# REFLECTIONS AND RECIPROCITY:
# CHINA AND GERMAN MODERNIST LITERATURE

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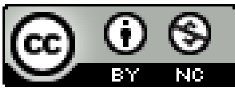

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the portrayal of China in German modernist literature, as well as the adaptation of said literature in post-Mao China. It analyzes how the German texts of the modernist period negotiate cultural and political identity in the age of imperialism and Orientalism, and how their Chinese interpretations approach similar issues of representation and reform in different decades of China after Mao. How do the de-nationalizing elements of the original German-language writings create resonance with the nationalist aspects found in their contemporary Chinese counterparts? Drawing upon specific examples, I situate the German-language sources and their Chinese adaptations within their literary, cultural and historico-political contexts, and implement a multidisciplinary approach that combines textual analysis with postcolonial theory and cultural studies on global capitalism. Demonstrating how each work addresses and challenges the dominant discourse of its day, my thesis shows the continued influence of Germany literary modernism upon culture and politics in present day China, and argues in support of the existence of dynamic cultural transference between Germany and China.

German-language works discussed include: Arthur Schnitzler's fragment "Boxeraufstand" (1926), Bertolt Brecht's drama *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (1953), Franz Kafka's short story "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer" (1917), and Stefan Zweig's novella *Brief einer Unbekannten* (1922). Chinese works discussed include: the Sichaun opera *Sichuan Haoren* (1987), Can Xue's essay "Building in Sections: The Artist's Way of Life" (1997), and Xu Jinglei's film *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (2004).

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

This study examines the dynamics of intercultural exchange between China and Germany from both sides of the cultural divide, specifically in terms of literary modernism. It analyzes how German-language modernist literature of the early twentieth century addresses the politics of identity and social reform through an engagement with China and Chinese culture. It also looks at how post-Mao era Chinese cultural and literary productions engage with the same issues by referencing German modernist source materials. Seeing the German-language writings and their Chinese interpretations side by side allows the reader to identify multiple layers of cultural transference, while highlighting the processes of reflection, refraction and reciprocity occurring within them. Via modes of seeing and being seen, the juxtaposition of the German and Chinese works emphasizes the fluid subject/object positioning of the West in relation to China, and vice versa.

## Thoughts on German-language Modernist Literature and China

This project proposes that claims made in postcolonial studies regarding the relationship between the Western European Self and the Chinese Other are insufficient to grasp the dynamic of cultural reciprocity that plays out around German-language modernist literature.[1] Rather than reproducing or reinforcing standard Orientalist

stereotypes, each German-language work interacts with and often subverts dominant discourses of nationalism, imperialism and modernism through its literary engagement with China. The texts, which create a fictional "contact zone" as defined by Mary Louise Pratt, demonstrate to the reader how the European Self is constituted through its treatment of the Chinese Other "in terms of copresence, interaction, [and] interlocking understandings and practices."[2] Questioning the underlying claims of Orientalism, these German-language works highlight the tension between binaries such as Self/Other and East/West in order to illustrate their limitations and challenge colonialist and imperialist ideology. These narratives suggest that there are more productive ways of understanding and interpreting literature about China than through methodology that emphasizes the critique of Orientalism.

**Postcolonialist Claims**

This project refers to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, explained in his 1978 study of the same name. Although Said focuses primarily on the Orient as defined by Islam, the Near East and the Arabic world, his theory of Orientalism applies to China and the Far East as well.[3] Said offers three different but interrelated interpretations of Orientalism. Orientalism concerns the area of research conducted, taught, and written by academics focusing on "the Orient." Orientalism also provides a way for "the Occident" to think about the Orient; that is, Orientalist thought employs a monolithic East as a starting point for Western discourse regarding the East, forming a binary distinction between the two. Lastly, Orientalism is "a Western style for

dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[4] Based on Michel Foucault's notion of discourse, Said suggests that Orientalism is a method by which Western discourse is used to justify the subjugation of the East.

Said's *Orientalism* continues to influence commentators in fields such as postcolonial studies, cultural studies and literary criticism, garnering praise and criticism since its publication. Lisa Lowe voices the objection that Said's concept of Orientalism may be too broad to encompass all of the different types of Western discourse about the East, and proposes a more heterogeneous understanding of Orientalism in her 1991 study, *Critical Terrains*.[5] Fred Halliday remarks that Said's critique of Orientalism does not allow for the expression of ideas and ideologies about the Middle East from the region itself.[6] James Clifford notes that Said, who refutes a monolithic understanding of the Orient, often juxtaposes a shifting, multilayered concept of the East with an essentializing and totalizing version of the West.[7] Commentators including Gyan Prakash, Jennifer Jenkins and Suzanne Marchand have discussed the implications of Said's avoidance of German Orientalism on the grounds of what he considers its scholarly (as opposed to political) inclinations.[8]

The ambiguity found in Said's definition of Orientalism makes it difficult to escape the conceptual framework created and encompassed by the term itself. Somewhat problematically, Said criticizes Orientalist discourse for falsely representing the Orient, but maintains elsewhere that the Orient does not exist. Discourse about the Orient appears to exist on two separate levels. More generally, Orientalist discourse encompasses any and all Western writings, teachings, research and discussion about the East. However, understood through a Foucauldian lens,

Said's concept of Orientalist discourse also refers more critically to "a discourse of power that characterise[s] a particular set of social, economic and political relations between Europe and its colonies."[9] The slippage between Orientalist discourse in a categorical sense and Orientalist discourse in an ideological sense is part of a larger hermeneutical problem left largely unaddressed in Said's study. This project, which recognizes and attempts to distinguish between the two types, also acknowledges the oscillation between them, often within the same work.

Clifford points out that "Said's concept of a 'discourse' still vacillates between…the status of an ideological distortion of lives and cultures that are never concretized and…the condition of a persistent structure of signifiers that, like some extreme example of experimental writing, refers solely and endlessly to itself."[10] According to Clifford's reading of *Orientalism*, the ambivalence of this central term reflects a larger theoretical question posed by Said in the text: "Can one ultimately escape procedures of dichotomizing, restructuring, and textualizing in the making of interpretive statements about foreign cultures and traditions?"[11]

My project attempts to show that the German-language modernist authors discussed in this study were cognizant of Said's greater concern, which deals with understanding, interpreting and categorizing the foreign.[12] Suggesting that the German-language texts demonstrate an attitude of curiosity and empathy towards difference, this approach builds upon Russell A. Berman's proposal that the greater German imperialist experience sometimes could take an alternative approach to depicting alterity—one that "allows for transgression, mixing, and plurality."[13] The writings examined in this project reflect the authors' struggles to allude to China in

non-"Orientalizing" ways, while nonetheless remaining aware of the difficulties behind their actions and intentions. Furthermore, the narratives indicate the authors' implicit understanding of their own participation in categorical and ideological Orientalist discourse. Implementing Chinese themes and images in ways that challenge the Manichean allegory identified in European colonialist literature at the time, the German-language narratives in this study destabilize the Orientalist paradigm from within. Through their non-conventional utilizations of China and Chinese culture, the texts illuminate the gap between the fictional, ideological construct of China and the country as a geopolitical entity. Without attempting to resolve the tension between their *Chinabilder* and other depictions of China at the time, the works encourage the reader to re-evaluate the politics of identity and representation.

**China, Europe and Germany: A Brief Overview**

To read more complexity into Europe's understanding of China, one must take into account the evolution of Europe's position towards China throughout the centuries. The European view is filled with contradictions and extremes. Beginning in the mid-fourteenth century and until the mid-eighteenth century, Europe's vision of China was largely positive. John Mandeville's *Travels*, published in 1365-1366, portrayed China as a great country and praised the Chinese people for their intelligence. In the fifteenth century, Marco Polo's *Travels* presented a similar image of China, and romantically depicted Kublai Khan and his rule.[14] In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Portuguese, Dutch and British traders and merchants, who

viewed China as a huge, potential trade market, took full advantage of the popularity of import items such as tea, porcelain, silk, scrolls and lacquered wares.

Jesuit missionaries during the same time period were also very influential in promoting a positive image of China. The Jesuits regarded Chinese and European civilizations as equals under the auspices of the Catholic Church. According to Ingrid Schuster, "Im Bild halten sich europäische und chinesische Elemente die Waage, erscheinen als gleichberechtigt und in voller Harmonie, im Zeichen des Kreuzes und der Kirche."[15] Matteo Ricci, who in 1583 founded the Jesuit mission in Beijing, published his written impressions of China in Europe in 1616. In his books and journals, he maintained that China was a unified and well-ordered country held together by Confucianism, and whose officials were chosen based on a system of meritocracy.[16] Ricci and other Jesuits' positive accounts of China were used as the basis for much of the Enlightenment literature about China, which depicted the country as an example of a rational, enlightened monarchy.

In the late seventeenth century, European scholars and philosophers began studying Confucianism. In 1687, Philippe Couplet published *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, which explained the ethical and political fundamentals of China as "natural" and independent from Christianity. Confucian teachings and principles of upbringing and education were later used to support Enlightenment theories proposing a rational, non-religious way of life.[17] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's *Novissima Sinica* was published in 1697, and he continued to write about China through the first decades of the eighteenth century. In his writings, Leibniz suggested that although Europe was superior with regard to theoretical and scientific knowledge, China was

superior in social and political arrangements. He advocated a mutual exchange of knowledge between Europe and China in order to benefit both.[18] Christian Wolff also wrote a book on China called *Oratorio de Sinarum Philosophia Practica*, published in 1721. In it, Wolff claimed that the Chinese were able to differentiate perfectly between good and bad, as well as distinguish true virtue from appearance, although they knew nothing of Christianity.[19]

The generally positive views of China began to change in the mid-eighteenth century. Protestant religious challenges and the Papal suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 led to an increase in anti-Jesuit sentiment and with it, a distrust in the Jesuit perception of China. Their reports on China were criticized as euphemistic and false. In addition to being indirectly affected by religious backlash in Europe, the Chinese empire erected its own barriers against international trade around the same time. This led to further aggression towards China by European merchants, including the British. Commodore George Anson, who visited Guangzhou (Canton), China in 1743, "personified Great Britain's newly assertive, self-confident, bellicose, impatient expansionist side."[20] He claimed that the Chinese were more dishonest than any other people in the world. He also criticized their military skills, their English language skills, and suggested that their handicraft skills were inferior in comparison to Japanese and European manufacturers. Moreover, he dismissed the Chinese written language and the Chinese government, suggesting that the Chinese excelled only in imitation.[21] His attitude was shared by John Barrow, who participated in the British embassy's expedition to China led by Lord Macartney in 1793-1794. Barrow's travel report on China was structured as a direct refutation of the positive views associated

with both the Jesuits and European Enlightenment thinkers. Among other things, his report criticized Confucianism, the "parental" nature of state authority, and the quality of Chinese fine arts and material goods.[22]

German thinkers continued to influence the European perception of China during the mid-eighteenth century. Johann Gottfried Herder used elements of German romanticism to contrast the putatively artificial character of the Chinese with that of "natural" German culture. This reversed the sixteenth-century European penchant for associating Chinese life with naïveté, happiness and light-heartedness. G.W.F. Hegel criticized China as well. In various works such as *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion,* and *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, he placed China at the beginning of world history, therefore regarding China as primitive and unable to progress towards freedom and self-consciousness.[23] Both Herder and Hegel emphasized China's rigidity and "backwardness," as well as the idea that China had already played out its part in the history of the world. According to them, China's achievements lay in the past, and its future was empty.

Along with the critical philosophical views of China in the eighteenth century, China's capitulation to Britain during the Opium Wars of 1840-1842 and 1850-1856 contributed further to its loss of prestige in the eyes of the West. From a European perspective, China lost both military power and cultural significance. In German literature, authors such as Heinrich Heine and Alexander von Sternberg used the image of the Chinese emperor and his advisors as a pejorative allegory for the Prussian monarchy and its supporters.[24] Criticizing and ridiculing "typical" Chinese

rule and government figures allowed the authors to express their dissatisfaction with the regime of Friedrich Wilhelm IV by displacing the object of their criticism into another time and place.

In March of 1898, China leased Jiaozhou (Kiautschou) Bay to Germany as recompense for the murder of two German Steyl missionaries in China the previous winter. During its sixteen-year lease, German attitudes towards the colonized Chinese people and their culture changed significantly. The colonization of Jiaozhou began as a regime of policy predicated on the differences between the colonizer and the colonized. The outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, along with Kaiser Wilhelm II's notorious "Hunnenrede" speech to German troops deploying to China in the same year,[25] further allowed Germans to justify their colonization policies and contributed towards a bellicose European attitude towards China and the Chinese people at the turn of the twentieth century.[26] However, Sino-German relations in Jiaozhou gradually moved towards foreign policies intended to cultivate "cultural-political relationships, especially with the educated Chinese upper strata."[27] Among other things, a German-Chinese university was established in Qingdao in 1909, and certain members of the Chinese elite were allowed to live in Qingdao and take part in political discussions. Gradually, some German intellectuals abandoned imperialist claims to superiority.[28]

The changes in colonial policy in China echo the different ways that colonialism was treated in pre-colonial German literature.[29] Prior to the establishment of German overseas colonies, German writers were not only able to assert their own moral superiority by criticizing the actions of non-German Europeans, but they also

increased the sense of collective German entitlement to colonial possessions by arguing that they would "do it better" than their European counterparts such as Great Britain or France. Alternatively, other German authors took a more contemplative view towards colonialism. Heinrich von Kleist challenged the European sense of exclusivity and moral superiority over non-Europeans in his treatment of race and race relations in stories such as "Die Verlobung in St. Domingo" and "Das Erdbeben in Chile." Written in the early nineteenth century, Kleist's literary works questioned the motives, outcomes and justifications for imperialism and colonialism long before Germany's entrance onto the colonial scene.

Fluctuating historical, cultural and politico-economic interests influenced the portrayal and reception of China in Europe throughout the centuries. The German understanding of China, particularly as it was expressed through philosophy and literature, also contributed to the formulation of China and Chinese culture in the West. Depicting China, the Chinese people and Chinese culture in varied and sometimes deliberately conflicting ways, the German-language authors in this study address issues of identity, nation and culture as they appear in Orientalist discourse. Contributing to the history of European discourse about China, their narratives question the notion of the Chinese Other and encourage the reader to reconsider the underlying ideological claims of Orientalism.

**Arthur Schnitzler's "Boxeraufstand"**

Arthur Schnitzler's literary fragment entitled "Boxeraufstand" introduces many of the issues concerning relations between China and the West that reoccur throughout this study. The dating of the piece is unclear, written perhaps as early as 1900 or as late as 1926. The work was published posthumously in the *Neue Rundschau* in 1957.[30] Its incomplete nature is demonstrated by the inclusion of handwritten additions to the published version; however, little is known about the text or its genesis. The narrative, which engages with Chinese themes and images, presumably utilizes its subject matter to reflect and comment upon the European perception of China in the early twentieth century. Through its deliberate implementation of Orientalist tropes such as the European Self and the Chinese Other, "Boxeraufstand" questions the rhetoric used to justify and validate Western military actions in China during the age of imperialism. From a Western perspective, Schnitzler's text raises the possibility of acknowledging China and the Chinese people outside of a purely imperialist context. Furthermore, by demonstrating the ambiguity of the Orientalist moment, the narrative suggests that universal humanity exists despite—or perhaps especially in the face of—seemingly insurmountable political, national and cultural differences.

Set in a small town two hours outside of Beijing, the story takes place during the summer of 1900, at the height of the Boxer Rebellion. The narrative is structured primarily as a first-person account told from the viewpoint of a European *Oberleutnant*, whose nationality is left unspecified.[31] Responsible for issuing the

command to execute seventeen Chinese prisoners, the lieutenant finds himself strangely drawn to one of them, who is absorbed in reading a novel. Unlike the others, the Chinese captive in question appears indifferent towards his surroundings as well as towards his upcoming execution. The officer, who becomes more and more agitated by the thought that the Chinese figure will be executed before finishing his novel, finds himself defying strict military protocol by approaching his superior officer and pleading for the prisoner's pardon. Ultimately, the lieutenant secures the captive's release, only to experience feelings of alienation and shame as he watches the freed captive walk away.

