Historian?" *Early China* 23-24 (1998-99): 203-246.

writings. The proliferation and popularity of fictions and dramas on Xiaoqing's life story, according to Ellen Widmer, were largely due to male intellectuals' sense of alienation and frustration during and after the disastrous Tianqi reign period.<sup>30</sup> They saw the story of a talented yet abused concubine "as an emblem of their frustration with difficult times" (Widmer 122). Xiaoqing, like many other dead and silent women, became the vessel for male literati to express their feelings and (re)affirm an alienated self.

The opening sentence of "In Memoriam" confirms the purpose of writing is not only for Zijun, the dead wife, but also the male writing self: "I want to try, if I possibly can, to set down here my feelings of sorrow and regret—for Zijun, and for myself" 如果我能夠，我要寫下我的悔恨和悲哀，為子君，為自己。(254)." If "it is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject" as Benveniste puts it (221), then this beginning that starts with "I" immediately establishes Juansheng, the narrator's personal agency and subjectivity; each "I" occupies the subject position and claims its agency and free will to write. As mentioned before, the beginning of a literary work, or what Fowler calls "opening formula," provides guidance for the reader to interpret the text. The opening formula here points to the purpose of the act of writing, yet due to its equivocation it leaves the reader wondering whom it is really for.<sup>31</sup> "为子君" serves as a pretext for self-assertion, a cover for self-serving purpose; the entire narrative functions in such a way in which it proclaims to be written for the sake of Zijun but in fact serves to reaffirm the self. Yet in a Derridian sense, the male self cannot be established without the female Other; the self cannot exist without its

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<sup>30</sup> For a detailed discussion of male and female reception of and writings about Xiaoqing, see Ellen Widmer's "Xiaoqing's Literary Legacy and the Place of the Woman Writer in Late Imperial China."

<sup>31</sup> Lydia Liu in her reading of the story also notices another layer of equivocation: whether Juansheng regrets his abandonment of Zijun or him having been involved in a romantic relationship with her in the first place. See Liu, "Narratives of Modern Selfhood: First Person Fiction in May Fourth Literature" p.111.

female alterity. Thus the male narrator's attempt to appease and exorcize Zijun's ghost is bound to fail and has only resulted in lying and forgetting: "[I] shall use forgetting and lying as my guide" 用遺忘和說謊做我的前導 (133; Lovell 272). His words signify nothing; the subject no longer speaks truth.

The subtitle of this story, "From Juansheng's notes" 涓生的手記, is another revealing generic signal that provides interpretive guidance and sets up reader's expectations. It first plays on the notion of a found text, disguising fiction underneath a claim to be real. Just as the narrator in the frame story of "Diary of a Madman" claims to have found the diary, here the notes of Juansheng are also found. But by whom? Who actually has found the text is omitted, but the third-person possessive adjective "Juansheng's" already indicates the existence of a third party, be it the implied author or the ideal reader, who gazes at, reads, and judges such a found text. In other words, there is already an imposing presence and omniscient gaze existing outside the mimetic world in the text. As we read on, we clearly see that Juansheng also has anticipated the moral judgment from himself (though the extent to which Juansheng is capable of self-critique is very limited), from Zijun, and from his possible readers. Thus his dominating voice is already dialogized and his sense of the self split. In the following part of the essay, I will analyze how Zijun imposes a determining influence on the discourse and consciousness of Juansheng and how Juansheng's attempt to exclude her presence and (re)affirm the self fails.

### **Erasing the Other and (Re)Affirming the Self**

Käte Hamburger points out in *The Logic of Literature* that there is a fundamental difference between the narrative in epistolary/diary writing and in the memoir novel. In a

diary, its temporal point progresses “from one temporal present” to another, and gradually they form a totality of the life of the writing subject. The writer of a memoir, however, “looks back from one fixed temporal present over the whole of his past life” as well as over “past stages of its own self” (326). The former self and his/her earlier phases are objectified by, and I would add under the scrutiny of, the present writing subject (327). The self thus is already split and separated by the temporal distance existing between the former and present self.

In “In Memoriam” there exist three levels of temporality as Lydia Liu observes: 1) the temporality in which Juansheng is writing, 2) the temporality in which Juansheng and Zijun start their own nuclear family and live together, and 3) the temporality in which Juansheng still lives alone and they have started dating. The “I” in the first temporal level looks retrospectively at the other two temporal levels and puts them in perspective, and sometimes the “I” in the second temporal level reminisces about previous happy days in the third temporal level (Liu 108). It is worth pointing out the beginning of the narrative, i.e. the first temporal level, is marked by a return to the third level. In other words, the narrative is cyclical:

And how unfortunate that I should now happen to return to this same room, unchanged in every way: the same broken window, the same moribund locust tree and ancient wisteria, the same square table, the same mildewed wall, the same plank bed pushed against it. As I lie on it now, alone and awake in the middle of the night, the past year seems to fade away, as if I had never lived with Zijun, as if I had never moved out of this shabby room to set up my own hopeful little family in Goodluck Lane. (113; Lovell 254)

事情又這麼不湊巧，我重來時，偏偏空著的又只有這一間屋。依然是這樣的破窗，這樣的窗外的半枯的槐樹和老紫藤，這樣的窗前的方桌，這樣的敗壁，這樣的靠壁的板床。深夜中獨自躺在床上，就如我未曾和子君同居以前一般，過去一年中的時光全被消滅，全未有過，我並沒有曾經從這破屋子搬出，在吉兆胡同創立了滿懷希望的小小的家庭。



The present “I” returns physically to the same room where he had resided; the repetition of the descriptive language not only emphasizes an unchangingness and sameness of the physical environment but also creates an illusion of an unchanging reality where events never took place and any sense of temporal progression is erased. This unchanged cyclical beginning is of course ironic because patently the death of his spouse happened. This beginning is working toward the first step to erase the existence of his spouse; it is an illusion that he literally would rather believe in, a simulacrum in which nothing has ever happened.

As the narrative continues, the first-person narrator continues to erase Zijun’s existence, and his memory by his own admission is extremely unreliable. The narrator admits himself numerous times that he cannot remember certain past events clearly. For instance, he confesses that he cannot recall how he has courted Zijun: “I can no longer remember how I expressed my pure and passionate love to her. Soon afterwards, the detail grew hazy in my mind—thinking back over them at night, I could only recall fragments” 我已經記不清那時怎樣地將我的純真熱烈的愛表示給她。豈但現在，那時的事後便已模糊，夜間回想，早只剩了一些斷片了 (115; Lovell 256). Even key moments such as him proposing to her have also faded away in his memory: “At that moment I did not see clearly my own behavior as well as Zijun’s” 不但我自己的，便是子君的言語舉動，我那時就沒有看得分明 (116; Lovell 256). In the following sentence the narrator uses “彷彿記得” (seem to remember) to narrate how the event unfolds. Lydia Liu points out that it is because the narrator feels embarrassed about the moment of proposal that he willfully forgets the details of that moment (1993:2, 196). Episodes like these reveal the highly unreliable and manipulative nature of his memory as well as his narrative.

The use of punctuation, a significant number of ellipses in the text in particular, also reveals the male narrator's willful omission. The narrative in fact ends with an ellipsis: "[I] shall use forgetting and lying as my guide..." 用遺忘和說謊做我的前導.....。The ellipsis deprives the narrative of a sense of closure. The signifying system of words can no longer fulfill its function, and instead a punctuate mark that indicates something has been omitted is put in its place. Emptiness, oblivion, omission are literally on display in the end. It signifies nothing but could also signify everything—the endless cycle of forgetting and not being able to forget, lying and omission, attempting to affirm the self and its failure. Just as the beginning of the narrative is a return to the narrator's previous living condition, the end leaves us wondering if the entire narrative is already written under the guidance of forgetting and lying.

Yet despite the male narrator's willful omissions and oblivion, his female spouse, Zijun's presence in the text is never fully erased. Even though Zijun, no matter living or dead, remains mostly silent and is denied access to the discursive realm, her presence has permeated into the discourse of the male narrator. First, I would like to point out that Zijun exists in the text both as a spectre and spectacle, i.e. she exists mainly as a ghostly presence of sound (non-discursive) and image. Zijun's initial entrance into the text is conjured up through the haunting sound of her footsteps and a following visualization of her image:

Another thing I now noticed. A year before, the stillness and emptiness about the place was different, full of expectation: the impatient expectation of Zijun's arrival. I would spring to life the instant I heard the crisp clip of high-heeled shoes along the bricked road. Then her round, pale, dimpled face, thin white arms, striped blouse and black skirt would swing into view.

不但如此。在一年之前，這寂靜和空虛是並不這樣的，常常含著期待；期待子君的到來。在久待的焦躁中，一聽到皮鞋的高底尖觸著磚路的清響，是怎樣地使

我驟然生動起來呵！於是就看見帶著笑渦的蒼白的圓臉，蒼白的瘦的臂膊，布的有條紋的衫子，玄色的裙。(113; Lovell 254)

Piece by piece, the narrator's words deliver the existence of Zijun: first the apparition of the sound of Zijun's footsteps and then the image of her physical body. The descriptive phrases only describe her body in parts and are listed in a paratactic fashion with no coordinating conjunctions as if Zijun already existed as an assemblage of visual fragments. For someone who claims to love this woman so adamantly, this description seems incredibly terse with so few details as if her image is already fuzzy and blurred. Further the double appearance of the adjective “蒼白” again emphasizes the ghostliness of Zijun for its lack of sanguinity and thus liveliness.

If at this moment Zijun's audible presence elicits excitement from the narrator, her later presence intrudes and annoys, making the narrator long for the tranquility of his former life as a bachelor: “the change in her began to unsettle me, and suddenly an image of my former, quiet life—the tranquility of that shabby old hostel room—flashed before my eyes” 我的心因此更繚亂，忽然有安寧的生活的影像—會館裡的破屋的寂靜，在眼前一閃 (120; Lovell 261). While Zijun toils away under the burden of housework that has been solely fallen on her shoulders and becomes exhausted by such strenuous labor, Juansheng laments the loss of tranquility at home and blames Zijun for “no longer [taking] as much care to be quiet or considerate as she had once done” 子君又沒有先前那麼幽靜，善於體帖了 (121; Lovell 261-262). The sound of her cooking and conducting other housework apparently disturbs Juansheng's inner peace and thus intrudes into a discrete and bordered self he endeavors to maintain.

Zijun's existence as a visual image poses even more penetrating threats to the male narrator's sense of self, silently passing moral judgment that pierces into the very core of his self-consciousness. As the narrative goes on, Juansheng's cruel mistreatments to her begin to occur, and Zijun barely speaks. What speaks instead is the description of her facial expression of sadness and sorrow (“凄然”“凄惨”), her child-like eyes as if the narrative is a camera that reveals a close up on her face. Patrick Hanan has observed, echoed by Marston Anderson, the camera-like quality of Lu Xun's narrative.<sup>32</sup> The function of close-ups in films is not only to foreground the emotion of the subject on the screen but also make the reader/audience identify with him/her. It thus establishes an intersubjectivity between Zijun and the reader/audience. Seen in this light, the trans-media quality of such a literary text nicely explains why our sympathy lies with Zijun not Juansheng, and Zijun's ontological existence in the text is not merely as an object. The images of her sad face takes on a life of its own and is able to obtain certain degree of agency; she constantly haunts the memory of Juansheng and becomes something that he desperately wants to get rid of.

Even though Zijun never voices words of condemnation, her silence imposes “a determining influence,” to use Bakhtin's phrase, on the discourse and consciousness of the male narrator. After Juansheng abandons Asui the dog, he has to provide a lengthy reasoning to rationalize his cruelty because he senses that Zijun is judging him:

But based on her tone and body language, I finally saw that she must have thought I was heartless. In fact if I'd been on my own, I'd have easily made a living. My pride had prevented me from having much to do with old family friends, and since moving out of the hostel I'd neglected all my former acquaintances. If only I could go away, the road of living should be quite broad. Everything I was putting up with now—all the difficulties,

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<sup>32</sup> See Patrick Hanan “The Technique of Lu Hsun's Fiction” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 34 (1974): p. 89 and Marston Anderson *The Limits of Realism* p.112.

the pressures—it was all for her, mostly. I'd got rid of Asui for her, too, but her senses seemed to grow weaker by the day, and she couldn't even see it.

我終於從她言動上看出，她大概已經認定我是一個忍心的人。其實，我一個人，是容易生活的，雖然因為驕傲，向來不與世交來往，遷居以後，也疏遠了所有舊識的人，然而只要能遠走高飛，生路還寬廣得很。現在忍受著這生活壓迫的苦痛，大半倒是為她，便是放掉阿隨，也何嘗不如此。但子君的識見卻似乎只是淺薄起來，竟至於連這一點也想不到了。(123; Lovell 263)

The narrator clearly senses Zijun's blame and judgment and thus feels the need to justify himself and shift the blame to Zijun. He imputes the pain and difficulties he has to suffer specifically to Zijun for he as the sole bread-earner has to provide the livelihood for him, his spouse and their surrogate child, Asui the dog. He further claims that his abandonment of Asui is also "for her." Again as in the beginning of the narrative where he claims his writing is for Zijun, he disguises his self-serving and selfish nature in the name of an altruistic effort for the benefits of Zijun.