Adrian Clive Roberts suggests that Schnitzler uses literary techniques including the historical mode, irony, ambiguity and polemical debate to both hide and expose his criticism of war and militarism.[32] Schnitzler's use of these techniques in "Boxeraufstand" further questions the validity of Orientalism as an ideological discourse. Schnitzler's short story is not only a commentary on "all politically motivated executions" or a "broader attack on all imperialism,"[33] but it also draws specific attention to the political situation in China during the time of the Boxer Rebellion. The narrative begins with a brief description of the current situation in China. The tense atmosphere of the Boxer Rebellion is conveyed through the use of descriptive phrases, incomplete sentences and short paragraphs. It is possible to read these lines from the perspective of an objective, third-person narrative voice. However, after terse statements describing the rebellion as both a "[n]ationalistische Bewegung" as well as a "Freiheitsbewegung," the narrative switches to the first person: "[d]och wir wollen nicht von Politik reden"[34] (I: 545). The multiple

perspectives that surface in the opening lines of the text obscure the straightforward narrative mode and tone of the work, further suggesting ambiguity. The first-person voice weaving in and out of the opening paragraphs presumably belongs to the lieutenant, whose first-person perspective emerges clearly only in the fifth paragraph of the text and takes over the rest of the narrative.

According to Felix W. Tweraser, Schnitzler's late works examine the circumstances leading to war by focusing on individuals and their relationship to official ideology. Deferring to the state, the individuals portrayed by Schnitzler could deny their own sense of personal moral responsibility, and the consequences of such actions were seen through the acts of political and military aggression that followed.[35] In "Boxeraufstand," the officer issues the political disclaimer in an attempt to avoid politics altogether in his subsequent first-person account. He feigns ignorance towards the greater political intentions of Europe in China, and avoids the ethical implications inherent in his own participation in the Boxer Rebellion. However, his actions have the ironic effect of calling even greater attention to the inescapably political nature of the text. By leaving the narrative's opening statements purposefully unqualified, Schnitzler's narrative establishes an antiwar stance towards the Boxer Rebellion cloaked in ambivalence. The literary fragment indirectly criticizes the lieutenant for hiding behind a façade of political neutrality. At the same time, the text raises the possibility of viewing the Boxer Rebellion as a nationalistic freedom movement by thematizing the viewpoint taken by Chinese proponents of the rebellion, thus destabilizing the typical Orientalist structure found in Western literature at the time in multiple ways. Treating the officer's disclaimer in an equivocal manner, Schnitzler's

story broaches the issue of individual culpability in the implementation of state policies and doctrine, while also protesting against Western militarism in China at the beginning of the twentieth century.

"Boxeraufstand" establishes dichotomies such as the European Self and the Chinese Other, only to question their validity throughout the course of the narrative. Before examining more examples in the text, it is useful to refer briefly to Abdul R. JanMohamed's theory of Manichean aesthetics as it applies to colonialist literature.[36] JanMohamed describes colonialist literature as literature in which the Western Self responds to the colonized, non-Western Other in terms of identity and difference. His characterization provides an effective method for considering the implications of Orientalist discourse, which similarly places the European Self against the Oriental Other. By ignoring the significant divergences in culture and by judging the Other according to the cultural values of the Self, the Western colonizer is able to assume an irremediable difference between himself and the subjugated Other. He also gives himself little incentive to adopt the Other's viewpoint in the process. JanMohamed suggests that colonialist literature articulates and justifies the moral authority of the colonizer, and further masks the enjoyment derived by the colonizer from wielding such authority.[37] This corresponds well to the ideology behind Orientalism, which strives to validate the imperialist and colonialist aspirations of the West through its portrayal of the East. Schnitzler's narrative, which centers upon the interactions between the imperialist European officer and the subjugated Chinese prisoner, appears on the surface to participate in the genres of both colonialist literature and Orientalist discourse.

The protagonist in Schnitzler's "Boxeraufstand" attempts to distance himself from the Chinese captives under his command. However, the lieutenant's inability to remain fully detached from the novel-reading Chinese prisoner in the "Trupp von siebzehn" (I: 545) demonstrates the breakdown of supposedly fixed boundaries between the European Self and the Chinese Other. After observing the Chinese prisoner calmly reading a novel in the face of his impending execution, the officer cannot leave the captive alone. Instead, the soldier finds himself inexplicably drawn to him. Unable to explain his reaction towards the captive, the lieutenant can only declare, "ich befand mich in einem so seltsamen Seelenzustand" (I: 546). Instead of referring to the typical *Fremdheit*, or foreignness, common to colonial encounters with the exotic Orient, the officer's statement alludes to the *Seltsamkeit*, or peculiarity, of his own psychological state of mind. This destabilizes the typical colonialist perspective and hints instead at the possible existence of universal humanity and cross-cultural connection in the midst of the imperialist moment.

The lieutenant, who is accustomed to observing Chinese prisoners impersonally as statistical numbers, appears both unequipped and unprepared to deal with his human feelings of sympathy, empathy or even possible self-identification with the captive. He attempts to articulate his feelings through a preoccupation with the prisoner's actions, as opposed to a deeper consideration of the prisoner himself. "Ich ertrug es nicht. Ich fand es ungeheuerlich, daß man diesen Menschen erschießen sollte, am Ende gar ehe er den Roman zu Ende gelesen. Ja, das dachte ich wirklich" (I: 546). The protagonist displaces his sentiments towards the prisoner onto the novel and the act of reading instead. The officer's preoccupation with the prisoner's novel

allows him to avoid considering the far-reaching implications of his fascination with the Chinese prisoner, and demonstrates his difficulty and discomfort in dealing with figures who fall outside of previously established relationship boundaries.

The lieutenant's complicated stance towards the novel-reading Chinese captive is further illustrated by fluctuations in register and address between the two of them. Early on in the fragment, the lieutenant refers to the prisoner with the familiar second-person pronoun *du*. However, as the officer becomes increasingly concerned about the ability of the prisoner to finish his novel before the hour of the execution, he begins referring to the prisoner formally as *Sie*, and continues to do so throughout the remainder of the text. The utilization of the formal register is ambiguous in and of itself, but even more so when placed in contrast with the *du* form found earlier in the narrative.

In the context of the power relationship between the lieutenant and the Chinese prisoner, it appears likely that the lieutenant's use of *du* indicates his position of superiority over the Chinese captive. Almost certainly carrying undertones of disrespect, this usage alludes to the attitude that many European military forces took towards the native Chinese population during the Boxer Rebellion.[38] However, it is also possible that *du* demonstrates a sense of familiarity between the two figures, especially because of their supposedly mutual appreciation for literature. Further complicating the narrative, though, this shared interest is clearly shown as a one-sided construction by the officer, as his fascination towards the Chinese prisoner is repeatedly left unacknowledged and unreciprocated by the captive. This undermines

the appropriateness of the *du* form in such a situation and further contributes to its equivocal nature.

The ambivalent circumstances under which the lieutenant employs the *du* form of address is further compounded by the ambiguity of the *Sie* form that he assumes shortly afterwards. The soldier addresses the prisoner as *Sie* to ask about the prisoner's reading material, and also to enquire about his personal life. Later, he uses the *Sie* form to inform the prisoner of his release. In these instances, the lieutenant's adoption of the formal register may signify a newfound respect for the captive. One might theorize that the lieutenant is impressed with the Chinese captive's resolve and his insistence on reading, even in the face of the impending execution. On an extradiagetic level, the interpretation of *Sie* as a sign of respect also demonstrates the subjectivity by which people bestow esteem on certain individuals as opposed to others. This corresponds to the arbitrary nature of distinction created by the officer between "his" Chinese prisoner, whom he refers to in the narrative as "mein Chinese," and "die Anderen"; that is, the other Chinese captives in the group.

However, the use of *Sie* may also signify a growing distance between the lieutenant and the captive. The lieutenant, who becomes ever more aware of the inexplicable nature of his feelings towards the captive, experiences emotions of doubt and shame as he requests, receives and grants the pardon. Employing the formal *Sie* could thus be seen as a reflection of the officer's increasing estrangement towards the prisoner and his own actions towards the prisoner. The officer, who must re-approach and reevaluate the line of distinction between himself and the Chinese captive on

multiple levels, may be reverting back to the formal register of speech in an attempt to linguistically preserve some of the distance between them.

In opposition to the uneasy relationship between the lieutenant and the novel-reading Chinese prisoner, the lieutenant's attitude towards the other captives is far more straightforward, and conforms to a more typical Orientalist depiction of the Chinese people. His approach towards the group as a whole further emphasizes the atypical nature of his regard for the novel-reading captive. "Das Los der sechzehn Andern war mir eigentlich gleichgültig. Sie taten mir leid, nein, kaum das" (I: 546-7). The remaining condemned prisoners have no emotional effect on the officer. Like the hundreds of other Chinese prisoners that he has been responsible for executing in the past, these sixteen are easily categorized and held distinct from the novel-reading figure simply as "die Anderen."

According to the rules of German grammar, *ander*, the indefinite determiner meaning "other," is never conventionally spelled with a capital letter. This applies even when the determiner is used as a substantive adjective. In other words, *ander* and its inflected form *anderen* should remain non-capitalized at all times, regardless of the presence or absence of an immediately following noun or pronoun.[39] Thus, the nonstandard capitalization of "die Anderen" in Schnitzler's narrative serves as an orthographical marker of difference, and is open to multiple, shifting layers of interpretation. On a broader level of the narrative, the term also differentiates the lieutenant, a European, from the prisoners, who are Chinese. Seen in this manner, "die Anderen" defines the non-European Other in clear opposition to the Western European Self. The capitalization of "die Anderen" in "Boxeraufstand" acknowledges the

Self/Other binary that has since become an identifying feature of colonialist literature and Orientalist discourse, especially when viewed through a postcolonial lens. However, it is important to note how Schnitzler's text uses the explicit vocabulary of "the Others" long before literary criticism integrated the term into its terminological toolkit.

Although the capitalization of "the Others" appears to signal a divide from an implicit Western Self represented by the first-person narrative voice of the European lieutenant, this binary distinction is destabilized and problematized early on in the text. The lieutenant first mentions "die Anderen" when he mentally differentiates the novel-reading prisoner from the sixteen remaining captives. However, the officer is unable to properly define or quantify this different within the structural confines of Orientalist binaries such as Self/Other and East/West. The prisoner in question does not readily belong with "die Anderen," whom the lieutenant dispassionately observes in activities such as letter-writing, speaking with one another, crying, lying on the ground or squatting and staring blankly in front of them. Nor does the novel-reading captive correspond easily to categorization in terms of the Western Self, despite the lieutenant's ostensible feelings of self-identification with him, grounded as they are in a mutual interest in literature. Instead, the novel-reading Chinese prisoner seems to occupy an ambiguous, undefined middle ground, as the lieutenant attempts to apply Orientalist standards to the captive, only to discover that they are ultimately inapplicable.

The contrast between the officer's conflicted attitude towards "his" Chinese prisoner and his indifference towards "the Others" illustrates the subjective and clearly

callous nature of demarcation regarding all of the condemned prisoners.  Calling attention to the arbitrary way that binary distinctions are created in the first place, the text further encourages the reader to reassess the qualities of Orientalism as a means of justifying imperialism.  Schnitzler's narrative indirectly asks the reader to consider alternative forms of categorization regarding the politics of identity and representation. His text depicts the officer's inabilities to reconcile his feelings towards the novel-reading Chinese captive with the values he is expected to possess as a Westerner, as a member of the European military power, and as a participant in the imperialistic forces occupying China during the Boxer Rebellion.  The literary fragment depicts the problems inherent within the ideological Orientalist framework, and indirectly poses an open-ended question within the text: can we ever fully extricate ourselves from binary structures in the quest for self-identification and a more accurate, in-depth understanding of other cultures?

While the prisoner's apparent lack of interest in the overtures of the lieutenant further strengthens the ambiguity of the imperialist and Orientalist moment in "Boxeraufstand," it is perhaps all the more striking that it is the officer who, by means of expressing his conflicted feelings, raises the possibility of recognizing the human solidarity that connects the colonizer to the colonized, and the oppressor to the subjugated.  Exploring the protagonist's psychological temperament and the feelings of estrangement that result from the asymmetrical process of identification between the lieutenant and the Chinese prisoner, Schnitzler's narrative examines the tenuous nature of binary distinctions and the difficulties in transcending them, particularly as they concern power relationships between dominant and subjugated forces.  The short

story engages familiar Orientalist tropes, but utilizes them in ways that demonstrate their shortcomings and limitations in terms of intercultural and interpersonal relationships, as well as within the context of Western imperialist ideology. Supporting Schnitzler's general views on war and imperialism, "Boxeraufstand" expresses anti-Orientalist sentiments that speak out against Western military action in China during the age of imperialism. The narrative's complicated stance towards Orientalism—simultaneously recognizing, utilizing and subverting it—is echoed in the other literary examples found in this study, and suggests that not only did nuanced representations of China exist in Western discourse of the early twentieth century, but that alternative methods of analysis must be employed to explore and comprehend their implications.

**Germany and Chinese Modernism**

Schnitzler's "Boxeraufstand" has yet to be translated into Chinese. However, several of Schnitzler's other prose and dramatic works, along with those of his contemporary and compatriot Stefan Zweig, were translated and published in China as early as the 1930s. Commentators such as Leo Ou-fan Lee and Shu-Mei Shih have discussed the influence of Western literary modernism on Chinese modernism, modernity and modernization in China's Republican era. These commentators focus on the hybrid nature of literary modernism in China, and explore its ramifications for Chinese cosmopolitanism and the continued ideological dominance and legitimization of Western discourse during this time.[40]

The issues that concern scholars working on Chinese modernity during the Republican period continue to hold relevance in post-Mao China. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, China began a similar phase of modernization, transformation and reform under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. The changing reception of Western modernist literature in contemporary China demonstrates the evolving attitude of Chinese artists, scholars and intellectuals towards the West on a cultural level, and alludes to greater social, political and economic concerns facing China in the contemporary age.

**Thoughts on Chinese Adaptations of German Modernist Literature**

This study suggests that an analysis of the Chinese adaptations of German-language modernist literature can provide insight into China's process of modernization and the development of a new national consciousness in the post-Mao era. These works engage with and respond to the German modernist representation of China. Falling under Pratt's categorization of "autoethnographic expression,"[41] the interpretations combine Western idioms with natively Chinese elements to offer a contemporary Chinese perspective on concepts of nation, culture and identity. Similar to the German-language originals, the Chinese adaptations also show how dichotomies such as Self/Other and East/West are insufficient for fully explaining China's relationship to the West. Moreover, the Chinese cultural appropriations, which work within the inescapable framework of socialist ideology, demonstrate varying levels of engagement with and objection to the political rhetoric of the state. Received,

interpreted and adapted in different decades of the post-Mao period, the works reflect the regime's changing influence upon the attitudes, mentality and lifestyle of the Chinese people. Through theatrical, literary and cinematic means, the Chinese productions express the larger social, economic and political concerns of the contemporary age. At the same time, they represent distinctive moments in the reception history of German modernist literature, which turns into a complex field of intercultural transfer.

**Finding a Framework for the Chinese Adaptations**

Before analyzing the Chinese cultural adaptations, the reader must first consider issues regarding perspective, subjectivity and voice. Gayatri Spivak's 1988 essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" questions the ability of postcolonial studies to avoid the same colonizing and imperializing impulses that can be found in colonialist literature. Her essay suggests that the West's "desire for subjectivity" will necessarily inscribe the subaltern Other with an objectivity that leaves it unable to represent itself.[42] Spivak asks whether or not the language of postcolonialism, which is primarily utilized by Western or "first-world" critics, can ever truly speak for the postcolonial subject. Paul A. Cohen also cautions against "ethnocentric distortion" in the interpretation of foreign cultures. In defining his "China-centered approach" to minimize distortion, Cohen emphasizes the need to understand Chinese problems from a Chinese context, and to measure their historical significance from a Chinese—as opposed to a Western—perspective. While Cohen does not object to using Western

approaches to interpret Chinese history, he distinguishes this from the implementation of Western discourse to construct or imagine Chinese history.[43] Both Spivak and Cohen warn the reader against utilizing Western discourse to speak for the Other, and caution against unintentionally reinforcing binary constructs formulated primarily through Western methodologies.[44]

While Spivak claims that the subaltern can never truly express him- or herself through the language of the colonizer, Homi K. Bhabha suggests otherwise. In his 1985 essay, "Signs Taken for Wonders," he interprets the reception of the European book in a colonized land as an indication of colonial ambivalence, as the book is "split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference."[45] Bhabha proposes that the colonized Other can speak for itself through the mimicry of European discourse, which hybridizes the original material. This approach allows the postcolonial subject to have agency, and admits the possibility of linguistic, literary and cultural subversion through the language of the colonizer. However, Bhabha's formulation of colonial ambiguity and subversion is only partially applicable to the Chinese cultural adaptations examined in this study.