The moral judgment silently passed from Zijun has resulted in the male narrator's changing of discourse, but it has never resulted in a true confession, self-critique or repentance on his part like many Dostoevskian heroes and heroes in Lydia Ginzburg's fictions.<sup>33</sup> Juansheng sees himself as a cruel and heartless person through the eyes of Zijun and this shatters his own sense of self, yet instead of redeeming his cruelty he tries to affirm his self. In her systematic study of Lydia Ginzburg's prose writing, Emily Van Buskirk points out that self-distancing, i.e. estrangement, or viewing oneself from the point of view of another is vital to Ginzburg's creation of heroes capable of moral judgment. Buskirk calls this

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<sup>33</sup> Lydia Ginzburg (1902-1990) was a prominent Soviet literary critic, historian and writer. She was also a survivor of the Siege of Leningrad and other purges during Stalinist era. Many of her works thus interrogate individual will and human survival under extreme historical and social circumstances, which resulted in her deep skepticism of European Enlightenment notions of an individualist self. Emily Van Buskirk, a literary scholar in the Russia field, calls the type of self produced in Ginzburg's writing a "post-individualist self" in her recent study of Ginzburg's oeuvre. I find the notion of a post-individualist self and her discussion of self-distancing particularly useful to shed light on similar qualities that can be observed on Juansheng in "In Memoriam."

type of individual or selfhood created a “post-individualist” self, a self that is no longer unique, autonomous, self-sufficient, and believing in personal agency and self-realization but fragmentary and part of the social fabric.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly Juansheng possesses a certain degree of self-distancing, being outside of the self, and judging the self. For instance, in order to pave the path for his abandoning of Zijun, Juansheng deliberately regurgitates the words he once uttered to Zijun on European Romantic writers and literature, Nora in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* in particular, that were once used to cement their romantic relationship and “liberate” Zijun the oppressed woman.<sup>35</sup> But now the courage and resolve of Nora that once was used to encourage Zijun to break away from an oppressive traditional family and choose free love is now used to insinuate that Zijun should voluntarily leave a loveless marriage. The narrator is aware that those same words have already become empty signifiers: “All this had been said the previous year in that shabby old room in the hostel, but now my words rang hollow. As I listened to myself, I constantly suspected there was an invisible urchin behind me maliciously parroting all I said” 也還是去年在會館的破屋裡講過的那些話，但現在已經變成空虛，從我的嘴傳入自己的耳中，時時疑心有一個隱形的壞孩子，在背後惡意地刻毒地學舌 (126; Lovell 266). There seems to be a temporal distance between the words uttered from his mouth and the words eventually entering his ear. In other words, it is as if for a moment his own words exist outside of himself. The parroting urchin further adds another level of alienation and estrangement to his utterances as if he no longer has control over the meaning of the words he

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<sup>34</sup> For a detailed discussion of Ginzburg’s conceptualizations of self, ethics, literature, and their interrelations, see chapter 1 “Writing the Self after the Crisis of Individualism: Distancing and Moral Evaluation” in Emily Van Buskirk’s *Lydia Ginzburg’s Prose: Reality in Search of Literature*.

<sup>35</sup> Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* had profound influence on the May Fourth discourse on marriage freedom and equality. Many celebrated Nora’s resolve and hailed her as an ideal. Lu Xun, however, in a famed essay 娜拉走後怎樣 poignantly points out Nora, without economical independence, can only return to her oppressive home or become a prostitute.

utters. The invisible urchin could be a psychological doubling of himself that mocks the hypocritical words he is uttering now. In sum, there is someone or something that exists outside of himself and simultaneously judges him. The “I” narrator is capable of being self-conscious and aware of his own hypocrisy and how he is taking advantage of once a liberating discourse to accomplish the cruelest deed.

However the essential difference between him and a Ginzburg or Dostoevskian hero is that eventually he is incapable of self-critique but only attempts to clear his self-conscience. Toward the end of the story, the narrative gets wrapped up in an intense eruption of confessional emotions that serves to exorcize Zijun’s ghost and purify his guilt:

我愿意真有所谓鬼魂，真有所谓地狱，那么，即使在孽风怒吼之中，我也将寻觅子君，当面说出我的悔恨和悲哀，祈求她的饶恕；否则，地狱的毒焰将围绕我，猛烈地烧尽我的悔恨和悲哀。

我将在孽风和毒焰中拥抱子君，祈她宽容，或者使她快意……

I hope there are dead ghosts and spirits and there is a hell. There, buffeted by the infernal roars of retribution, I will seek out Zijun, tell her of my sorrow and regret, and beg her forgiveness; or the poisonous flames of the underworld will surround me and consume my sorrow and regret.

Surrounded by infernal winds and poisonous flames, I shall take Zijun in my arms, and beg her to take mercy on me, or whatever she will... (133; Lovell 271)

The narrative here almost takes on a lyrical quality in the sense that it is a pure expression of internal emotions and there is no sense of temporal movement or events unfolding that is vital to the construction of a narrative. In other words, the narrative stops at this point. The temporality of these utterances is a non-existing temporality; it cannot happen and will not happen except by being conjured up by the speaking subject’s imagination. The educated and enlightened narrator is willing to believe in afterlife so that he could confess his sorrow and regret directly to his dead wife. It is absolutely vital that he finds Zijun and is reunited with

her because the dead has to be conjured up to be present for his confession and grant him forgiveness. The act of conjuring the dead is to appease an angry ghost so that it can stop haunting him. The 否則 conjunction might indicate an alternative that seems punitive on the surface since he will be surrounded by poisonous flames if he did not obtain an acquittal from the dead. Yet the result of being surrounded by flames is not self-destruction but a relief from the sorrow and regret that have haunted and tortured him. In either case, his guilty conscience along with the haunting memory of the dead will be purified—the ultimate catharsis will be achieved.

Then the narrative ends in the temporal level of the writing present. The ending solely consists of sentences whose subject positions are occupied by the narrating “I”:

……我活著，我總得向著新的生路跨出去，那第一步，——卻不過是寫下我的悔恨和悲哀，為子君，為自己。

我仍然只有唱歌一般的哭聲，給子君送葬，葬在遺忘中。

我要遺忘；我為自己，並且要不再想到這用了遺忘給子君送葬。

我要向著新的生路跨進第一步去，我要將真實深深地藏在心的創傷中，默默地前行，用遺忘和說謊做我的前導……。

I am alive, and must make strides towards a new life. The first step is to write down my sorrow and regret for Zijun, and for myself.

A dirge of funeral wails is all I have to bury Zijun with, to bury her in oblivion.

I shall forget, for my own sake; I must stop thinking that I buried Zijun in oblivion.

I must take the first strides towards a new life, burying the truth deep in the wound in my heart, silently advancing, and use forgetting and lying as my guide. (133; Lovell 272)

All the sentences that begin with “I” not only claim the personal agency for the “I” but also are speech acts that promise to do something and possibly already have, because this narrative is written under the guidance of lying and willful oblivion.<sup>36</sup> It could be argued that

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<sup>36</sup> J. L. Austin, a philosopher of language, developed speech act theory in *How to Do Things with Words*. According to Austin, certain utterances such as “I hereby announce you husband and wife” are not constative but *performative*—we do something by uttering those words. The use of “I” is often necessary to validate and legitimize a performative utterance. Benveniste in



the entire text or the act of writing is a speech act that attempts to affirm the self, perform a therapeutic and exorcizing function, clear the guilty conscience of the narrating “I,” and set in motion the first step toward a new life devoid of the disturbing ghostly presence of the dead female Other.

Yet such an attempt to reaffirm a coherent and autonomous self, as this chapter has argued so far, has failed. The dead female Other, existing mainly as image and sound, constantly haunts the memory of the male narrator and permeates into the discourse as well as consciousness of the speaking subject “I.” The very fact that the narrating “I” as well as narrated “I” in another level of temporality feel the constant need to remind the writing “I” that he is still alive, to mention *shenglu* 生路 numerous times, and to say that the “I” must live on as if he had to persuade himself to live on, attests to the fragility of his selfhood. In certain sense, they are both socially dead—it is Lu Xun’s poignant comment as well as deep skepticism about free love when there were no institutional backup or social acceptance at his time. However, Zijun literally dies and Juansheng lives. The text has thus, consciously or unconsciously, revealed the truth about the so-called modern sexual relationship in a patriarchal society that it is always the woman, as a “soiled good,” who has to pay the ultimate price—her life—for *qing* and sexual transgression. In the next chapter, we will witness a female writing subject being torn between her sexual desires and social norms. The self is more fragile and fragmented; her attempt to write the self into existence and struggle to maintain an autonomous self are more difficult.