In *The Lure of the Modern*, Shih discusses the limitations of colonialism as applied to the Chinese context. The word neither precisely describes the presence of numerous foreign powers in China during the Republican era, nor does it accurately reflect the conflicting forms of domination and cooperation that existed between imperialist powers and the Chinese state. Shih, who prefers the term "semicolonialism" to colonialism, suggests that the lack of a uniform colonial infrastructure in semicolonial China enabled Chinese intellectuals to hold

ideologically, politically and culturally ambivalent positions towards the West. This was further enforced by the uninterrupted use of Mandarin Chinese as the national language.[46] Some Chinese intellectuals distinguished between the "metropolitan West," or "Western culture in the West," and the "colonial West." Their ability to maintain separate attitudes contributes to the multilayered nature of China's relationship to Europe and the West.

Focusing on the same time period, Lee argues that the Chinese notion of modernity in the beginning of the twentieth century was largely idealized and situated within "an imagined, often visually based evocation of a Chinese 'new world.'"[47] Conceptualized by Chinese intellectuals living in cosmopolitan cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, modernity was primarily associated with Western civilization in spiritual and material terms that avoided political implications. This association and disassociation with the West further emphasizes the disjuncture between the politics of culture and the politics of imperialism in China at the time. The complex relationship between colonial forces and semicolonial China contributed to China's ambiguous attitude towards the West from the turn of the last century onwards.

Postcolonial theories offer constructive ways to consider ambivalence, subjectivity, voice and subversion in the Chinese adaptations. However, China's semicolonial past and its equivocal relationship to the West question the applicability of a solely postcolonialist or Orientalist analysis of the Chinese adaptations.[48] In an effort to acknowledge these concerns, this study considers how those theories can be incorporated into a broader approach that also takes into account China's search for modernity and national identity in the contemporary age of global capitalism.

According to Yongnian Zheng, semicolonialization was partially responsible for the modernization of China in the early twentieth century.[49] Modern Western institutions and concepts influenced Chinese Enlightenment thinkers during the May Fourth Movement and into the Chinese Republican era. The issues that Chinese intellectuals grappled with during this time, including modernization, Westernization and nationalism, resurfaced during the early post-Mao era, as China once again looked outwards for economic, technological, scientific and sociocultural inspiration and development.[50] Deng's reform period and his support for open door policies were accompanied by the drive to define and announce a uniquely "Chinese" identity to the rest of the world after years of near-isolationism. Situating the Chinese cultural adaptations within the larger politico-economic infrastructure shows how the search for national and cultural identity is reflected in China's literary, cinematic and performance arts, and offers additional insights into the progression of Chinese modernity into the present day.

Fredric Jameson has proposed that all third-world texts should be read as national allegories; that is, "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society."[51] His essay, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," has often been criticized for its totalizing assertions, its Western, "first-world" attitude towards the "civilizational Other," and its limiting, reductive and Eurocentric view of the "third world."[52] However, it also offers what Imre Szeman calls "a way of conceptualizing the relationship of literature to politics (and politics to literature) that goes beyond the most common (and commonsense) understanding of the relations

between these terms."[53] Although it is not the intention of this study to endorse Jameson's overarching and generalizing claim, it does elaborate upon his notion that the Chinese cultural adaptations can be better understood by examining the intersection of the public and private spheres within them. The Chinese interpretations may be read not only for "the lived experience of…private existences," but also for what they tell the reader regarding "the abstractions of economic science and political dynamics."[54] Adapting Western source material into Chinese contexts, the Chinese cultural interpretations forcibly combine elements from China with aspects from the West, and integrate traditionalism with modernization. The adaptations address the politics of identity, representation and reform through a Chinese lens. By portraying the changing relationship between literature, culture and the state in the post-Mao era, the productions also reflect sociopolitical and economic changes occurring at particular moments in Chinese history.

**Chinese Modernization and the New National Consciousness**

Unlike Chinese leaders before him, Deng saw economic wealth as a prerequisite for national unity, not the other way around. He emphasized economic development in post-Mao China as the means for China's growth, prioritizing economic modernization over Mao Zedong's principle of "politics in command." According to Deng, a direct focus on China's wealth and power would enable the country to "catch up" to the rest of the world and re-enter the global system more effectively than previous approaches to modernizing China, which had focused on

strengthening the centralized state system in order to resist further victimization at the hands of its enemies.[55] As a result of Deng's economic policies and those of his successor, Jiang Zemin, China's economic growth has progressed steadily from the 1980s through the present day.[56]

China's economic progress came at the cost of decentralizing state power. The central regime withdrew from local communities, leaving local governments in charge of the socioeconomic well-being of their residents. Moreover, the state's new emphasis on capitalism and the market economy contradicted its official socialist doctrine. As "economics in command" took precedence, Marxist and Maoist ideals were gradually replaced with values associated with the West, including capitalism, individualism and political liberalism.[57]

The political vacuum left behind when economic reality displaced state ideology has led to what Min Lin calls "a new form of national consciousness" in China. In the post-Mao era, nationalism developed as a new means to unify Chinese society, promote reform and legitimize the state's political leadership.[58] Different types of Chinese nationalism, formulated by the state as well as by various groups of individuals, have continued to contribute to the ongoing discussions surrounding contemporary Chinese national identity.[59] The exploration of national consciousness has become increasingly important as China continues to assess and define its place in the world, and cannot be separated from China's quest for a distinct modernity in the present day. The emergence of nationalism in contemporary China has also helped reformulate the Chinese self-image in the present-day, as well as Chinese perceptions

of the past.[60] Before proceeding further, however, it is necessary first to consider terms such as nation and nationalism within the contemporary Chinese context.

According to Anthony D. Smith, nationalism is "an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential 'nation.'"[61] Smith's definition of nationalism acknowledges Benedict Anderson's formulation of nation as an "imagined political community" that is both limited and sovereign.[62] Smith further elaborates upon Anderson's study of the nation by calling nations "named populations possessing an historic territory, shared myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members."[63]

While Smith's definition of nation appears to correspond roughly to the contemporary conception of China, various commentators have pointed out that Western terms such as nation and nationalism remain contentious when applied to China. For instance, Michael Yahuda refers to China's history of pre-modern statehood and political community. He suggests that previous China commentators, including Joseph Levenson, under-emphasize elements of state- and nationhood that existed in China long before the acceptance and widespread adoption of the modern European concepts of state and nation.[64] Yahuda's observation recognizes the more general paradox that Anderson identifies regarding the reconciliation of "the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye" with "their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists."[65] Furthermore, his observation questions the assertions of theorists such as Ernest Gellner, who argues that nationalism and nations are relatively recent

products of modernity and modernization.[66] Wang Hui also discusses the difficulties that arise when applying terms such as nation-state and empire to China. He proposes alternative ways of understanding Chinese modernity that take into account the continued effects of premodern Chinese traditions, rituals and institutions upon modern-day Chinese statecraft.[67]

Although Smith's working definitions of nationalism and nation are sufficient for the purposes of this study, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the imperfect correlation of these terms to the Chinese context. The problems, objections and alternative formulations raised by political theorists continue to foster debate in contemporary China as well as the rest of the world. These discussions may affect one's notions of China and any subsequent analysis of China in the present day.

According to Arif Dirlik, capitalist modernization has helped facilitate the production of Chinese national culture.[68] This is related to "modernization with unique Chinese features," a phrase which Chinese intellectuals have struggled to define since the beginning of the Dengist reform period.[69] The phrase combines modernity, Westernization, Chinese traditionalism and national culture; however, the extent to which each aspect is valued in China has changed drastically over the decades. In the 1980s, there was a predominant push for modernization through Westernization. Intellectuals, following the thought process of their May Fourth predecessors, advocated total Westernization as the only way for China to advance in the twentieth century. In the 1990s, though, many Chinese intellectuals turned away from Westernization. Instead, they looked towards ancient Chinese history and culture, including Confucianism, as the basis for a new collective Chinese identity. To

this day, Chinese scholars and state officials continue to wrestle with finding the best way to reconcile Western methods, concepts and institutions with China's distinctive model of historical development. Taking a less extreme position than in earlier decades, most Chinese intellectuals now recognize the need for China to maintain an open and outward-looking approach to modernization, but without belittling China's self-worth or sense of tradition. In other words, they acknowledge the importance of striking a balance between complete Westernization and xenophobic isolationism.[70]

China's relationship to the West cannot be separated from its quest for modernity, or from its search to define national and cultural identity. This was true during the Republican era as well as in the present. The complexity of China's relationship with the West is captured in the recent Chinese adaptations of German-language modernist literature, which allow contemporary Chinese intellectuals and artists to reflect upon and engage with China as it has been presented to them through a Western perspective. The interpretations also demonstrate how the relationship between the Chinese Party-state and the people has evolved in the post-Mao period. Furthermore, they deepen the reader's understanding of sociocultural, political and economic issues in present-day China through theatre, literature and film.

However, this study strives to avoid reinforcing a teleological view of China through the analysis of the Chinese case studies. Although they carry historical, cultural and political significance, the Chinese adaptations should not be seen as portending the developmental progress of post-Mao China. Instead, the Chinese productions can be viewed as snapshots of contemporary history, which depict the

progress and ongoing development of Chinese modernization, modernity and nationalism through cultural means.

**Overview**

This project is divided into three chapters, each focusing on a modernist German-language narrative and its Chinese interpretation. The first chapter examines Bertolt Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*. Set in the fictionalized and partly industrialized capital of Sezuan, China, Brecht's drama demonstrates a complex relationship towards modernity and modernism. Drawing on Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst" for additional support, this chapter explores how Brecht's contradictory approach to China actually conceals his deeper relationship to traditional Chinese philosophy and culture. Brecht's subjective utilization of Chinese elements also alludes to his interest in Chinese current events while simultaneously hiding his political sympathies. The analysis of *Mensch* shows how Brecht, as a champion of the modern, finds ways to reconcile his fascination with Chinese traditionalism with Western modernism, modernity and modernization.

The Chinese adaptation of Brecht's *Mensch* is a sinicized version of *Mensch* in *chuanju* form, or traditional Sichuan opera. Similar to Brecht's original drama, *Sichuan Haoren*, which is a direct translation of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, combines Chinese traditionalism with European modernism. The opera also encounters difficulties in acknowledging and concealing its foreign influences, but

from an inverted perspective with respect to Brecht's original work. The analysis highlights similarities between the struggles that the Sichuan opera troupe, director and adaptors experienced in the creation of a sinicized Brechtian play, and many of the problems that Brecht addressed when creating a Chinese veneer for *Mensch*. This chapter also suggests that there are parallels in the implementation of intercultural exchange in both versions of the drama. While Brecht's original piece demonstrates how aspects of traditional Chinese culture and philosophy could positively influence Western modernism in the early twentieth century, its Chinese adaptation utilizes Western modernism to make traditional Chinese theatre relevant to contemporary theatergoing audiences in the early period of Dengist reform.

The next chapter examines Franz Kafka's short stories, "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer" and "Ein altes Blatt." This study proposes that Kafka uses Chinese symbols and images as metonyms for China, and that they should not be understood only in anti-realist or metaphysical terms. The analysis shows how Kafka's works inscribe the difficulty of comprehending China as a geopolitical entity and as a fictional construct onto the texts themselves. In addition, this chapter identifies how Kafka's "Chinese" narratives utilize typical Orientalist themes and imagery to question the ideological motives of Orientalism. Kafka's texts, which are set in ancient China, subvert Western discourse about China and assert an anti-Orientalist stance. At the same time, they also self-consciously acknowledge their complicit participation in the categorical and ideological genres of Orientalist discourse that they are attempting to challenge.

This chapter also examines contemporary Chinese author Can Xue's interpretive essay on the Great Wall of China, entitled "Building in Sections." The study explores how Can Xue's text de-emphasizes the importance of Kafka's narrative upon her own writing, while simultaneously acknowledging the fact that her essay would not exist without Western influence. This mirrors the dilemma faced by Kafka in writing against Orientalism from within the discourse itself: neither author is able to completely separate him- or herself from the underlying framework that gives the author's work its creative basis. The analysis also suggests that Can Xue's interpretive essay demonstrates signs of subversion that echo those found in Kafka's original Chinese narratives. Contrasted with a conventional, propagandistic audiovisual portrayal of the Great Wall of China within official Chinese state discourse of the 1990s, Can Xue's Wall questions and challenges the ideological usage and depiction of the Wall as a historically, culturally and politically important national icon.

The last chapter briefly considers Stefan Zweig's *Brief einer Unbekannten.* Unlike the first two German-language case studies, this narrative does not concern China at all. Therefore, this study focuses on other parallels between the novella and the previously examined works. Similar to the German-language writings in the previous chapters, Zweig's novella also questions dominant discourses in the modernist period, such as political nationalism and cultural experimentalism. This chapter shows how Zweig's text expresses disapproval towards the motives and objectives of nationalist doctrine through the narrative's renunciation of the greater issues. By refusing to contribute to these discourses or support their ideological

objectives, Zweig makes a political statement against them. Concerned primarily with the politics of personal desire, his novella nevertheless reveals Zweig's true feelings towards state politics and nationalism in Europe during the interwar era.

The primary focus of this chapter is on the contemporary film adaptation of Zweig's *Brief*, directed by Xu Jinglei. This study suggests that her film displays China's new conceptualization of itself as a global participant on the world stage. Named after the original novella and translated from Chinese into English as *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, Xu's film engages with China and the West in ways that show how China's approach to modernization and national consciousness has evolved in the post-Mao era. In contrast to the other adaptations, Xu's *Letter* deliberately incorporates China into the storyline and creates a Chinese context for the original Western narrative. This analysis proposes that the decision to sinicize Zweig's *Brief* indicates a change in the estimation of Chinese self-worth. The film's focus on interpersonal relationships and the politics of personal desire, like its Western source material, reveals the film's awareness of official state discourse by consciously avoiding it. Furthermore, this chapter shows that the film's nostalgic, Republican-era setting emphasizes the politics of consumption, and situates contemporary China within the context of global capitalism. The study demonstrates how Xu's *Brief* exemplifies the reconfiguration of intersecting Chinese political, sociocultural and economic spheres in the new millennium through contemporary Chinese cinema.

**Summation**

The modernist era at the turn of the twentieth century and the era of globalization at the turn of the twenty-first century have both fostered accelerated yet thoughtful contact between China and the West. By looking first at the German-language source material and then at its Chinese interpretation, this study attempts to emphasize how each pair of works invokes a counter-response to the dominant discourse of its time. From either side of the cultural divide, the German-language modernist narratives and their contemporary Chinese adaptations exhibit a dynamic engagement with the cultural Other, which affects how they negotiate national, cultural and self-identity within their respective modernist and modernized landscapes. Each German-language text engages with and challenges discourses of imperialism, modernism, nationalism and Orientalism through its manipulation of typical Orientalist tropes or the exploration of interiority. In ways that recall the original source material, each Chinese interpretation questions the official state rhetoric of the time through a juxtaposition of Chinese and Western elements in their narratives. Examined chronologically, the Chinese adaptations reflect changes in attitude towards Chinese modernization, Westernization and nationalism, and also exhibit various degrees of awareness, interaction and engagement with the Chinese Party-state in the post-Mao era. Through this particular reception history, they further illustrate how German-language modernist literature discovers a surprising relevance in the formation of contemporary Chinese self-understanding, as well as in a broader process of intercultural exchange in the era of globalization.

## Notes to Chapter One

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[1] In this study, capitalizations of Self, Other, Orient, Occident and their related terms are used to indicate the conventional definitions of the concepts as they are utilized in postcolonial and Orientalist studies.
[2] Pratt, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6-7.
[3]For instance, Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert have engaged with Orientalism as it applies to Australia and Japan. See "Looking the Same? A Preliminary (Postcolonial) Discussion of Orientalism and Occidentalism in Australia and Japan," *Edward Said*, Vol. II, ed. Patrick Williams (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 177-95.
[4] Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979, c. 1978), 3.
[5] Lowe, Lisa, *Critical Terrains* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 4. Although issues of race, class and gender intersect with the Orientalist discourse to both problematize and destabilize the narrative of Orientalism, Lowe's framework continues to operate within the dichotomy of East and West. Her formulation of multiple Orientalisms still treats Orientalist discourse as a way for French and British cultures to assert colonial domination through literature.
[6] Halliday, Fred, "'Orientalism' and Its Critics." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies.* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1993): 145-63.
[7] Clifford, James, "On *Orientalism*." *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 255-76.
[8] Prakash, Gyan, "*Orientalism* Now." *History and Theory*. Vol. 34, No. 3 (1995): 199-212. Jenkins, Jennifer, "German Orientalism: Introduction." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.* Vol. 24, No. 2 (2004): 97-100. Marchand, Suzanne, "German Orientalism and the Decline of the West." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 145, No. 4 (December 2001): 465-73.
[9] Mani, Lata and Ruth Frankenberg, "The Challenge of *Orientalism*." *Edward Said*. Vol. II. ed. Patrick Williams (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 3-19. 6.
[10] Clifford, "On *Orientalism,"* 260.
[11] Ibid., 261.
[12] "How does one *represent* other cultures? What is *another* culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the 'other')?" Said, *Orientalism,* 325.
[13] Berman, Russell A., *Enlightenment or Empire? (*Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 15.
[14] For more historical detail, see Steinmetz, George, *The Devil's Handwriting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[15] Schuster, Ingrid, "Der exotische Spiegel: Europäische Vorstellungen von den Menschen Chinas und Japans im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert." *Faszination Ostasien* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 247-76. 247-8.
[16] Spence, Jonathan D., *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 33.
[17] Schuster, Ingrid, "Konfuzianische Ethik als europäischer Bildungsgedanke." *Fazination Ostasien* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 211-26. 211.
[18] Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent,* 83-7.
[19] Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting,* 382.
[20] Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds*, 52.
[21] Anson, George and Richard Walter, *A Voyage Around the World in the Years MDCCXL*, I, II, III, IV (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1749), 386-417.
[22] Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting,* 399; Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent,* 52, 56-62.
[23] Steinmetz, George, *The Devil's Handwriting,* 400-3.
[24] See von Sternberg's story *Tutu* and Heine's poem "Der Kaiser in China." For more detail, see Schuster, "Der exotische Spiegel," 254, 256-7.
[25] Kaiser Wilhelm II's "Hunnenrede" was delivered in Bremerhaven on July 27, 1900. Although the

exact wording of the speech is debatable, the infamous line "Pardon wird nicht gegeben! Gefangene werden nicht gemacht!," has been confirmed by multiple sources. See Soesemann, Bernd, "Die sogenannte Hunnenrede Wilhelms II." *Historische Zeitschrift* 222 (2): 342-58. 1976; Penzler, Johannes, *Die Reden Kaiser Wilhelms II. in den Jahren 1896-1900*. 2. Teil (Leipzig: Reclam, 1904), 209-12; and Görtemaker, Manfred, *Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert. Entwicklungslinien* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1996), 357.

[26] China suffered even greater losses to its sovereignty and international image after the signing of the Boxer Protocol between the Eight-Nation Alliance and the Qing Dynasty court in September of 1901.

[27] Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting,* 459, 471.

[28] Ibid., 296-7.

[29] Germany's long period of "colonial fantasy" began in the 1770s, although Germany's period of "actual" colonization lasted only from 1884 to 1919. For more regarding Germany's colonial past, see Zantop, Susanne, *Colonial Fantasies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), as well as *The Imperialist Imagination*, ed. Sara L. Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox and Susanne Zantop (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

[30] For historical information regarding the text, see Schnitzler, Arthur, *Die erzählenden Schriften,* Erster Band (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1961), I: 545, Roberts, Adrian Clive, *Arthur Schnitzler and Politics* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1989), 130, and Urbach, Reinhard, *Schnitzler-Kommentar zu den Erzählenden Schriften und dramatischen Werken* (München: Winkler, 1974), 113.

[31] Adrian Clive Roberts introduces the protagonist as a British army officer, although he does not give any further reasoning for his assumption (*Arthur Schnitzler and Politics,* 129). Austria-Hungary, which had a naval presence in China during the Boxer Rebellion, contextualizes the possibility that the officer could be Austrian. The Seymour Expedition, led by the British admiral Edward Seymour between June and July 1900, enlisted the help of the Austro-Hungarian naval forces from the SMS Zenta in addition to reinforcements from the rest of the Allied Forces. See Ham, Claudia and Christian Ortner, eds. *Mit S.M.S. Zenta in China. "Mich hatte auch diesmal der Tod nicht gewollt…" Aus dem Tagebuch eines k.u.k. Matrosen während des Boxeraufstands* (Wien: Verlag Österreich, Print Media Austria AG, 2000). Furthermore, the Austro-Hungarian *Fremdenblatt* published an article regarding "the small Austro-Hungarian contingent…defending both our moral and material interests" in China as an "obligation of honour." From Our Own Correspondents, From Our Correspondent and Through Reuter's Agency, "The Co-Operation of the Powers." *Times* (London, England): 6 July 1900, 5. Alternatively, the narrative's allusion to Kaiser Wilhelm II's "Hunnenrede" also suggests that the officer could be German instead.

[32] Roberts, A*rthur Schnitzler and Politics,* 5.

[33] Ibid*.*, 130, 131.

[34] Schnitzler, "Boxeraufstand." *Die erzählenden Schriften*, Erster Band (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1961), I: 545-8. I: 545. All subsequent references refer to this edition.

[35] Tweraser, Felix W, *Political Dimensions of Arthur Schnitzler's Late Fiction* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998), 21-3.

[36] JanMohamed, Abdul R., *Manichean Aesthetics* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983).

[37] JanMohamed, Abdul R., "The Economy of Manichean Allegory." *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 12, No. 1 (1985): 59-87.

[38] Documentation of such attitudes towards the Chinese has been recorded in various first-person accounts of the Boxer Rebellion. For a German perspective, see Fehl, Gerhard und Renate, eds., *The Germans to the Front? Mit einer Batterie schwerer Haubitzen im "Boxerkrieg"* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2002). For Austro-Hungarian accounts, see Jung, Peter, ed., *Österreichische Militärgeschichte. Sturm über China. Österreich-Ungarns Einsatz im Boxeraufstand, 1900* (Wien: Verlagsbuchhandlung Stöhr, 2000).

[39] Durell, Martin, *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage,* Third Edition (Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), 99, 499. *Beide* is another indefinite determiner that remains non-capitalized regardless of context.

[40] Lee, Leo Ou-fan, *Shanghai Modern*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Shih, Shu-

Mei, *The Lure of the Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[41] The term autoethnography "involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conquerer." Pratt, *Imperial Eyes,* 7.
[42] Spivak, Gayatri, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.
[43] Cohen, Paul A., *Discovering History in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 186-7. See also Zheng, Yongnian, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9-10.
[44] Arif Dirlik voices his concern regarding the reinforcement of Orientalism even in texts that criticize Eurocentrism. Using Paul A. Cohen's and John Schrecker's accounts of Chinese history as an example, Dirlik suggests that the insistence in delineating Chinese history from other histories remains within the epistemological structure of Orientalism, as it continues to maintain strict East/West distinctions. Dirlik, Arif, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism." *Edward Said*. Vol. II, ed. Patrick Williams (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 247-70.
[45] Bhabha, Homi K., "Signs Taken for Wonders." *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 102-22. 107.
[46] The unbroken use of Mandarin Chinese as the national language in China further questions the applicability of postcolonial theory to Chinese literature in the first place. See Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., in their book, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 2002), 7-8.
[47] Lee, L., *Shanghai Modern*, 35-6.
[48] In their studies, Dirlik, Min Lin and Zheng have discussed the adoption of Said's Orientalism by some contemporary Chinese intellectuals such as Zhang Xudong, Li Xiguang, Liu Kang, Zhang Kuan and Wang Mingming. These intellectuals understand the West's attitude towards China in the present day as an attempt to subjugate the East and maintain their hegemonic position in the new global order. This Western position towards China is then utilized to support new Chinese discourses on nationalism.
[49] Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China,* 15.
[50] Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, ix.
[51] Jameson, Fredric, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text*. No. 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65-88. 69.
[52] Ahmad, Aijaz, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory.'" *Social Text*. No. 17 (Autumn 1987): 3-25. 25.
[53] Szeman, Imre, "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. Vol. 100, No. 3 (Summer 2001): 803-27. 804.
[54] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," 69.
[55] Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*, 17.
[56] Wang, James C. F., *Contemporary Chinese Politics*. *An Introduction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc. 2002), 301-37.
[57] Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*, 18.
[58] Lin, Min, *The Search for Modernity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 159.
[59] Different forms of nationalism will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this study.
[60] Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism," 247-70.
[61] Smith, Anthony D., "Theories of nationalism." *Asian Nationalism,* ed. Michael Leifer (London: Routledge, 2000), 1-20. 1.
[62] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 6-7.
[63] Smith, A., "Theories of nationalism," 1.
[64] Yahuda, Michael, "The Changing Faces of Chinese Nationalism: The Dimensions of Statehood." *Asian Nationalism.* Ed. Michael Leifer (London: Routledge, 2000), 21-37. 22.
[65] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.
[66] Gellner, Ernest, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
[67] Huters, Theodore, "Introduction." Wang, Hui, *The Politics of Imagining Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1-9.
[68] Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism," 247-70.
[69] Liao, Gailong, "*Quanqiu zoushi, shehuizhuyi he Zhongguo chuantong wenhua*." Cited by Lin, *The*

*Search for Modernity*, 162.
[70] Lin, *The Search for Modernity,* 176-8.

## Chapter Two

### Modernity Meets Tradition: Brecht, Sichuan Opera and *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*

Brecht's fascination with China and the Far East is evidenced by the Chinese scrolls and Japanese Noh masks that hung from his walls; the plots of plays and novels including *Die Massnahme, Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* and *Me-ti, Das Buch der Wendungen*; and his freely translated Chinese poems. However, it is often difficult to see beyond the surface manifestations of such interests. Brecht, who took notes on Chinese philosophy and wrote approvingly about Chinese poetry, "never tried to justify or explain his own relationship to China or Chineseness."[1] Nor does there exist a "metadiscourse on China with which to begin to think about not only Brecht's relation to China, but his own understanding of that relation."[2] While critics such as Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Martin Esslin and John Fuegi have been cited for dismissing Brecht's fascination with China as either superficial or as a form of exoticism,[3] critics such as Renata Berg-Pan and Yuan Tan have conversely attempted to establish the importance of Chinese poetry and philosophy on Brecht's worldview by examining specific examples of overlap between them.[4]

**Brecht and the Dialectical "Great Method"**

In Brecht's drama and in his theoretical essay, Brecht appears to relate to China while simultaneously making China strange in a process of *verfremden*. The contradictory processes of familiarizing and estranging constitute an important aspect of Brecht's relationship to China. Taking a dialectical approach to this process—that is, one that recognizes but does not attempt to resolve the interplay of contrary attitudes—can help the reader better comprehend Brecht's relationship to Chinese art, culture and philosophy, and acknowledge the tensions inherent within it. Viewing Brecht's relationship to China in terms of its contradictions supports Frederic Jameson's suggestion that Brecht strove to live life in accordance with the *große Methode*, or Great Method. Jameson demonstrates how Brecht's concept of the Great Method applied to his thoughts on leftist politics of the 1950s; that is, on Brecht's attempt to reconcile the particulars of politics as found in the Soviet Union at the time with its simultaneous appeal to universality. Also known as the dialectic, the Great Method is the struggle to create unity out of disjoint conceptual collectives, and was discussed in detail in Brecht's unfinished novel *Me-ti, Das Buch der Wendungen.*[5] By searching out and then utilizing contradictions within seemingly unified aggregates, one is better able to understand how new thoughts and developments emerge out of that which came before them. Understanding processes as dialectical enables one to view situations as historically dependent and continuously changing, as opposed to universally fixed and static.

It is useful to think about Brecht's engagement with China in this manner. Brecht's worldview, his construct of China and its referent, the historical, geopolitical entity of China, are not only closely linked, but also in constant flux. The reader can better comprehend Brecht's relationship to China by addressing his conflicting stances both in favor of and against Chinese culture. Recognizing—as opposed to reconciling—this tension reveals additional insights into how and why Brecht utilizes images of China in his writings. The dialectical relationship to China in writings such as the "Verfremdungseffekte" essay and *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* hints at a deeper connection between Brecht and China, and speaks to the importance of foreign influence in the development and formation of new cultural, political and historical perspectives.

**Chinese Influence and the "Verfremdungseffekte" Essay**

In the spring of 1935, Brecht attended one of Mei Lanfang's *jingju* (Peking opera) performances in Moscow. Mei's performance provided Brecht with the impetus to write the essay "Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst" in 1936. In the essay, Brecht discusses how Chinese acting methods produce the alienation effect, or *Verfremdungseffekt*, in which the audience is deliberately distanced from the actor and the performance. According to Brecht, the alienation effect, abbreviated as the *V-effekt* in German and as the A-effect in John Willett's English translation of the essay,[6] forces the audience to consciously accept or reject the actors' actions and utterances, as opposed to allowing such process to occur

subconsciously. The essay allows Brecht to formulate, contextualize and elaborate upon aspects of epic theatre and the A-effect as a theoretical work. Highlighting the modes of production in Chinese theatre, Brecht describes how the traditional Chinese art form achieves the A-effect.[7] He suggests how these techniques might be transported into European theatre, and more specifically, into "ein realistisches und revolutionaries Theater" that he is developing.[8]

Commentators such as Chen Yong and Zhang Li maintain that this essay helps demonstrate the overall importance of Chinese culture and thought to Brecht's writings, theories and worldview.[9] Others, such as Huang Zuolin and Ding Yangzhong, are more cautious regarding the influence of China on Brecht's works. They recognize Brecht's borrowing of *xiqu*[10] in "Verfremdungseffekte" as aesthetic and non-contextual, and caution against reading too much into the superficial similarities between the two types of theatre.[11] While these positions seem directly opposed to one another, they are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, there is evidence in Brecht's essay to support both readings.

The first half of "Verfremdungseffekte" discusses traditional Chinese theatre practices, such as the lack of a "fourth wall," the actors' method of self-observation, and their ritualistic and highly stylized movements. These practices contribute to the alienation effect in Chinese opera, which Brecht describes in detail as an alternative to the Stanislavsky system of theatre predominant in European theatre at the time. Traditional Chinese theatre thus appears as a precursor to the type of theatre that Brecht wishes to achieve. However, Brecht is quick to offset his praise for Chinese opera by downplaying the distinctiveness of its methods. In the introductory

paragraphs of his essay, Brecht notes that alienation effects were also found "auf primitiver Stufe schon bei theatralischen und bildnerischen Veranstaltungen der alten Volksjahrmärkte."[12] Brecht uses Chinese A-effects as an empirical example of estrangement in theatrical history, but appears to resist calling them exemplary.

The second half of Brecht's essay, which focuses on the social application of the A-effect in modern German epic theatre, continues to take an even more clinical and detached view towards Chinese A-effects.