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his study of the unique linguistic quality of the first-person pronoun similarly pointed out that “I promise” and “he promises” have fundamental differences: “he promises” is purely a statement whereas “I promise” can be performative. See Benveniste “Nature of Pronouns” in *Problems in General Linguistics*.

### CHAPTER III

#### “CAN I TELL WHAT IT IS THAT I REALLY WANT?” THE FORMATION OF MULTIPLE AND UNINTELLIGIBLE SELVES IN DING LING’S “MISS SOPHIA’S DIARY”

“Miss Sophia’s Diary,” Ding Ling’s debut on literary stage in 1928, made her a nationally recognized figure.<sup>37</sup> As one of the May Fourth writers appropriating “superior” Western literary form and content, narrative in particular, Ding Ling’s early style was characteristic of “a mixture of colloquial Chinese and more classical syntax” and was confined to urban bourgeois middle-class consumption (Barlow 6). Indebted to Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, themes like female sexuality, sexual repression, and the essence of femininity figured prominently in Ding Ling’s early writing.<sup>38</sup> As Tani Barlow points out, Miss Sophia has long been interpreted as standing for “psychology of the modern girl” and as the epitome of New Woman (6). Existing scholarship, however, paid little attention to the formal and textual complexity of “Miss Sophia’s Diary.”<sup>39</sup> Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker’s monograph on Ding Ling is probably the only work that offers substantial textual analysis of

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed publication history of “Miss Sophia’s Diary” 莎菲女士的日記, see Tani E. Barlow’s “Introduction” in *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* (1989). All the translations of the text are based on Barlow’s translation in *I Myself Am a Woman* with my slight alterations and revisions to bring out the more literal meanings of the original text. The original text used in this paper is anthologized in *Ding Ling duanpian xiaoshuoxuan* 丁玲短篇小說選, Hong Kong: Wenjiao chubanshe (1979).

<sup>38</sup> Barlow discusses in detail in the “Introduction” Ding Ling’s obsession with Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and its patent influence on her own work.

<sup>39</sup> Earlier scholarship often draws attention to the social and historical significance of the creation of Miss Sophia and attributes Miss Sophia’s tragic unhappiness and obfuscation to a social reality (traditional Confucianism deracinated and a new modern bourgeois subjectivity yet-to-be-formed) that failed to provide any care or guidance for women. For instance Amy Tak-ye Lai notes that female subjectivity in “Miss Sophia’s Diary” is split and her decision to give up diary writing at the end, i.e. silencing herself, is a result of “relatively conservative social background in the May Fourth period” (96). See also Yuan Liangjun “The Historical Significance and Archetypal Meaning of Miss Sophia” (1990) and Zhang Yongquan “A Woman in Search of Light in the midst of Darkness: A Reappraisal of the Image of Miss Sophia” (1984). Lydia H. Liu deems “Miss Sophia’s Diary” the key to the making of a “female literary tradition,” which she argues is a collective and historical endeavor by female writers and critics. Yet Liu never discusses the formal dimension of the text nor reads it holistically. See Liu, “Invention and Intervention: The Making of a Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature” in *From May Fourth to June Fourth Fiction and Film in Twentieth-century China* (1993).

“Miss Sophia’s Diary” in which she attends to certain formal dimensions of the text, such as narrative techniques. While building my reading of “Miss Sophia’s Diary” largely on hers and her view of self-writing as an attempt to render the self intelligible, I depart from Feuerwerker’s work to interrogate the use of “I” and the formal and generic characteristics of a diary that have not been discussed.<sup>40</sup>

This chapter attempts to explore the formal complexity of the diary narrative and believe that form, as a “historical practice in the social material process,” can bring the together aesthetic and social context (Williams 184).<sup>41</sup> Thus I ask: Why a diary? What does it mean to use “I”? What kind of cultural function does the first-person singular “I” perform? And how does the narrative of a diary enable or impede the subject formation and construction of identity and subjectivity? In order to answer those questions and attend to the specific aesthetic features of the text, this chapter draws on the sociolinguistic theory on the intersubjective, social and performative nature of the “I,”<sup>42</sup> existing discussions of formal features of the diary, and a poststructuralist reading of autobiography as a *figure* that precedes and *produces* the self. It is my contention that the formal and generic multiplicity of the diary narrative written in first person perspective problematizes subject formation and attests to the difficulty and even impossibility of representing the self and rendering it intelligible. The

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<sup>40</sup> My reading is indebted to Feuerwerker’s insight that diary as a self-reflexive writing ends up “cast[ing] grave doubts on the intelligibility of the self, on the self as a source of meaning and authenticity” (49). Another existing scholarship that discusses first-person narratives from a linguistic perspective is the sixth chapter “The Deixis of Writing in the First Person” in Lydia H. Liu’s *Translingual Practice*. However even as Lydia Liu briefly evokes Emile Benveniste’s linguistic theory that it is through language that a subject is constituted, her consequent reading of “Miss Sophia’s Diary” focuses more on writing and reading as a gendered act and thus fails to fully engage with Benveniste’s theory and the function of a “I” discourse.

<sup>41</sup> For Raymond Williams, form is not devoid of social context but itself is a social relationship. See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

<sup>42</sup> As Lydia Liu points out in “The Deixis of Writing in the First Person” chapter, May Fourth writers consciously appropriated Indo-European languages, especially the use of pronouns that was not common or essential to Chinese language. Barlow similarly has noticed the conspicuous “Western-language sentence structure” in “Miss Sophia’s Diary” (50). Thus I am using sociolinguistic theories on inflected languages to apply to non-inflected Chinese without further justification.

formal and generic multiplicity produces a performative, fragmented and contradictory selfhood, which in turn resists any fixed subject position.

### **The Performative and Social “I”**

The French structural linguist, Emile Benveniste, in his classic chapter on “Subjectivity in Language” notes the reciprocity of the use of “I”: “I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address” (224), and the other becomes an echo to myself “to whom I say *you* and who say *you* to me” (225). Thus the old boundary between the self and the other in turn is bound to fall (225). Such a condition of intersubjectivity is what “makes linguistic communication possible” (230). Drawing on Benveniste, the French literary critic Michael Lucey notes the performative and social nature of the first person singular when discussing the (im)possibility of representing same-sex sexuality. According to Lucey, the first person “I” is a highly abstract *figure* that “successfully and intelligibly enacts social relations, keeps face, lays claims, and achieves recognition” (my emphasis 19). Further, “I” not only functions as a referential index that refers to the person saying “I” at that given moment, but also as a nonreferential index that points to a larger social context: the utterance of “I” takes some of its sense from the larger social universe in which it occurs (20).<sup>43</sup> Informed by Benveniste’s and Lucey’s conceptualization of the first person singular, I analyze how the performative and social/relational nature of “I” plays out in “Miss Sophia’s Diary” and how it constructs the female identity and subjectivity.