> "Es darf einen…nicht stören, daß der chinesische Artist, wenn er den Eindruck des Geheimnisvollen erzeugt, kein Interesse zu haben scheint, uns ein Geheimnis zu entschleiern. Aus den Geheimnissen der Natur (besonders der menschlichen) macht er sein Geheimnis, er läßt sich nicht hineinschauen, wie er das natürliche Phänomen hervorbringt, auch die Natur gestattet ihm, der das Phänomen schon hervorbringt, noch nicht die Einsicht. Wir stehen vor dem künstlerischen Ausdruck einer primitiven Technik, einer Urstufe der Wissenschaft. Der chinesische Artist holt seinen V-Effekt aus dem Zeignis der Magie. […] Tatsächlich können nur diejenigen ein Technikum wie den V-Effekt der chinesischen Schauspielkunst mit Gewinn studieren, die ein solches Technikum für ganz bestimmte gesellschaftliche Zwecke benötigen."[13]

In this passage, Brecht disregards the context of the original elements. He equates Chinese theatre with mysticism and primitivism, and views Chinese theatre as incapable of containing or expressing worthwhile social, political or ideological motives.[14] This statement marks the end of Brecht's discussion on traditional Chinese theatre—immediately afterwards, Brecht's essay ceases to mention Chinese opera altogether. The way in which Brecht describes Chinese A-effects with admiration only to dismiss them for their perceived lack of social function supports a view of Brecht as a cultural robber of sorts: he openly acknowledged his own experiences of

copying from Japanese, Greek and Elizabethan dramas, and believed that there was an art to achieving the masterful imitation of models.[15] Although Brecht's analysis of traditional Chinese theatre becomes more problematic the more closely we examine his interpretations, his (mis)understanding of Chinese opera is not central to this study.[16] Instead, the ways that Brecht subjectively utilizes Chinese practices and thought for his own purposes offer the reader an alternative perspective on Brecht's relationship to China.

**Chinese Influence and the Moment of Contradiction in "Verfremdungseffekte"**

In Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekte" essay, the moment of contradiction itself appears as the crux of the essay. This moment is located in the abrupt shift in topic from the detailed aesthetic description of the A-effect in Chinese opera in the first half to a discussion on the social application of the A-effect in German epic theatre in the second half. The distinctiveness of the two portions illustrates how Brecht's essay seems to have both everything and nothing to do with China: first by establishing a sense of familiarity with aspects of traditional Chinese theatre, and then by completely disassociating from those very aspects.[17] A deeper understanding of this moment helps the reader comprehend the continuously evolving nature of Brecht's relationship to China.

Brecht criticizes Chinese opera for lacking social purpose and intent. He distinguishes Chinese opera from his concept of epic theatre by emphasizing epic theatre's ability to foster sociopolitical change. However, this does not mean that the

reader should treat Chinese theatre as a mere point of departure for Brecht's ideas. On the contrary, Brecht's view of Chinese theatre informs his theory of epic theatre and the important social function of the alienation effect. Furthermore, Brecht's subjective understanding of Chinese theatre is part and parcel of his overall impression and interpretation of China. Focusing on certain aspects of traditional Chinese theatre enables Brecht to argue more effectively and position his concept of epic theatre, while simultaneously shaping his understanding of China and Chinese culture.[18]

Although "Verfremdungseffekte" highlights aspects of Chinese theatre worthy of discussion and possible emulation, Brecht proceeds to deny any connection between Chinese and Brechtian A-effects in the same work. Brecht's position towards Chinese opera throughout the course of the essay reveals tension in his attitude towards Chinese culture and its influence on his theory of epic theatre. Much like Brecht's emphasis on dialectical thinking and practice in other aspects of his life and work, a dialectical approach that acknowledges the contradictory portrayals of China and Chinese culture in Brecht's works allows new insights to emerge regarding his view of them.

**Brecht, Modernism and Traditional Chinese Theatre**

The opposing ways that Brecht treats Chinese opera in "Verfremdungseffekte" reflects his struggle to reconcile an admiration of traditional Chinese theatre with the modernist impulse to denounce tradition. How could Brecht continue to champion modernist ideals of progress, technology and innovation while also referring to the

apparently highly conventional and traditionalist Chinese theatre in a positive light? It is possible that Brecht regarded an explicit connection between traditional Chinese theatre and his own theory of epic theatre as running counter to his otherwise modernist aesthetic. Brecht's embrace and subsequent dismissal of Chinese theatrical elements in this essay could thus demonstrate his struggle to reconcile the utilization of traditional Chinese theatre in the face of an anti-traditionalist modernist sensibility. The abrupt change in the tone of the essay—from admiration to indifference bordering on scorn—expresses this tension. By claiming that his theory of epic theatre has nothing to do with traditional Chinese theatre, Brecht attempts to distance himself from Chinese opera completely. However, this transition is only partially successful. With its inconsistencies and discontinuities, the "Verfremdungseffekte" essay leaves the reader with a sense of disconnect regarding the nature of Brecht's relationship to China and Chinese culture, as well as regarding the lure of tradition in general.

**Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan***

The difficulty in reconciling traditional Chinese culture with modern German theatre surfaces again in Brecht's 1940 play, *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*. As a dramatic piece, *Mensch* establishes a "Chineseness" that may not withstand historical or cultural scrutiny with respect to its purported referent, the geopolitical entity of China, nor should it necessarily be held to such standards. Nevertheless, Brecht's construct of China remains significant to the work itself, despite—or because of—his poetic license to create the work's Chinese setting. Chosen for the disjunction of its

specifically Chinese veneer and its all-encompassing universal message, *Mensch* conveys more of the tension regarding China in Brecht's works, including the aforementioned struggle to combine aspects of traditional Chinese thought and philosophy with a modernist aesthetic. The examination of specific—and often contradictory—examples of "China" and Chinese culture as they are introduced in *Mensch* allows the reader to gain valuable insights into Brecht's theoretical, artistic and political intentions for the play. Furthermore, understanding Brecht's construct of China is integral to obtaining a deeper understanding of his vision and worldview.

## Interpreting the Chinese Setting of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*

Commentators and directors often view the Chinese setting of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* in one of two ways. One way is to understand Brecht's Sezuan as another instance of typical exoticism. China was only one of many foreign locations utilized by Brecht in his plays. Reich-Ranicki, for example, suggests that the Chinese setting employed by Brecht serves no other purpose than "to be mere provocations with the modish (and usually so cheap) chic of the exotic."[19] Manfred Wekwerth, on the other hand, sees the Chinese setting as a function of Brecht's epic theatre, but deems it ultimately ineffective as an alienating device. "Mir scheint das 'fremde Milieu' – das London der *Dreigroschenoper*, das Indien des *Mann ist Mann* und das China des *Guten Menschen* – heute schon wieder so bekannt zu sein, daß jene von Brecht erhoffte Überraschung nicht eintritt, da es Mode geworden ist."[20] Contrary to providing an experience of curiosity, astonishment, or shock, the "fashionably" exotic

setting was in danger of engendering complacency and even apathy among the audience. In each case, the Chinese setting is ultimately regarded as an artificial, exotic sheen that does not enhance the play's overall content or meaning.

Other commentators and directors comprehend the Chinese setting as a transcultural, universalizing element of the play. Similar to Shakespeare's use of settings such as Denmark or Venice, Brecht's Sezuan can be understood as transcending cultural particularities and appealing to the audience on the strength of its universal features. According to Patrice Pavis, directors who work with transcultural aspects "are concerned with particularities and traditions only in order to grasp more effectively what they have in common and what is not reducible to a specific culture."[21] Fuegi, who sees Brecht's Sezuan as a "very short step from the Prague of Schweyk […]", claims that "in both, we find ourselves face to face with a moral problem that knows no national bounds and that isn't restricted to any specific time"[22] From this perspective, Sezuan serves as an example of the familiar, and represents all industrialized cities under capitalism. While this interpretation removes the "exoticizing" function of Sezuan from *Mensch*, it also diminishes the specific significance of China to Brecht's play.[23]

Both viewpoints regarding Brecht's Sezuan dismiss the Chineseness of *Mensch* altogether. Seeing Brecht's Sezuan—and by extension, Brecht's China—as just another example of the "foreign" in his dramas disregards the thought and concern that went into creating the specifically Chinese profile of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan.* By looking at the setting in a reductive manner, the reader stands to miss a

vital component that can be used to better understand the play within its intentionally situated context of location.

## The Importance of Chicago to Brecht's Plays

Reinhold Grimm is among the commentators who have attempted to explain the issue of foreign setting in Brecht's plays more methodically. In his essay, "Bertolt Brecht's Chicago—A German Myth?," Grimm analyzes the importance of Chicago to Brecht's life and work, as the city appears in various dramas, fragments, poems and film stories.[24] Contrary to finding Brecht's Chicago "absurd," "exotic," "entirely abstract," or "vague,"[25] Grimm objects to other critics' dismissals of the "Chicagoan oddities and eccentricities" found in Brecht's descriptions as "trifles…either means of estranging Brechtian form, expressions of a sovereign contempt or *Wurstigkeit*, or altogether negligible."[26] Instead, Grimm argues that for Brecht, Chicago embodies the American dream through its constant tension with the "American nightmare."[27] Instead of dismissing Brecht's Chicago as a "German myth" with no connection to its American namesake, Grimm demonstrates how the specific locality of the city plays a key role in Brecht's thoughts on the United States in general. Grimm's examination of Brecht's Chicago challenges the reader to reconsider the significance of the Chinese setting to Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan.* Grimm, who analyzes Brecht's relationship to Chicago, illustrates its inherently contradictory nature and the tension between Brecht's admiration for and disapproval towards the city. This parallels Brecht's conflicting attitude towards traditional Chinese theatre in

"Verfremdungseffekte," which reappears in his treatment of China and Chinese culture in *Mensch*.

**Brecht's Journal Entries and the Development of the Play**

Brecht's notes and journal entries indicate that Brecht's use of a Chinese setting for *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* held great significance. The amount of revision he undertook to create its Chinese veneer already seems to refute any understanding of the Chinese setting as standard exoticism. Originally set in Berlin, Brecht first writes about the difficulties in creating a Chinese setting for the drama in 1939, while he was living in exile in Denmark. Sketches for the piece existed as early as 1927, when it was entitled *Fanny Kress oder Der Huren einziger Freund*. At the time, Brecht was living in Berlin. In 1930, Brecht took up the sketch in Berlin again, changing the title to *Die Ware Liebe*. It was not until 1939 that Brecht returned to *Die Ware Liebe,* eventually settling on the title *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* and reworking the sketches into what would become the published work. *Mensch* was completed in Sweden in 1940, but the songs "Das Lied vom Rauch," "Das Lied vom achten Elefanten" and "Das Terzett der entschwindenden Götter auf der Wolke" were not finished until January of 1941, while Brecht was in Finland.[28] The final version of *Mensch* was the result of many struggles to create an acceptably realistic parable and a Chinese disguise for the play that would not be mistaken for either a faithful Chinese milieu or pure *chinoiserie*.[29]

Brecht indirectly addresses the notion of *chinoiserie* and his wish to avoid it by writing about his frustrations to create a believable Chinese setting for the drama. In an entry in his *Arbeitsjournal* dated July 2, 1940, Brecht expresses doubts over the substitution of bread and milk for rice and tea:

> "Wir grübeln noch über der Frage: Brot und Milch oder Reis und Tee für die „Sezuan"-Parabel. Natürlich, es gibt in diesem Sezuan schon Flieger und noch Götter. Alle Folklore habe ich sorgfältig vermieden. Andrerseits ist nicht beabsichtigt, aus den französische Weißbrote essenden Gelben einen Witz zu machen. Das London der „Dreigroschenoper" und das Kilkoa von „Mann ist Mann", diese poetischen Konzeptionen scheinen geglückt. Zur Diskussion steht: soll man nur die sozialen Anachronismen beibehalten? Die den Göttern (und der Moral) auf den Leib rückende Industrie, die Invasion europäischer Gebräuche. Damit bewegte man sich noch auf realem Boden. Aber weder Industrie noch Europäertum wird den Reis mit dem Brot ersetzen. Hier hat man dann das Chinesische als reine Verkleidung und als löchrige Verkleidung!"[30]

In this passage, Brecht articulates his difficulties in making *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* seem realistic, and realistically Chinese, but not excessively so—especially given the certainty of international influence in the age of imperialism. Brecht, for whom a realistic depiction of China includes the "invasion" of European customs, was nevertheless stumped on how best to portray both Chinese and Western elements in his drama. He did not want the Chinese aspects of the play to be misunderstood as merely a disguise, and a shabby one at that. How could Brecht keep the Chinese attributes of *Mensch* intact, without causing the entire play slide to into the dangers of stereotyping? Conversely, how could Brecht remove some of the Chinese markers, without making the subsequent characterization lack plausibility? Brecht wrestles with keeping Chinese elements at bay, yet still within arm's reach,

effectively formulating a dialectic between maintaining Chinese specificity and diminishing it.[31] His journal entry illustrates the balance Brecht was trying to achieve through the establishment of a setting that was neither authentically nor stereotypically Chinese; that is, through the creation of a plausibly real yet still definitively imaginary China.

**Sichuan as Politically Motivated Inspiration for Sezuan**

Originally set in "die Stadt Sezuan," Brecht later changed the location of *Mensch* to "die Hauptstadt von Sezuan."[32] However, nowhere in the drama does Brecht explicitly point to Chengdu as the genuine capital of Sichuan province in China. In fact, the only Chinese city ever mentioned by name in *Mensch* is Beijing. This prompts the question: why did Brecht choose to situate his play in Sezuan—that is, a fictionalized Sichuan[33]—in the first place?

In a letter dated May 4, 1940 to the German painter Hans Tombrock, Brecht writes:

> "Wir müssen zwischen all dem Ungemach unsere Arbeit weitermachen…In sogenannte historischen Zeitläuften, d.h. solchen, wo Geschichte gemacht wird (Wurst gemacht wird), gibt es nur ein Gegenmittel: man muß sich selber in eine historische Persönlickeit verwandeln. Ich meine, wenn in den Zeitungen eines bestimmten Tages steht, daß die Chinesen Sezuan gestürmt haben, mußt Du Dich eben fragen: Was machte an diesem Tag Tombrock?"[34]

This appears to be an indirect reference to the Second Sino-Japanese War, which lasted from 1937-1945 and was fought between China and the invading imperialist

Japan. At the time, Sichuan, together with the provincial city Chongqing and its provincial capital Chengdu, were often mentioned in European newspapers such as the *Times* of London as crucial locations of Chinese resistance against the Japanese.[35] Brecht's knowledge of Sichuan's historical and political significance, especially its revolutionary connotations, may have influenced his decision to situate *Mensch* in a fictionalized version of the province. Brecht's allusion here to Sichuan is therefore intriguing because of its historico-political implications.

**Sichuan's Historico-political Significance in China**

According to Graham Hutchings, since the end of imperial rule Sichuan province has proven to be

> "a key political, economic and military region of China. Governments that have failed to control Sichuan have usually failed to control the country…The Japanese discovered [this], too: during the Sino-Japanese war they occupied virtually all of south China *except* Sichuan, where Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist government sought refuge. As a result Japan failed to subdue China."[36]

Brecht's aforementioned epistolary reference can be seen in the context of the Chinese resistance movement against the invading Japanese troops in Sichuan during the Second Sino-Japanese War. In particular, it seems possible that Brecht's allusion to the "storming of Sichuan" refers to the development and progress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 1934 during the Chinese Civil War, the Communist military began a massive series of retreats, moving from Jiangxi province in the southeastern portion of China through western China and then northwards to Yan'an,

in an attempt to evade pursuit and decimation by the Nationalist Party of China, or Kuomintang (KMT).[37] This Communist military defeat was known collectively as the Long March. In 1935, a portion of the Red Army passed through Sichuan on their journey north. Although the various Red Armies suffered heavy losses during the Long March, the remaining Communist forces eventually made it to Yan'an, where they were able to reassemble and recuperate.[38] After rebuilding, the CCP eventually defeated the KMT and established the People's Republic of China in 1949. The taking of Sichuan by the People's Liberation Army would have been crucial for this process; in fact, Sichuan's importance as a battleground between the Nationalists and the Communists was specifically detailed in the *Times* as part of their coverage of the Chinese Civil War.[39] Brecht's remark, made in 1940, can be understood as a hopeful and prescient statement for that "bestimmter Tag" in which the CCP would eventually take Sichuan and claim China as the People's Republic.

The first published edition of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, which came out in 1953 corroborates Brecht's awareness of current Chinese events.[40] In its published form, the introductory text to the play reads: "Die Provinz Sezuan der Parabel, die für alle Orte stand, an denen Menschen von Menschen ausgebeutet werden, gehört heute nicht mehr zu diesen Orten" (6: 176). This statement appears to refer directly to China's transition to communism, and insinuates that Sichuan was no longer the site of the KMT. This adds further relevance to Brecht's use of this province in particular. Additionally, this statement may also indicate Brecht's regard for China as a model for German political emulation in the 1950s.

China's political climate was of great interest to Brecht because of its role in the internationalist Marxist movement. Brecht would have been increasingly aware of the CCP's efforts in China by 1939, when he changed the title of his drama from *Die Ware Liebe* to *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*. His introductory note regarding Sichuan province in the 1953 edition of the play seems to further indicate the importance of China to his professional and personal life. However, it is also likely that Brecht was more heavily invested in the politics of China than the average European citizen at the time. As such, it is unclear how his Western readers or theatergoers interpreted the political implications of Sichuan province and their significance to Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*.

The play's portrayal of a fictionalized Sichuan as Sezuan holds meaning on several different levels, including the historico-political. Brecht's allusions to Sichuan can be attributed to two complementary and yet conflicting reasons. Writing through the fictional Sezuan allows Brecht to indirectly reference the progress of the CCP in Sichuan both during and after the Chinese Civil War and the Second Sino-Japanese War. Simultaneously, the fictional Sezuan, as a setting of relative anonymity in the eyes of the West, also allows Brecht to selectively utilize the collective Western cultural imaginary of China and create a Chinese veneer for the play that straddles the line between realism and remove. Operating under the guise of feigned exoticism, Brecht conceals the "real" significance of China and Chinese culture to his play behind a carefully constructed Chinese exterior.

## "Halb europäisiert" as a Marker of Cultural Difference, Westernization and Modernity

The brief, written introductory description demonstrates the integral role of "remove" to the construction of a realistic depiction of China in *Mensch*. The play takes place in "[d]ie Hauptstadt von Sezuan, welche halb europäisiert ist" (Introduction.21-2). The ambiguities contained within the term "halb europäisiert" further strengthen the proposal for viewing Brecht's Sezuan as dialectically related to Sichuan while also depicting an imaginary Chinese setting. The term reflects some of the issues addressed by the overall Chinese setting of the piece and by Brecht's struggle to reconcile the play's content with its milieu. For the European audience, *Mensch* is undeniably "Chinese" by virtue of its title and setting. While Hayot makes the case that the production of the work requires a balance and distinction between "Chinese reality" and the "reality of China" as understood by a Western audience,[41] one can also find evidence to support his claim embedded within the specificity of the term itself.

Brecht's use of the term "halb europäisiert" acknowledges and even anticipates some of the struggles faced by ethnographers in their attempts to produce accurate interpretations of other cultures.[42] The Western gaze brings with it a perspective that must be taken into consideration when considering the object of that gaze. In this case, the term "halb europäisiert" can be read as an extradiegetic acknowledgement of how China is perceived and understood by a Western audience: while the country is undergoing the process of modernization, it still has a long way to go in order to

become “Europeanized.” However, Brecht does not openly comment further on this issue. As a playwright, Brecht was not concerned with accuracy from an anthropological perspective—nor was he held to such a standard, or even expected to be judged on such terms. Nevertheless, that does not mean he was unaware of the implications of deliberately choosing to set *Mensch* in China. The play’s recognition of Sezuan as “halb europäisiert” allows Brecht to address the phenomenon of Orientalist discourse in Germany and Europe at the time, as well as his own participation within that discourse. Furthermore, describing Sezuan as “halb europäisiert” not only emphasizes Sezuan’s connection to Europe, but also its distinction from Europe. By calling attention to Sezuan’s familiarity, Brecht simultaneously reminds his audience of Sezuan’s foreignness. This corresponds to Brecht’s dialectical tendencies as well as his overall struggle with making the Chinese setting of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* believable but not necessarily realistically faithful.

The term “halb europäisiert” can be interpreted across other milieus as well. For example, the term also alludes to the hybridity of the capital city of Sezuan as depicted by Brecht. Situated in pre-Communist but post-agrarian China, the European influence on Brecht’s Sezuan is visible through descriptions of the city’s industrialization: Shui Ta’s tobacco plant, for instance, or Yang Sun’s dreams of being an airborne postal carrier, a position made possible through advances in aviation technology. The partial Europeanization of Sezuan thus references two different phenomena: it is a sign that Sezuan has entered the international imperial system, and it signals Sezuan’s partial modernization, illustrating Brecht’s enthusiasm for “the

modernity of the machine itself, which [he] also welcomes and celebrates."[43] Modern technological innovations in the play are juxtaposed with traditional professions such as the one held by Wang, the water-seller, and traditional aspects of Chinese culture, such as the existence of the three gods.

The depictions of Wang and the gods criticize old traditions and antiquity while also demonstrating the shortcomings of an industrialized and capitalist society. In the prologue to the play, Wang himself remarks on the obsoleteness of his profession. "Mein Geschäft ist mühselig. Wenn es wenig Wasser gibt, muß ich weit danach laufen. Und gibt es viel, bin ich ohne Verdienst" (Vorspiel.8-10). This is a comment on the dangers of over-production and a critique of the market, but it also questions the commodification of water as a natural resource. Wang's "Lied des Wasserverkäufers im Regen" in the third act of the play further illustrates these points. Attempting to sell water in the rain, Wang dreams of a drought-filled time when "Wasser maß ich ab nach Tropfen! / Ach, wie schrieen sie: Gib Wasser! / Jeden, der nach meinem Eimer faßte / Sah ich mir erst an daraufhin / Ob mir seine Nase paßte." Instead, "jetzt sauft ihr kleinen Kräuter / Auf dem Rücken mit Behagen / Aus dem großen Wolkeneuter / Ohne nach dem Preis zu fragen" (3.25-9). Wang's lament shows not only the growing obsolescence and the difficulties of his trade, but also the shortcomings of the supply and demand system. Both old methods and new advances are implicitly criticized through Wang's predicament. He cannot survive as an old element in a modern world, nor can he survive in a modern world that takes as its model the free market economy.

The gods, too, are becoming obsolete. They acknowledge their lack of involvement with the "real" world by declaring on various occasions that they do not meddle in business affairs. After being hosted by Shen Te in the prologue of the play, the gods remind her, "[v]or allem, sei gut, Shen Te! Leb wohl!" (Vorspiel.22) When Shen Te asks them how she can remain good in a world where everything comes at a price, the second god responds, "[d]a können wir leider nichts tun. In das Wirtschaftliche können wir uns nicht mischen" (Vorspiel.26-7). Shen Te further highlights the helplessness of the gods in the interlude between the fourth and fifth acts, during her "Lied von der Wehrlosigkeit der Götter und Guten." In the process of disguising herself as Shui Ta for the second time, she despairs, "Die Guten / Können sich nicht helfen und die Götter sind machtlos" (4.Zwischenspiel.14-5). Asking rhetorically why the gods do not assist the good-hearted, Shen Ta's song pointedly alludes to the inability of the gods to effect change in society. Shen Te's dilemma, "[g]ut zu sein und doch zu leben" (10.13) is shown as irresolvable without the presence of evil. The gods' final exit from the stage further pokes fun at their futility as well as their inability to address the crucial problem: the impossibility of being good to oneself as well as one's neighbors in a world filled with need and despair. The gods refuse to change the world, or even to acknowledge that such a dilemma exists. The first god goes so far as to claim that "es ist alles in Ordnung" (10.33) before the three deities float off on a pink cloud, leaving Shen Te to fend for herself and her unborn child. This open ending effectively shows the gods' inability to resolve real-world problems, and asks the audience to consider alternative solutions.

## Chinese Philosophy and Thought in *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*

In *Mensch*, Brecht invokes ancient China in order to criticize modern society and encourage social reform. The fictional nature of the play, as opposed to the theoretical discourse of the essay, provides Brecht with the artistic freedom to create a "China" that lies somewhere between historical reality and poetic license. Unlike in his "Verfremdungseffekte" essay, in *Mensch* Brecht does not appear to justify or rationalize his references to traditional Chinese culture in order to remain true to his modernist roots. However, the use of China and elements of Chinese culture, art and philosophy in Brecht's drama are not entirely unproblematic. The tension between admiration and outright dismissal, seen already in Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekte" essay, appears in modified form in *Mensch* as well. In the play, references to Chinese thought are handled lightly and in a sometimes satirical manner. Of course, these passages can be read in a way that diminishes their importance to Brecht's text. However, upon closer examination, the social applications of Chinese philosophy in the modern world serve to highlight its validity and importance to the drama, as well as to Brecht's message of social reform.

Allusions to Chinese philosophy and poetry appear throughout *Mensch*. One such example is provided by Frau Yang in the eighth scene of the play, as she praises Yang Sun's transformation from an unemployed pilot into a factory overseer. "Heute ist Sun ein ganz anderer Mensch als vor drei Monaten. Das werden Sie wohl zugeben! 'Der Edle ist wie eine Glocke, schlägt man sie, so tönt sie, schlägt man sie nicht, so tönt sie nicht', wie die Alten sagten" (9.35-8). This is a citation from Confucius' *Book*

*of Rites*. The original Confucian passage refers to education and pedagogy and the example of the bell "describes the method of making progress in learning."[44] The resonant tone of a bell is compared to how a teacher, when asked a meaningful question, will respond in a way that most benefits his student. Asked a non-meaningful question, the teacher provides only a short and ultimately unsatisfactory answer, analogous to striking a bell lightly or not at all. In *Mensch*, however, Frau Yang's paraphrase of the Confucian saying is given a less decorous meaning, playing on the connotations of "schlagen" to imply both the striking of a bell and the way in which Yang Sun was "knocked into shape."[45] Adapted to fit a bourgeois, capitalistic context, Frau Yang's interpretation has transformed Confucius' aphorism by replacing the meritorious intentions of the original with a defense of corporal punishment.

The use of this Confucian adage in *Mensch* demonstrates Brecht's simultaneously serious and satirical engagement with Chinese thought: although it provides important knowledge, it also serves as a backdrop for the narrative. The intentional skewering of ancient Chinese philosophy through the character of Frau Yang makes light of its utilization while also allowing Brecht to introduce traditional Chinese thought into a modern-day context. Brecht's parody of the Confucian proverb operates as a sly reference to the very phenomenon discussed by the original. Taken at face value—that is, by striking the bell lightly or not at all—Frau Yang's allusion to Confucius appears to poke fun at Confucius and the petty-bourgeois members of society who cite "die Alten" to support their views. Probing deeper—or by striking the bell so that it resonates—reveals how Confucian thought applies and contributes to the drama's overarching message of social reform.

That Brecht believed Chinese philosophy could support his own thoughts on social change and reform can be confirmed by recalling additional references to Chinese writers and their works in *Mensch*. During the second act, Shui Ta paraphrases the Chinese poet Bo Juyi while bargaining with the carpenter for the shelves built for the tobacco store. Commenting on the helplessness that confronts a single person in the face of the needs of the masses, Shui Ta quotes, "'Der Gouverneur, befragt, was nötig wäre / Den Frierenden der Stadt zu helfen, antwortete: / Eine zehntausend Fuß lange Decke / Welche die ganzen Vorstädte einfach zudeckt'" (2.35-8).[46] Shui Ta's use of Chinese poetry, similar to Frau Yang's citation of Confucius, contains an inherent slyness. Shui Ta's offhand reference to Bo Juyi is meant to illustrate his inability as an individual to act in a way that does not first and foremost benefit himself in a troubled society. This reverses the intentions of the original poem, which portrays the troubled plight of society by highlighting it from an individual's point of view. Although the original poem and Shui Ta's use of the poem approach the issue from opposing angles, both ultimately challenge the reader and spectator to actively create social change.

Wang, the water-seller, cites Chinese philosophy in the form of a story by the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi. The story, entitled "Das Leiden der Brauchbarkeit," concerns trees that, due to their usefulness, are cut down before they have a chance to reach their full maturity. In a dream that takes place between the sixth and seventh acts of the play, Wang asks the three gods about the meaning of the tale, and worries that Shen Te will meet a similar fate. "Vielleicht ist sie wirklich zu gut für diese Welt, Erleuchtete!" (6.Zwischenspiel.34) The gods dismiss the notion, again refusing to

interfere in earthly matters. The second god goes so far as to declare, "Je schlimmer seine Lage ist, als desto besser zeigt sich der gute Mensch. Leid läutert!" (6.Zwischenspiel.12-3)

Upon first glance, the gods' passive stance seems to correspond with the Daoist concept of non-action. However, the notion that "Leid läutert!" advocates the further deterioration of the situation in order for "der gute Mensch" to show his true colors. This attitude is no longer reminiscent of the theory of non-action, but rather invokes ultra-leftist ideology, which was criticized by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in his 1920 essay, "Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder."[47] The gods' steadfast insistence on allowing Shen Te's situation to continue worsening thus exemplifies the unyielding, dogmatic attitude taken by ultra-leftists in their deterministic approach to revolutionary action. The gods' inability—or unwillingness—to alleviate Shen Te's dismal fate parodies the ultra-leftist position, and criticizes its inability to effect real, social change.

Brecht's stance towards ultra-leftism as portrayed in this scene contributes to his contradictory position towards orthodox Marxism, especially as postulated by Douglas Kellner. According to Kellner, Brecht's understanding of Marxism was deeply influenced by his friend and mentor Karl Korsch, a well-known leader of the Left opposition. Kellner suggests that the ambivalence held by Brecht towards Marxism was due to in part to his support for both "the ideas of democratic socialism espoused by Rosa Luxemburg and Korsch on the one hand and…the authoritarian communism of Lenin and Stalin on the other."[48] Having the second god express ultra-leftist convictions allowed Brecht to explore the consequences of political extremism

in the safety of imagined circumstances—something that Kellner also perceives in *Me-ti*, which was written around the same time period as *Mensch*. What seems at first to be an allusion towards Chinese traditional philosophy actually points to a deeper critical engagement with Western political thought and attitudes.

**Brecht's Relationship to China**

There are distinct levels of Chineseness in Brecht's *Mensch*. A Chinese veneer serves to outwardly sinicize the drama. Elements such as teahouses, water-sellers and Chinese currency add "authenticity" to the play, and create a believable Chinese milieu while avoiding its opposite—a setting full of ornamental *chinoiserie* and exoticism. *Mensch* also engages with the real, geopolitical entity of China through its indirect references to contemporary Chinese politics. Brecht, who was sympathetic to the Chinese Communist cause, refers to Sichuan and its importance to the CCP by establishing its namesake, Sezuan, as the play's specific Chinese location. Finally, *Mensch* also incorporates complex and informed references to ancient Chinese philosophy and poetry into the narrative. These inferences hide their critique of modern Western society through a satirical and seemingly irreverent treatment of Chinese thought and culture. By examining the references more closely, the reader can see how Brecht utilized ancient Chinese thought to support his own worldview and thoughts on social reform.

The shifting layers of Chineseness in *Mensch* allow Brecht to avoid the abrupt switch between admiration and dismissal found in "Verfremdungseffekte." The

overlapping systems of engagement enable Brecht to reconcile his admiration of traditional Chinese culture with his modernist aesthetic and thoughts on Marxism by concealing a more meaningful relationship between Brecht and China within the outwardly superficial Chinese exterior of the play. Furthermore, understanding the play's Chinese setting as a deliberate construction permits multiple interpretations with varying degrees of authenticity. The resultant Sezuan is situated in a China that exists between the poles of imagination and historico-political reality, and Brecht takes full advantage of its ambiguous nature.