Foremost, the “I” in “Miss Sophia,” despite its desire to be understood by the world, is performative and even deceitful. Miss Sophia finds no difficulty in lying to others, even

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<sup>43</sup> Here Lucey clearly echos another Benveniste’s essay “Nature of Pronouns” in which he elucidates that “I” is not referential in the sense that it does not point to a social reality but “can be only identified by the instance of discourse that contains it and be that alone” (218).

closest friends like Yunlin: “I’ve also deceived Yunlin as if telling lies were my instinct, and I exercised it effortlessly today” 並且在糊里糊塗中欺騙了雲霖，好像扯謊也是本能一樣，所以在今天能毫不費力的便使用了。(January 1, 56). When with Ling Jishi, the man she desires, Miss Sophia constantly performs the role of a silent and submissive woman whose behavior befits the prescribed gender norms. Often Miss Sophia listens to Ling quietly even if she is filled with disagreement, hatred, and anger:

So once again I yield to his shallow affection and listened while he talked animatedly about the stupid pleasure he enjoys so much, listened to him expound on his philosophy that making money and spending money sum up the meaning of life. I even acceded to his insinuation on the appropriate duty of being a woman. That made me despise him even more than before, and I cursed him and ridiculed him secretly, even as inwardly my fists struck painfully at my heart.

於是我又很柔順地接受了他許多淺薄的情意，聽他說著那些使他津津回味的卑劣享樂，以及“賺錢和化錢”的人生意義，並承他暗示我許多做女人的本分。這些又使我看不起他，暗罵他，嘲笑他，我拿我的拳頭，隱隱痛擊我的心。(March 21, 71)

There simultaneously exist an outwardly performative “I” conforming to gender norms and an inwardly more authentic (supposedly) “I” capable of criticizing the accumulative and consumptive ethos of capitalism and dominant gender ideology, who nevertheless has to internalize all those criticisms and dissents into self-afflicted pain. In the diary Miss Sophia is constantly oscillating between an external “I” and an internal “I.”

Further, the “I” in “Miss Sophia’s Diary” has a clear referential meaning, yet due to its abstract and figural nature it also points to a larger social context. On the surface, the title of the diary forecloses any referential ambiguity: “I” refers to “Miss Sophia,” pure and simple. However, as Barlow points out that a Western name is the mark of her “universal femininity,” and the name “Sophie” or “Sophia” alludes to Sophie of Rousseau’s *Emile*, who

is the “‘natural’ woman whose innate ‘female’ qualities became a textual reference in subsequent European philosophies of sexual essentialism” (26). I would further suggest that the universality and representability of Miss Sophia comes from the universal intersubjectivity of the first person singular “I”: anyone can use and become an “I” and thus makes the reader’s identification with the “I” significantly easier and more ready. Situated in the larger social context of 1920s China, when May Fourth intellectuals were endeavoring to characterize, define and encode a type of femininity to convey their political and didactic message, when breaking away from traditional family and free love were seen as act of free will that marked one’s identity as a modern man/woman, “I” Miss Sophia becomes a type through which all those ideals can be realized.<sup>44</sup> It came as no surprise then that Miss Sophia has long been interpreted as an epitome of New Woman or Modern Girl.

Apart from bringing a larger social context into the meaning of “I,” the “I” is also intertwined with the immediate social environment in which it is situated. The beginning of the diary is marked by its very *absence* of an “I” subject; it only starts with a description of external force—the wind, and how it wakens the absent “I”: “The wind’s up again! Was wakened by the blowing wind before daylight. Then the boy came in to start the stove. I know I’ll never get back to sleep again” 今天又颶风！天还没亮，就被风颶醒了。伙計又跑進來生火炉。我知道，这是怎樣都不能再睡得着的了。(50). The “被” sentence pattern highlights the passivity of the subject and suggests the presence of an absent receiver. Even as the “I” occupies the subject position in the following sentence (“I know...”), the

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<sup>44</sup> Yue Ming-Bao points out that May Fourth literature on the one hand often recounts the tragic fate of lower-class and uneducated women to launch their scathing critique of a repressive traditional society, and depicts educated and modern women (New Women) to indicate the future of the nation on the other. In either case, women are always being represented and silenced even though they figure prominently in the narrative. See Yue “Gendering the Origins of Modern Chinese Fiction” in *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Society* (1993).

content of its knowledge, far from being a claim to truth or of significance, is about something extremely trivial and personal—her inability to fall asleep again; thus the subject being formed here is an extremely weak one. Throughout the first diary entry, the “I” is always on the receiving end of and annoyed by outside intrusions, such as wind, cold weather, and the noise from the hall, permeating into the private domestic space she endeavors to maintain. Such a porous domestic space suggests the impossibility to maintain a sense of self-contained “I” devoid of external disruptions.

The relational nature of the “I” is rendered more obvious when positioned in relation to others in the society and enacting a set of social relations that put her in a centered, superior position. The effeminate Weidi brings her sustenance such as eggs that are vital to the invalid “I;” he alleviates her suffocating loneliness while he becomes the source of her sadistic pleasure:

When this honest, open man was there, I used all the cruelty of my nature to make him suffer. Yet once he’d left, there was nothing I wanted more than to snatch him back and plead with him: “I know I was guilty. Don’t love a woman so unworthy of your affection as I am!”

在一個老實人面前，我已盡自己的殘酷天性去磨折他，但當他走後，我真想能抓回他來，只請求他：“我知道自己的罪過，請不要再愛這樣一個不配承受那真摯的愛的女人了吧！”(54)

Miss Sophia is repetitively torn between a sadistic pleasure and masochistic guilt afterwards. Both the pleasure and guilt are derived from the pains she afflicts on an emasculated man, which puts her in an unequal power relation with Weidi since her guilt later translates into emotional rewards for Weidi. In other words no matter guilty or not, she has absolute control over Weidi’s behavior.

After encountering Ling Jishi, a wealthy young man from Singapore, Miss Sophia expresses even more intense desire to control and possess: “I want to possess him. I want unconditional surrender of his heart. I want him kneeling down in front of me, begging me to kiss him.” 我要佔有他，我要他無條件的獻上他的心，跪著求我賜給他的吻呢。(59). The “I” occupies absolute subject position in three paralleled sentences and enacts action as well as desire. To control, to possess a man as an object means her resistance to being controlled, possessed and objectified. On the contrary, Miss Sophia constantly fantasizes, objectifies and fetishizes Ling Jishi. Lydia Liu observes in the text a reversal of desiring subject (male) and the object of desire (female) in which the gaze of the female narrator “turns the man into a sex object, reversing male discourse about desire” (“Invention” 201). The body of Ling Jishi under Sophia’s gaze is always in fragmentation: lips, eyes, face, hair, etc. His body parts, his tall and slim body, his red lips, his enchanting eyes, his rosy face, and his soft hair are repeatedly depicted in the diary as if Lin is devoid of subjectivity (59, 62, 79). Such an inverted gender role is a highly transgressive one.

The “I” in “Miss Sophia’s Diary” thus cannot reach its ontological meaning without the existence of a performative self, the social other (to be subjected, objectified and possessed), and a larger social context. Its very contingency on social relations and context renders any self-containment impossible even in a first-person writing, a privileged site to construct, define and describe a self. In the next part, I turn to such difficulty of narrating the self and maintaining an intact/autonomous self.

### **The Fragmentation and Unintelligibility of the Self**



Diary, as a form of first-person writing, not only gives the reader relatively unmediated access (compared with a third-person narration) to the interiority of the writer, but also as Paperno points out, enables the author to “describe and define” him/herself through an “unmediated position of the speaking subject” (2).<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, a diary, as a daily accounting of internal thoughts and external actions of the self, has a temporal aspect; this temporal aspect is vital to the construction of a self: a Kantian self needs succession and continuity to unfold and form in time (Paperno 18). The relatively unmediated and temporal nature of a diary naturally makes it an optimal form of writing to narrate the self. However, in “Miss Sophia’s Diary,” even if the writing narrator narrates herself from a seemingly unmediated position of speaking subject and the reader is guaranteed a relatively unmediated access to the most inner and private thoughts of Miss Sophia, the narrated self is split and fragmented. It remains a self unintelligible to Sophia herself, to others in the story and to the reader; it can only reach the destination of self-effacement because an imminent death approaches.

Due to the formal similarities between diary and autobiography (both in the first-person modes), I find Paul de Man’s contention that autobiographical writing precedes and produces the life of the writer and not the opposite particularly useful: “the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life” (69). As de Man nicely puts it, the writing of oneself, or “the technical demands of self-portraiture” may well be governed and determined by “the resources of his medium” (69). In other words, language as a medium and autobiographical writing as a form govern and determine the formation of the writing/written

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<sup>45</sup> Paperno in another article that discusses the formal distinctions of diaries as a genre points out that many scholars have noted the private and confessional nature of diary. See Paperno, “What Can Be Done with Diary?” (2004).

self. In the last part of the paper, I attempt to analyze how the formal multiplicity of this diary produces a fragmented and unintelligible self and how it complicates subject formation and eventually erases the subject.

First of all, the split and fragmented self of Miss Sophia is produced by various addresses to herself. Throughout the narrative Miss Sophia continuously addresses herself in third person as if her self were an object to be analyzed and studied. As she self-objectifies, “my life is nothing but my own plaything” (我的生命只是我自己的玩品) (March 28, 80). When “I” and “Sophia” appear in the same sentence, the sense of estrangement and alienation becomes even more conspicuous: “I have nothing further to say on the subject of friends. *I* only know that *Sophia* will never find satisfaction in ordinary friendship” 關於朋友，我不說了。我知道永世也不會使莎菲感到滿足這人間的友誼的！ (March 27, 77). Who’s this “I” if not Sophia? Even the “I” refers to Sophia in such given context, it also enacts a distance and split relation between one self “I” and another third-person self “Sophia.” “Sophia” thus splits from the writing subject and becomes an external object to be addressed and analyzed.

However when addressing herself in second person as Sophia does at the end of the diary, the narrative turns into a lyric address: “I laughed wildly and pitied myself: ‘Live quietly and die quietly. Ah, I pity you, Sophia!’” 我狂笑的憐惜自己：“悄悄的活下来，悄悄的死去，啊！我可憐你，莎菲！” (March 28, 81). The “I/you” pronouns here establish a relationship between the self and the other whose boundary as Benveniste’s points out is indeed fragile; the distance between “I” and “you” is indeed shorter than addressing someone in third person. Further, as Jonathan Culler in *Theory of the Lyric* has theorized the non-linear, non-teleological nature of the temporality in the lyric as opposed to narrative, to

apostrophize something is “to locate them in the time of the apostrophe” (225). The addressee is in turn animated and preserved as forever *present* in the instance of the utterance (Culler 226). Here “Sophia” as a “you” enters an intersubjective relationship with the self as an “I,” and thus multiple selves are produced by the lyric address as well as rendered forever alive and present by the lyric address. It simultaneously deprives the subject of its life as she is going to die soon while preserving the subject in an utterance.

This fragmentation and alienation of the self becomes more dramatized when Sophia interacts with other people in society. Sophia constantly complains that people around her do not understand her; she wants to maintain her sense of an autonomous self yet cares deeply about how others perceive her:

I am the only person who can pardon what I did. They all criticize me, but they don't know the feelings I endure when I am with other people. People say I am eccentric, but no one notices how often I'm willing to toady for affection and approval. No one will ever encourage me to say things that contradict my real thoughts. They endure my eccentricities constantly, which gives me even ore cause to reflect on my behavior, and that ends up distancing me even further from them.

除了我自己，沒有人會原諒我的。誰也在批評我，誰也不知道我在人前所忍受的一些人們給我的感觸。別人說我怪僻，他們哪裡知道我卻時常在討人好，討人歡喜。不過人們太不肯鼓勵我說那太違心的話，常常給我機會，讓我反省我自己的行為，讓我離人們卻更遠了。(December 24, 53)

What is striking in terms of part of speech is that all the *wos* here are unanimously objects. In other words, Sophia becomes an “I” *wo* as “me,” as an object not subject or agent. Her passivity is further marked by her willingness and attempts to please people that only result in her further alienation from them. In her interactions with other people, Sophia develops a double consciousness in which she always see herself through others' eyes.<sup>46</sup> The words and

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<sup>46</sup> I am evoking W. E. B. Du Bois's conceptualization of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folks* here. A double consciousness is developed when one is “looking at oneself through the eyes of others” (Du Bois 68). Du Bois's double

opinion of others impose a determining influence on the discourse and consciousness of Sophia. As argued in my previous chapter, a seemingly solipsistic first-person narrative is in fact dialogized or double-voiced. The confessional nature of diary allows us a vantage point to witness the formation of such conflicting double consciousness.

Throughout the narrative, Miss Sophia always sees herself through the eyes of others and develops a new knowledge of herself based on others' perception of her. In the passage quoted above, *guaipi* "eccentric," a term given to her by other people around her, becomes part of her perception of herself and how she conducts her behaviors accordingly. Sophia in particular is eager to learn how Ling Jishi sees her: "This uncertainty makes me want to see him again, to examine how this tall and strange creature sees me" 這又使我只想再見他一面，到底審看一下這高大的怪物是怎樣的在觀看我。(70). Upon their first encounter, under the gaze of Lin, Sophia feels extremely ashamed of her "ragged slippers" and dares not to go into the lighted area—a feeling that has never occurred to her. Frustrated with her restrained and boring manner, she suddenly develops a new perspective on her self: "Today I found out how moronic and graceless I could seem to be" "今天才知道自己是還只能顯得又呆，又傻氣。(January 1, 55). Sophia here develops a double consciousness and acquires a new knowledge of herself when sees herself through the eyes of her superior male counterpart.

The diary narrative thus is locked in a perpetuating battle between establishing the self as source of knowledge and authority and others' perception and knowledge on her. The verb "知道" appears numerous times in the text, and often in the form of "我知道" (I know...)