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## ***Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*** **in China**

In June of 1987, the Third Chengdu City Sichuan Opera Troupe, one of the most acclaimed *chuanju* (traditional Sichuan opera) troupes in China,[49] performed a traditional Sichuan opera adaptation of Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* in Chengdu, Sichuan. Literally translated into Chinese as *Sichuan Haoren*, the adaptation was later reworked into a televised *chuanju* performance in 1988.[50] The filmed version was the first foreign work to be specifically adapted for a small screen *xiqu* performance, and was praised for its accomplishments in advancing the field of televised *xiqu* as well as for its innovative content.[51]

An analysis of the *chuanju* adaptation of Brecht's *Mensch* provides insight into the relationship and perceived relationship between Brecht and China, especially from

the Chinese perspective. Looking at *Sichuan Haoren* also sheds light onto the concerns of theatre reform in early post-Mao China. Furthermore, examining the opera's production, content and reception illuminates China's renewed relationship with the West after the establishment of the Dengist regime. Through contemporary *xiqu*, the ways in which *Sichuan Haoren* addresses Chinese and Western influences demonstrate the struggle to reformulate Chinese identity in the early post-Mao era from a national standpoint as well as an increasingly global perspective.

When considering the issues surrounding the sinicization of Brecht's dramas, it is useful to first examine the history of Shakespeare in China. Because of its duration and extent, the reception of Shakespeare in China can be viewed as the defining paradigm for the Chinese reception of Western culture in general. Adaptations of Shakespeare's works function on multiple levels in China, and address issues of authenticity, authority, and cultural identification that also appear in the *chuanju* interpretation of Brecht's *Mensch*.

**Shakespeare in China: Performance Practices and Theoretical Perspectives**

As formulated by James R. Brandon, Shakespearean theatre in Asia can be categorized in three ways: canonical, indigenous, or intercultural.[52] This trichotomy loosely corresponds to the three performance approaches identified by Alexander C.Y. Huang regarding Chinese interpretations of Shakespeare's dramas: the trend to universalize; to localize; or to rewrite, deconstruct, and relate back to images of China.[53] The intercultural approach, or the rewriting of the original plays so that they

relate to their new Chinese contexts, simultaneously acknowledges the original Shakespearean texts while also valuing the local culture's contribution to the production. In this approach to Shakespeare, the confrontation between East and West is highlighted, as is the difficulty in addressing locality and nationality in the midst of an increasingly global culture. In China, intercultural or rewritten adaptations of Shakespeare often take the form of a "sinicized" Shakespeare, in which the drama is adapted and performed through the form of traditional Chinese opera. This connects Shakespeare, a marker of Western and global culture, with traditional Chinese theatre, which contains local and provincial-level influences in addition to highly national cultural overtones.

According to Poonam Trivedi, "the recognition, circulation and approbation of Asian versions of Shakespeare in the last few decades mark a shift in intellectual property relations."[54] With the increased importance of Asia to the global economy of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Asia's cultural stock is correspondingly on the rise. Trivedi sees intercultural methods of restaging and rewriting Shakespeare as indicators of a more equitable set of relations between East and West—one where the East is "producing innovative work which is forging new meanings and arresting the imagination beyond the 'local'."[55] Sinicized Shakespearean productions address cultural differences in ways that reinforce the mutual importance of China to the world. They also exemplify how post-Mao China has taken an increasingly active and assertive role in adapting Western discourse to suit its own needs.

**Shakespeare and Chen's Occidentalism**

Xiaomei Chen discusses China's utilization of Western discourse in her 1995 study, *Occidentalism*. As defined by Chen, Occidentalism is "a discursive practice that, by constructing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others."[56] Occidentalism can further be divided into two categories: "official Occidentalism" and "anti-official Occidentalism." Chen defines official Occidentalism as "the Chinese government's use of the essentialization of the West as a means for supporting a nationalism that effects the internal suppression of its own people."[57] This political instrumentalization by the Party-state contrasts with anti-official Occidentalism, in which "certain groups of Chinese intellectuals [utilize their] knowledge and literacy…in [their] own practice of power against the powerful status quo."[58] Although the objectives of these two types of Occidentalist discourse may seem oppositional, Chen is quick to point out that this distinction should not be formulated in binary terms. Instead, she suggests that official and anti-official Occidentalism converge at times: "one witnesses a third kind of Chinese Occidentalism, in which the anti-official Occidentalism against the Maoist autocracy in early post-Mao China significantly overlapped with the official Occidentalism of the Deng regime, which briefly tolerated and even encouraged the intellectuals' anti-Maoist sentiments in order to manipulate them into legitimizing its political legacy."[59]

Examples of this "third kind" of Occidentalist discourse in China can be seen in productions that emerged after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and before the Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989. During this initial post-Mao transition period, many of Shakespeare's dramas were performed through the medium of traditional Chinese opera. The resulting productions acknowledged the existence of a Western cultural and literary canon while also advocating the relevance and significance of traditional Chinese culture to contemporary Chinese society. They further illustrated the complex nature of Occidentalist discourse as described by Chen. From an "anti-official" stance, sinicized Shakespeare celebrated the West and engaged freely with European literature that had been denounced under the Cultural Revolution. From an "official" stance, the ahistorical use of Shakespeare's plays was acceptable and even encouraged because the plays were seen as an implicit critique of life under Mao. In the eyes of officials during the early Deng period of reform, the denouncement of the old government could be used to bolster the legitimacy of the new one, although, as Chen reminds the reader, Chinese intellectuals' ostensible support for the new political system also contained an inherent criticism of communism more generally, suggesting that the new Dengist regime was not exempt from scrutiny.[60]

**Brecht and Occidentalism**

Chen's analysis of Shakespeare in China can be applied to productions of Brecht's plays in post-Mao China. After the Cultural Revolution, Brecht's *Leben des*

*Galilei* was staged as a Western drama in Beijing in 1979 by the Chinese Youth Art Theatre, directed by Huang Zuolin and Chen Yong. A state-run drama training institute and consequently an ideological mouthpiece, The Chinese Youth Art Theatre's decision to produce Brecht's *Galilei* was made with the consent of the new Dengist regime.[61] The play was widely understood and acknowledged as a critique directed against the Gang of Four and "socialist fascism, a term now used exclusively for the catastrophic ten years of the Cultural Revolution […]."[62] Additionally, co-director Chen maintained that *Galilei* was staged in order to "strengthen international cultural exchange,"[63] and that Brecht's epic theatre demonstrated "the 'social behaviour' which shows the class nature of society and its individuals."[64] *Galilei* helped validate the new regime and establish distance from the immediate past while reinforcing concepts of class struggle and socialist ideology. The play's criticism against an oppressive regime that suppressed science and culture during the Cultural Revolution also served as an implicit warning against the potential actions of the new socialist regime—a connection that may have slipped unnoticed by the censors. Fulfilling both official and anti-official objectives regarding Occidentalism, Brecht's drama appealed to the state, scholars and the popular theatergoing audience at the time. The positive reception of Brecht's *Galilei* in China after the end of the Cultural Revolution, as well as Brecht's multivalent status as a political figure in post-Mao China, helped pave the way for the sinicization of *Mensch* in the decade that followed.

**Brecht in Post-Mao China**

Brecht's political affiliation notwithstanding, articles written about Brecht in China did not devote much time to discussing political doctrine. The avoidance of political discourse demonstrates one way in which Chinese intellectuals participated in the renegotiation of Chinese identity in the early post-Mao era. Directing minimal attention to political agenda in Brecht's life or works, these writings can be perceived as ambiguous political statements that neither contest nor support official government rhetoric. According to Elizabeth Wichmann, consideration for the ideological content of traditional Chinese opera remained an important concern in the early 1980s. However, ambiguity regarding the exact nature of the relationship between doctrine and the dramatic arts continued to hinder its further development in the period following the end of the Cultural Revolution.[65] The uncertain link between theatre and the promotion of state discourse can be seen in discussions of Brecht's *Mensch* in China during this time.

In 1980, Ding Yangzhong wrote an essay entitled "Brecht and his *Good Person of Sichuan,*" which addresses Brecht's contribution to European theatre modern theatre.[66] Near the end of the article, Ding makes a passing reference to Brecht's position as a Marxist. However, his comment that Brecht had been "a Marxist, a steadfast anti-Fascist"[67] since the 1930s is left unclarified, and has little connection to the rest of the paragraph or the article as a whole. The lack of emphasis on Brecht's political affiliation reflects Ding's uncertainty and cautiousness regarding the promotion of a political doctrine that had not yet been clearly specified.[68] Ding's

1988 article, "Reflections on the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren,*" as well as a joint essay by Liu Shaocong and Wu Xiaofei written in the same year, "To Develop Oneself in the Midst of Acceptance: On the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren,*" appear similarly wary in their treatment of ideological rhetoric.[69] In these writings, the allusions to and subsequent dismissals of Brecht's position on Marxism suggest that scholars were careful about aligning themselves with a specific political doctrine. The absence of state-sponsored rhetoric in these essays indicates a transition away from official discourse within the realm of the performing arts. Furthermore, the political ambiguity found in these articles and the production of *Sichuan Haoren* reflects Brecht's own contradictory relationship to orthodox Marxism, which was often expressed through his literary works.[70] The ambivalence and tension surrounding Marxism in *Sichuan Haoren* also recall the lack of Marxist doctrinaire explicitly found within Brecht's *Mensch*, as well as in other pieces written during the 1940s and Brecht's period of exile.[71] Advocating theatre reform through praxis, both *Mensch* and its Chinese adaptation take a moderate and reserved stance towards theoretical politics.

**Modernization of Chinese *xiqu* Through Utilizing Foreign Source Material**

Ding Yangzhong translated *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* from the original German into Chinese, and served as the artistic consultant on the original production of *Sichuan Haoren* by the Third Chengdu City Sichuan Opera Troupe.[72] In his aforementioned essay, "The *chuanju Sichuan Haoren*," Ding stresses the need to incorporate new content into *xiqu* repertoire, while also remaining true to native

Chinese dramatic forms, including *chuanju* and *jingju*. Only by addressing both points does Ding believe that traditional Chinese theatre can "catch up to the era's pace."[73] In his essay, Ding argues for the importance of drawing "horizontally" from other sources—particularly modern European sources—in order to revitalize *xiqu* and make it relevant to contemporary society. "*Xiqu*'s transformation and innovation cannot leave China's reality, nor can it dismiss developmental dramatic trends in the world. Even if *xiqu* is China's unique type of drama, its development cannot deny the imprint of the cultural ideas of the 1980s in today's close East-West cultural communications."[74] Ding's statement shows an awareness of China's global status in the late 1980s. It also addresses how external factors can contribute to the formulation and renegotiation of national identity. Arguing for Chinese theatre's need to look to outside sources for inspiration, Ding actively proposes that traditional Chinese theatre must accept foreign influences in order to continue evolving in the present day.[75]

Liu Shaocong and Wu Xiaofei, the adaptors of the *chuanju* script for *Sichuan Haoren*, maintain a similar position towards foreign source material. In "To Develop Oneself in the Midst of Acceptance: On the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren,*" Liu and Wu argue for the importance of using Western influences to strengthen traditional Chinese theatre and with it, a sense of Chinese identity. "Without having to go over our especially illustrious and glorious culture, in today's competition of civilizations, we are already lagging behind. If we want to meet them head-on and catch up, the only way is to become open. This means that we must accept and admit foreign modern culture."[76] With regard to Chinese theatre and its relationship to global theatre, the adaptors' article contains the same sense of urgency found in Ding's essay. Liu and

Wu further stress a sense of competition between nations, which reflects the influence of transnational capitalism in China as it was introduced in the years immediately following the end of the Cultural Revolution. In both essays, the authors speak in favor of a view of China that looks outward to build and strengthen the concept of national identity, and to elevate China's place in the world.

The idea that engaging with the West can raise China's intra- and international standing is connected to the implicit awareness of modern China's decades-long isolation from the rest of the world, as well as the sense of a need to rectify this situation. By proposing an adaptation of Brecht in *chuanju* form, Ding, Liu and Wu advocate an intercultural performance method defined by the complex imperative of acknowledging the influence of Western theatre as a form of cultural legitimacy without in any way denigrating the value of traditional Chinese theatre. Their essays reflect a strong awareness of the balance needed to retain a strong sense of Chinese identity while incorporating modern Western material into traditional Chinese art forms. These articles clearly perceive and acknowledge the tension between traditionalism and modernization. This mirrors the tension between traditionalism, modernism and modernization found in Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekte" essay as well as in *Mensch*. Brecht's writings downplay and disguise the importance of Chinese traditionalism to his theory of epic theatre and messages of sociopolitical reform. The articles by Ding, Liu and Wu, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of maintaining traditional Chinese culture in the face of modernization. *Sichuan Haoren*, which approaches the poles of traditionalism and modernization from the post-Mao Chinese perspective, inverts how those same concepts are treated in *Mensch* from a

modernist point of view. In short, Brecht's engagement with traditional Chinese theatre and cultural elements prefigures how they are later addressed in the creation process of *Sichuan Haoren*. Brecht's play is embedded in an era of aesthetic modernism and political revolution, while *Sichuan Haoren* reflects the ethos of a post-revolutionary era.

**Reform vs. Traditionalism in China**

In *Sichuan Haoren,* Brechtian theatre is forcefully and purposefully integrated with traditional Chinese theatre. New realistic, symbolic and stylized elements are incorporated into the *chuanju* form to better express the essence of the original drama. Liu and Wu write, "[f]oreign art, if it is not connected to the motherland's national art forms, will never be able to develop roots and flower."[77] Instead, foreign sources must be digested and absorbed "to nourish our national human body."[78] In this way, both the national body and the foreign arts stand to benefit under new circumstances. Xiaoying Wang makes a similar analogy: "From the perspective of cross-cultural significance, we should also go through Western dramatic culture to rethink our own traditional *xiqu*. 'Carrying a golden bowl to beg for food' is of course no good, but a 'golden bowl' that is defended to the death will also suffer from hunger."[79] Wang defines *xiqu* as uniquely belonging to the Chinese people. However, as a cultural commodity, it cannot continue to survive in isolation. The importance of cross-cultural exchange is recognized as an important component to the rebuilding and re-

establishment of the nation and Chinese identity. The essays emphasize hybridization, rather than the wholesale adoption or acceptance of foreign materials.

The above statements echo the perspective taken by political reformers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[80] Michael Yahuda writes that the opposing approaches taken by Qing reformers and the Confucian literati have continued without resolution into the present day:

> "On the one side were reformers who argued that it was necessary to adapt to Western ways if China were to strengthen itself and once again acquire the power and wealth to repel aggressors and re-establish its significance as a major centre of power and culture in the world. On the other side were those who argued, on moral grounds, that this was tantamount to 'Westernisation' which would inevitably undermine the key values that the reformers claimed to uphold. […] This paradox is as true today for the adherents of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' as it was for the upholders of the Confucian way in the latter part of the nineteenth century."[81]

The tension and irreconcilability of the opposing stances towards modernization in China, described by Yahuda on the larger politico-economic level, is also encapsulated on the cultural level through the issues surrounding *xiqu* reform in the early 1980s. Discovering itself at a global crossroads after decades of isolation, traditional Chinese theatre looked for a way to evolve in the late twentieth century while still retaining its fundamentally "Chinese" characteristics. The articles by Ding, Wang, Liu and Wu reflect the authors' awareness of the struggle to balance modernization with Chinese traditionalism, especially in the adaptation process of *Sichuan Haoren*. The production and reception of the 1987 *chuanju* production further illustrate these two conflicting lines of thought.

## *Sichuan Haoren*: The Production

The contradictory impulses to create a production that incorporates Brechtian elements while showcasing the unique qualities of *chuanju* were already manifest in the basic structure of the Chinese adaptation. The *chuanju Sichuan Haoren* kept the setting of the German original. In addition, the *chuanju* retained Brecht's ambiguously real or fictitious location. Ding suggests that the adaptation's version of Sichuan should be understood as a fictionalized "Sezuan" unrelated to Sichuan province in China.[82] In his review of the Chinese production, Chao Shunbao similarly acknowledges the fictitiousness of location by placing "Sichuan, China" in quotation marks.[83] Yi Kai, however, calls the setting of *Sichuan Haoren* "a world embodied with Sichuanese flavor," and introduces the play as taking place in the "eastern-flavored environment of Sichuan, China."[84] The various interpretations of the setting demonstrate multiple ways of understanding the integration of Chinese and Western elements in the *chuanju*.