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consciousness specifically refers to Black people being forced to view themselves through white perspectives while endeavoring to maintain their own identities and self-definitions—two coexisting and irreconcilable identities. Such racial double consciousness resembles Miss Sophia's gendered double consciousness because in both cases the inferior party positioned in an unequal power relation sees oneself through the eyes of the superior counterpart and thus develops a self-consciousness based on others' perception of oneself.

and sometimes “誰也/他们不知道” (nobody knows/they don't know...). In premodern Chinese literary culture, the intelligibility of the self was very much tied up to being socially recognizable to others. For instance, poetry, centered on the writing and expression of the self, was supposed to render the self intelligible to oneself and to others in a community that consists of poets, as encapsulated in the axiom “詩言志” (poetry expresses aspiration). *Zhi* (aspiration) in the premodern context and *zhidao* in this text have clear resonance.<sup>47</sup> It could be argued that Sophia engages in similar process of creating self-expression that might render her aspiration (*zhi*) as well as herself intelligible. Yet because Sophia's self is no longer the sole source of self-knowledge but split, fragmented, and contingent upon others, she fails to articulate her *zhi* and construct a social identity recognizable and intelligible to others through the act of writing.

Such a split, fragmented, and contingent self only results in confusion and further unintelligibility. Sophia cannot be understood by others precisely because she cannot understand or articulate what she wants or aspire to. She ends up endlessly interrogating herself “Can I say what it is I really want?” 我能说得出我真实的需要是些什么呢? (January 3), later “But then what is the point of after all? This is really hard to say!” 我到底又为了什么呢，这真难说! March 13), and toward the end “Recently I've had more difficulty understanding what I'm anxious for” 近來呢，我更不知為了什麼只能焦急。” (March 21, Evening). When she discloses her diary to Weidi, hoping that it could explain herself to him, yet it has only resulted in Weidi's continual misunderstanding and misinterpretation of her. The same text therefore has produced two different meanings when

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<sup>47</sup> My special thanks should be given to Prof. Maram Epstein for pointing out the prominence of the verb “知道” in this text and its relation to traditional notions of “志.”

addressing to herself and addressing to Weidi.<sup>48</sup> Despite her constant complaints about the world's failure to understand herself, disclosure of her most inner thoughts does little help to render the self intelligible. Indeed as de Man points out, autobiography, and in this case a diary, hardly offers "reliable self-knowledge" but reveals "the impossibility of coming into being" through a textual system (71).

Sophia's split and unintelligible self also derives from a subject position that speaks and internalizes the language of dominant gender ideology, continuously measuring her behavior against prescribed gender norms, and a subject position that rejects those ideologies.<sup>49</sup> Sophia is highly aware of the social norms imposed on women and on how they should behave: "A woman that uninhibited would risk having everything blow up in her face" 一个女人这样放肆，是不会得好结果的。(January 4, 57); "I have decided; I regret, regret that the wrong doings I did today—things a respectable woman could never do" 我决定了，我懊悔，懊悔我白天所做的一些不是，一个正经女人所做不出来的。(January 5, 75). She has to suppress her sexual desire for Ling because it is prohibited by society: "I know very well that in this society I'm forbidden to take what I need to gratify my desires and frustrations, even when it clearly wouldn't hurt anybody" (55). Instead she "lowers [her] head *patiently* and *quietly* read the name printed on the card..." (my emphasis 55). In other words, she conforms to socially constructed norms such as patriarchal gender codes of Confucianism that discipline female bodies and prescribe women's silence, chastity and subservience. Even

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<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that the only person who seems to understand Sophia is Sister Yun, a friend/lover figure for her. Many critics have noticed the homosocial bonding between Sophia and Sister Yun. Lydia Liu specifically foregrounds female bonding as a site of resistance to patriarchal power in her reading of "Miss Sophia's Diary" and in the works of many other female writers. See Liu "Invention and Intervention" and chapter six in *Translingual Practice*.

<sup>49</sup> I agree with Yi-tsi Mei's reading that Sophia is never fully emancipated from "traditional institutionalized modes of womanly behavior" but internalizes them, resulting in a continual war with oneself (44).

if Miss Sophia is an educated modern woman, the power of social norms penetrates her discourse and interpellates her into a conforming subject.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, Sophia refuses to conform to certain norms and attempts to establish the self as the ultimate source of authority (“only I can know myself”) by rejecting any form of institutional affiliation. No matter marriage or family—the two primary and probably the sole institutional affiliations accessible to women at that time—is rejected by Miss Sophia, yet such rejection only results in her self-effacement. Even though Sophia cannot articulate what she wants, she articulates what she does *not* want clearly: not marriage, not family, not money, not status (March 28, 79). Structurally excluded from the dominant society, i.e. a patriarchal society, in terms of economic structure, familial structure and institutional structure, women in a Confucian society could only assume a position of subordination, as expounded by the “Three Obediences” and “Four Virtues.” This still stands true in a post-Confucian China such as the May Fourth period. Renouncing any forms of affiliation, be it family or marriage, Sophia negates her own existence as well: she simply cannot exist in a society whose structure has no place for a woman like Sophia. The self in the diary reaches an ontological impasse in which the narrative is going nowhere, nothing gets resolved and Sophia will “die quietly” (last entry, 81).

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<sup>50</sup> Here I’m evoking Louis Althusser’s concept of ideology and its power to interpellate an individual into subjects in “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus.” Althusser’s famous analogy for understanding the individual’s interpellation is that of a person walking down the street when a policeman yells, “Hey You!” Within the action of turning around, the individual has become hailed into the law because the individual has recognized that call, turned, and thus is willingly subject to the ideology of law. According to Althusser, the subject is always already initiated into subordination to the ruling ideology both through the Repressive State Apparatus (such as army, police, prison, etc.) and through the Ideological State Apparatus (such as schools, education, church, etc.) that works in more subtle ways and creates a freely submitting subject. Ideological State Apparatus, school and education system in particular ensures the reproduction of labor power, for it not only imparts skills that would prepare the man for future work and labor market, but also inculcates ruling ideology and ensures submission to such ideology.

The self, whether a performative first-person singular “I,” an objectified “me” or third-person “Sophia,” can only exist in relation to others and cannot exist when it rejects all forms of institutional affiliations. In its formal multiplicity, in its own construction of identity through the eyes of others as well as through dominant ideology, in its resistance to institutional and social affiliations, in its rejection to be interpellated into any fixed subject position, there can only exist double or even multiple selves, fragmented and unintelligible. The diary, a presumably optimal site to define and describe the self, on the one hand produces and preserves selfhood, and on the other attests to the very difficulty of narrating and constructing an intact and autonomous self devoid of the materiality of social relations and affiliations. Especially when the material conditions of a Chinese society in the 1920s failed to accommodate the existence of “quasi-liberated” women like Sophia, it only resulted in an aporia of narrative and ontological impasse. The diary, as an attempt to write oneself into existence, only becomes a testament of her existence before she dies quietly; the “I” in written utterances, like the signature, marks the absence of the writer Miss Sophia and only attests to her “having-been-present in a past” (Derrida 107).



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION: TOWARD A REVOLUTIONARY SELF

As Feuerwerker rightly observes, the narrative impasse reached at the end of “Miss Sophia’s Diary” encapsulated the limit of such a self-confining subjective form of writing (1982, 76). The realization of such limit led to Ding Ling’s eventual abandonment of this form of writing and the bourgeois individualist ideology underlying it, and to her conversion to a Marxist ideology in the 1930s. Lu Xun’s shift to the left toward the end of his life seemed also to bespeak his disillusionment with a bourgeois individualism; his giving up of fiction writing altogether reflected an even deeper disillusionment with a mode of literary representation that relies on the mediation of social reality. These two writers’ change of intellectual stance was again representative of the shift in larger intellectual context of their time, or as Marston Anderson puts it, “reflect[ed] the general trend toward collectivism among intellectuals in post-May Fourth China” (1993, 257).

Their attempt to textually construct a bounded, coherent and autonomous self modeled on Western Enlightenment notions of the self failed; the aspirational modern self remained forever aspirational and never quite realized. As the close readings of the two texts have shown, the formal and generic complexities of the texts in fact stand in the way of or even betray that construction, and instead those complexities produce selves that are multiple, fragile, fragmented, under the threat of death (of self and other), and sometimes unintelligible.

This reading does not so much confirm a poststructuralist belief in the limits of language and discursive production as point to a more significant revelation that the social reality of China at that time foreclosed the possibility of textually creating an aspirational

modern self. Juansheng and Zijun's pursuit of free love leads to their social exclusion as well as loss of economic means of survival; Miss Sophia's rejection of traditional forms of social/institutional affiliations and value systems results in her failure to construct an intelligible social identity and thus failure to write the self into existence. After all, as Adorno states, "works of art that react against empirical reality obey the forces of that reality" (190). The fragmented, split, and fragile self is the negotiated result of the encountering between the concept of a bordered, coherent and autonomous self and a social reality that lacked the material base for the existence of such a self.

As mentioned before, many intellectuals abandoned this concept of the self and took a more collective approach to thinking about the self and subjectivity after the May Fourth. Soon a new type of the self, a different model of conceiving the self and subjectivity would emerge and take over. It culminated in the socialist era in the 1950s, and the *Diary of Lei Feng* was its paradigmatic manifestation. While the authenticity of the *Diary of Lei Feng* remains questionable, as Wendy Larson eloquently argues in her comparative study of diary of Hermine Hug-Hellmuth, a faithful disciple of Freud, and Lei Feng's diary, the assumption that autobiographical writing such as diary will reveal an authentic inner self should be questioned.<sup>51</sup> This is because diary writers can easily manipulate the form, and for diaries that were written under heavy influence of ideological imperatives, in this case Freud's theories and Maoism, it might be more productive to read them as "windows into ideological constructs" (Larson 2011, 178).

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<sup>51</sup> Hermine Hug-Hellmuth (1871-1924) was psychoanalyst and a disciple of Freud. According to Wendy Larson, most of her contemporary psychoanalysts attributed *A Young Girl's Diary* that was allegedly written by a patient of hers to Hug-Hellmuth because the young girl was never identified. Given Hug-Hellmuth's "'obstinate' adherence" to Freud's theories, Larson rightly points out that we should interpret the diary as a fictional creation and the young girl a literary persona created by Hug-Hellmuth based on Freud's theories on the self and subjectivity. See Larson, "The Freudian Subject and the Maoist Mind: The Diaries of Hermine Hug-Hellmuth and Lei Feng," *Psychoanalysis and History* 13.2 (2011).

The *Diary of Lei Feng* does offer us a picture of the ideal embodiment of what a Maoist revolutionary self with a revolutionary mind looks like. According to Larson, the Freudian sexualized unconscious and the Chinese revolutionary spirit are two different models of conceptualizing the self and subjectivity, and the former should not impose its quasi-claim to universality to the latter.<sup>52</sup> The Chinese revolutionary mind is defined “through passionate intellectual and emotional embodiment of social context and position” (Larson 2011, 158); a revolutionary self is properly positioned in relation to power (Larson 2009, 79); a revolutionary subjectivity is “in complete sync with the material and social reality” (Larson 2011, 175). The transition between the subjective, the social, and the material is thus seamless.

In the following passage, we will witness the formation of the revolutionary “I” that is properly positioned and in perfect sync with the social reality:

我出身在一个很贫穷的农民家庭，在旧社会受尽了折磨和痛苦，在慈祥的母亲中国共产党的不断哺育和教导下，居然成为了一个国防军战士、光荣的共产党员，我要时刻准备着为党和阶级的最高利益，牺牲个人的一切，直至生命。  
I was born in an extremely poor peasant family. I suffered endless tortures and pains in the old society. Yet under the nurture and guidance of the loving Mother, the Chinese Communist Party, I became a soldier in the national defense and an honorable Communist Party member. I must be prepared at all times to sacrifice everything of myself for the ultimate interests of the Party and class until my last breath. (December 27, 1960)

This short passage constructs a narrative of the teleological development of the ideologically charged “I”—from a poor peasant child to a soldier and Party member. This is also a narrative that fits into the Party-state’s official narrative of a history divided into pre-liberation

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<sup>52</sup> See also Larson, *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China* (2009).

bitterness and suffering and a post-liberation prosperity and happiness. In other words, Lei Feng's sense of the self and construction of his personal history is in line with an official discourse on how history should be narrated and constructed. While there is a clear distinction between the temporality of the past and the temporality of the present, the present and the future temporality are connected and enclosed by the narrating "I"'s forever readiness to sacrifice the self for the Party representing a greater good and higher end. Lei Feng thus comes to embody Mao's idea of a "permanent revolution." Unlike Miss Sophia whose *zhi* (intention) and social identity are unintelligible, the narrating "I" finds meaning in his identity as a soldier and Communist Party member, and in turn those socially recognizable identities had rendered Lei Feng intelligible as well as emulatable to millions readers from the 1950s. This revolutionary self occupies a subject position that has been successfully interpellated by the dominant ideology, properly positioned to power represented by the Party, and completely embedded in the collective social.

But one may argue that Lei Feng, as a possibly fabricated person and an ideological construct, may have little bearing on how people living in the 1950s actually conceived the self and came to inhabit a subject position. One may question if this model of conceptualizing the self and subjectivity were operating in the minds of actual people. Then the historian Gail Hershatter's study of the life stories of women labor models from the 1950s confirms the validity of this different model.<sup>53</sup> Based on the analysis of the interviews conducted with female labor models from the 1950s, Hershatter draws the following conclusion:

“[E]mergence as a labor model, with its accompanying public activities, profoundly shaped

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<sup>53</sup> For more detailed and systematic study of rural women's experience of the revolution and collectivization, see Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (2013).

these women's sense of who they were and their memories of that time. ... [W]omen recalling their past as labor models do so in language provided by the historical process they are recalling" (50). In other words, their identity and subjectivity cannot be separated from the state discourse and political movement. Hershatter further suggests that this find calls into question the very existence of interiority as well as the assumption that underneath the surface there is always an authentic and private self "apart from or in resistance to state discourse"(50).

In a similar vein, it is my hope that through my discussion of different models of conceptualizing the self, including the Western Enlightenment epistemology of the self, we've come to see the self and subjectivity as discursively and ideologically constructed. A concept of the self, such as possessive individualism that has been taken to be universal, in fact has a history and thus is always contingent and particular. A possessive and private self is no more universal than a relational and collective self; a revolutionary mind is no more particular than the Freudian unconscious.

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