The production also displayed tension in the establishment of familiarity versus distance, further indicating a struggle to balance the play's foreign material and its "native" structural framework. Instead of taking place in the modern, industrialized era, the "halb-europäisierte Hauptstadt Sezuans" found in *Mensch* was relocated to the distant past in *Sichuan Haoren*. According to the adaptors, this temporal displacement functioned as an acknowledgement of Brecht's desired alienation effect, and gave the audience a greater sense of remove from the Chinese setting and its characters. However, it is also possible that the decision to transplant the narrative into the past

was a calculated decision that effectively rendered the play harmless as political commentary, and therefore indicates the adaptors' awareness of the uncertain political environment in theatre at the time. The *chuanju* replaced Brecht's German colloquialisms with Sichuanese dialect and witticisms, establishing a more authentic Chinese milieu for the production and eliminating some of its distance. Similarly, in an effort to conform to the expectations of the Chinese audience, the plot was abridged and centered primarily on Shen Te's struggle to be good.[85] These editorial choices acknowledge the expectations of the Party-state as well as the theatergoers, while attempting to remain true to the intentions of the original play. In terms of set design, the stage was well lit and left relatively empty of props. This corresponds to both Brechtian and traditional Chinese theatre conventions. A set of large, stylized masks suspended from the ceiling were alternately raised and lowered, and scaffolding which could be utilized in various ways depending on the scene remained onstage for the entirety of the performance. The three gods were represented by three different *xiqu* character roles: *dan*, *jing*, and *chou*, and consisted of one female goddess and two male gods, respectively. Instead of the eight-headed family found in Brecht's original play, a large, impersonal mass of hungry diners fleshed out the ensemble. They not only antagonized Shen Te, but also provided comic relief and commentary on the drama and its actions through various song, dance and acrobatic numbers.

**The *chou* as a Character Type in *Sichuan Haoren***

The substitution of an anonymous mass of hungry diners in place of the eight-headed family exemplifies how the *chuanju* production freely transformed the Brechtian source material. The diners were represented as *chou*, or clowns, a set character role in traditional Chinese theatre.[86] The only character allowed to use colloquial speech, the *chou* often provides comic relief, but may also play serious or even evil roles. According to Ashley Thorpe, "the *chou* role [is] a complex mixture of fool, villain, trickster and hero, portrayed in characters from across the social classes."[87] An oftentimes improvisatory role, the *chou* is further expected to incorporate bits and pieces of the other *xiqu* character roles such as *sheng*, *dan*, *jing* or *mo* into his or her performance.[88] In *chuanju*, the *chou* is held in especially high regard, praised for embodying Sichuan opera's lively atmosphere through its humor and its depiction of specialized local trades and professions.[89] Each of the diners in the group is recognizable as a *chou* character through his or her distinctive and stylized make-up, consisting of a white patch of makeup partially covering the actor's face, most often the eyes and nose.[90] Recognizable *chou* roles in *Sichuan Haoren* included the *wuchou*, or "acrobatic *chou*," as well as several types of *wenchou*, defined as "non-military characters from a diverse range of social classes including aristocrats, officials, bartenders, gamblers and thieves."[91] These included the *yanzichou*, or "sooty *chou*," and the *laochou*, or "elderly *chou*."[92]

In *Sichuan Haoren*, the group of *chou* diners occupy the same position as the eight-headed family in *Mensch*. The diners are rude and demanding towards Shen Te,

fawning and simpering towards Shui Ta, and jeering and mocking towards the carpenter Lin To, who claims that Shen Te owes him money for the shelves in her store. The *chou* ensemble in *Sichuan Haoren* portray the arguably most unsavory characters in Brecht's *Mensch*. Because of the satirical nature of the eight-headed family in the original, it seems fitting to have their positions filled by the *chou* in traditional Chinese opera.

The use of *chou* in *Sichuan Haoren* has been praised as an example of the successful integration of Chinese opera elements into the storyline of the adapted Western drama. Yi claims the group of *chou* depicts "the faces of Sichuan society in all of its walks of life."[93] This view highlights the sinicization of the original Brechtian drama, and celebrates the diversity of Sichuan and the regional *chuanju* form through its portrayal of various *chou* characters. Here, the *chou* is seen as a natural substitute for the ensemble characters in the original. Yi's interpretation directly transplants the *chou* role from the past into the present.

However, this is only a surface assessment of the *chou* found in *Sichuan Haoren*. Upon closer examination, it becomes more doubtful whether or not the *chou* in the Chinese production of *Sichuan Haoren* can be so glibly associated with its traditional *xiqu*. Wang objects to seeing the group of *chou* in the Chinese adaptation of Brecht as representative of the traditional *chou* character. "[I]n *chuanju* as well as all of Chinese *xiqu* culture, what the '*chou* character' demonstrates is more on the side of jocular humor, great sage-like wisdom, kindheartedness, honesty, liveliness and the like. '*Chou*' in these types of quality and style are 'beautiful and good,' they are 'even-tempered' and 'happy,' but the '*chou*' needed in *Sichuan Haoren* are instead

dumb and stubborn, selfish, deceitful and cunning, low-grade and rascally. In sum, they are truly repulsive and ugly."[94] Wang argues that the *chou* are depicted as distasteful and abhorrent figures in order to better carry out their function in the production: they act as a catalyst that forces Shen Te to conjure up the evil Shui Ta as a means of self-preservation. By differentiating between the *chou* role in *Sichuan Haoren* and in traditional *chuanju*, Wang suggests that the *chou* character in the modern *chuanju* has been transformed, not simply displaced. Instead of highlighting the unique properties of the *chou* as a *chuanju* character role, the group of *chou* is shown as crass, repulsive and demanding. This view, which emphasizes the ugly nature of the characters as opposed to their stylized, aesthetic or comedic value, stresses the importance of Brechtian drama first and foremost. From this perspective, the *xiqu* structure can and should be adapted to better accommodate the message of Brecht's original play. This puts a different emphasis on the relationship between *xiqu* form and Brechtian content, and privileges the source material over the framework. Contrary to "sinicization," Wang understands the resulting *chuanju* production as a "Brechtianization."[95]

Although Wang's analysis of the *chou* in *Sichuan Haoren* appears critical, his discussion of *Sichuan Haoren* reveals a progressive view towards modernizing theatre in China. Wang's article supports the attempt by the adaptors to emphasize Brecht's message, and speaks in favor of modifying traditional Chinese theatrical elements to do so. In his essay, Wang suggests that there are many ways to achieve theatre reform in contemporary China. Although Wang argues that the modification of the *chou* role in *Sichuan Haoren* is important for the play's overall Brechtianization, he is careful to

distinguish between different methods of hybridization. Wang cites a non-verbal scene in the *chuanju* where a group of factory workers, all wearing masks and dressed uniformly alike, cross the stage performing various acrobatic maneuvers while Yang Sun looks on as their overseer. In the article, Wang criticizes the factory workers' feats of athleticism, stating that their actions, while aesthetically impressive, mitigate the drama's intended sense of industrialization and dehumanization during this scene. According to Wang, the factory scene, which introduces Yang Sun in his new role, demonstrates how "the 'allure' of traditional *xiqu*"[96] may dilute the overall effect of the production. Wang's essay on *Sichuan Haoren* indicates a perspectival shift towards the modernization of *xiqu*—one that is open to reforming Chinese theatre objectives, and considers Western theatre as a model for emulation in addition to a potential source of new material.

The adaptation and transformation of the *chou* in *Sichuan Haoren* raise questions regarding the advancement of the character role, and of Chinese *xiqu* in general. In the Chinese production, the *chou* character as embodied by the group of hungry diners can be seen as both progressive and retrogressive. As a supporting ensemble role, the transformation of the *chou* in *Sichuan Haoren* demonstrates how elements of traditional Chinese theatre may be adapted to accommodate fresh content for the objective of producing innovative contemporary theatre. However, this adaptability may come with the price of sacrificing some of the uniqueness or integrity of the original theatrical aspects. According to some critics, the *chuanju* performance was not detailed enough, the songs and melodies were not intricate enough, nor was the staging aesthetically pleasing.[97] The *chou* in *Sichuan Haoren* became a caricature

of its former self. The perceived lack of subtlety attributed to the ensemble of *chou* in the Chinese adaptation of Brecht's drama speaks to the dilemma of balancing the demands and expectations of one theatrical tradition with those of another. The different ways of interpreting the changes further allude to the troubles faced in modernizing traditional Chinese opera through its hybridization with Western theatre form and content.

Reading the ensemble of *chou* characters in terms of either its sinicization or Brechtianization neatly encapsulates the tension that arises in the attempt to balance traditional *xiqu* with foreign theatre. Does an emphasis on one necessarily imply a detriment to the other? The use of *chou* in *Sichuan Haoren* seems well-suited to representing the eight-headed family found in Brecht's original drama. However, at least in its execution, the reduction of the *chou* to vulgar stereotype does not allow the *chou* to achieve its full potential as a *chuanju* or more broadly *xiqu* character type. These actions can be perceived as weakening the native theatrical traditions that they draw upon. In this view, the *chou* role encounters the danger of being subsumed under the global in the name of intercultural theatre and performance. Alternatively, utilizing the traditional *chou* character and reassigning its character function can be viewed as a way to successfully expand the range of traditional *xiqu* roles. Incorporated into another type of theatre altogether, the modifications to the *chou* role in *Sichuan Haoren* can be understood as enhancing the original *xiqu* forms and bringing them into the present-day. The difficulty in resolving the tension between these two different perspectives illustrates the dilemma faced by those looking to

modernize traditional Chinese theatre in the 1980s, and hints at similar issues of concern on the greater politico-economic level in China at the time.

### *Sichuan Haoren* and Chinese Modernization

Formulated as a modern *chuanju*, *Sichuan Haoren* was received in a generally positive manner. Reviewers and critics applauded the *chuanju* for its combination of Brechtian and Sichuanese elements in broad, glowing terms.[98] However, the commentators' expressions of general optimism are tempered by their discussions of specific aspects of the production.[99] The mixed commentary, which alternately criticizes and praises *Sichuan Haoren* on its success as a modern *chuanju*, makes it clear that the successful integration of Brechtian material with *xiqu* form is more difficult in its execution than as a proposed theoretical model. On the one hand, commentators commend the production for introducing new material and conventions to traditional Chinese theatre. On the other hand, commentators seem dissatisfied or unconvinced by the results of such borrowing. The critical remarks regarding *Sichuan Haoren* reveal the reviewers' expectations for the production: to preserve traditional *xiqu* qualities effectively while incorporating changes based on the Brechtian original.

The conflicting expectations and reviews of *Sichuan Haoren* provide additional insight into the way that politico-economic modernization of China was regarded during the early post-Mao period. In late December of 1978, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP ratified new foreign and domestic policies in the early post-Mao era. The plenum also clarified the Four

Modernizations: programs in agriculture, industry, national defense, science and technology intended to modernize China. A large part of this program included opening China's economy to foreign investors and the outside world.[100] Ding, who suggests that *Sichuan Haoren* serves as a warning against the dangers of capitalism as it was promoted under the Open Door policy, directly connects the theatrical production to national issues of modernization under the Dengist regime.[101] However, Ding does not elaborate further upon his claim. Instead, Ding's statement alludes to the dangers of capitalism from an ideological perspective, while tacitly acknowledging its importance to China's modernization after Mao. By leaving more unsaid, Ding's statement on the significance of *Sichuan Haoren* as a politico-economic warning further reflects the tension described by Yahuda in the widespread acceptance of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." Its noncommittal nature also supports Wichmann's observation on the unclear relationship between ideology and traditional Chinese theatre at the time. Both criticizing and supporting the role of capitalism in early post-Mao China, Ding's statement consciously straddles the categorical line separating "official" from "anti-official" Occidentalist discourse as defined by Chen.

Yi identifies the capitalist critique found in Brecht's drama as well, and suggests that it is embodied by the *chuanju* production. "The people of the Western capitalist world and their relationship to products are cold and unfeeling…the audience must necessarily experience the limits of stage happenings, and think of even larger societal issues […]."[102] Like Ding, Yi does not further elaborate upon the Brechtian message of the drama, nor its appearance in the *chuanju* production. This also indicates a certain wariness in openly supporting political and ideological motives

in *Sichuan Haoren*. The care with which these issues are broached belies their importance to China within the grand scheme of politico-economic modernization. On the cultural level, the mixed reception of *Sichuan Haoren* addresses the modernization of traditional Chinese theatre, and echoes the uncertain manner in which politico-economic developments were received on a national scale.

*Sichuan Haoren* addresses issues of Chinese modernization, traditionalism and reform as they appear in contemporary Chinese *xiqu*. The *chuanju*, which strives to maintain a Chinese core while utilizing foreign sources, embodies what could be labeled "Brechtian theatre with Chinese characteristics." The production combines traditional Chinese opera with modern Western elements as a method of encouraging theatre reform and modernization. The aim of the opera parallels the early reform-era Dengist regime's objective of promoting "socialism with Chinese characteristics" within Chinese society. However, just as the Dengist regime experienced difficulties in reconciling the capitalist reform policies with socialist ideology, the Chinese production of *Sichuan Haoren* also struggled to resolve the contradictory nature of the drama's anti-capitalist message with its newly pro-capitalist environment. The sinicization of Brecht's play, which was partially justified on account of Brecht's socialist affinities, can be interpreted as either facilitating or resisting the new Dengist reforms of the early post-Mao period. The production's embrace of Western source material may serve as a positive indicator of Chinese modernization; alternatively, its message of social reform may be read as a veiled critique of Chinese modernization in the Deng era. The Chinese critics' ambivalent responses to the sinicized version of

*Mensch* reflect their recognition of the tension located in the production as well as in Chinese society at the time.

**Summation**

Both Brecht's *Mensch* and the Third Chengdu City Sichuan Opera Troupe's production of *Sichuan Haoren* encounter difficulties in combining modern sensibilities with aspects of traditionalism. *Sichuan Haoren* remains focused on maintaining traditional Chinese elements in the production while simultaneously advocating theatre reform. This inverts the directionality of the tension found in the German original, which focuses on disguising aspects of traditional Chinese culture and thought so as not to detract from the modern message of the drama. Although many commentators of Brecht's *Mensch* have historically appeared to dismiss the Chineseness of the narrative, the Chinese production of *Sichuan Haoren* demonstrates one way in which an in-depth analysis of the Chineseness of Brecht's text offers a new perspective on the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions found within the German play, while also shedding light on the historical moment in China. In both versions of the drama, the engagement with foreign sources results in the re-examination of identity, perspective and worldview.

The sinicization of *Mensch* provides an example of theatrical innovation in China during the 1980s. The production revives traditional Chinese opera while also implementing a method of modernization that had not been previously attempted: the utilization of a modern European drama as source material. Not only did Brecht's

*Mensch* provide Chinese *xiqu* with new subject matter, but the drama also gave traditional Chinese theatre a new means of effecting reform in the early Deng period. In addition to revitalizing traditional Chinese theatre, the adaptation of Brecht's *Mensch* illuminates China's sentiments towards the West at the time. The concerns regarding the modernization of *xiqu* reveal a deeper awareness of the problematic surrounding China and its relationship to the West, especially with regards to Chinese national and cultural identity.

Brecht's original drama, which advocates social reform, avoids a dogmatic position towards political rhetoric. In fact, Brecht's satirical treatment of everything from Confucian proverbs to ultra-leftist ideology cautions against blindly following doctrine. Its Chinese adaptation treats socialist ideology in a similarly ambivalent manner, and its reception is correspondingly ambiguous. *Sichuan Haoren* illustrates Chinese theatre's evolving attitude towards state-sponsored rhetoric during this time. It also demonstrates the state's relaxed hold on theatre as an ideological tool. No longer openly promoting official doctrine, *Sichuan Haoren*'s agenda of reform through theatre reflects a change in the Dengist regime's more general position towards ideology, especially in relation to its views on socioeconomic modernization in China. Instead of bolstering state ideology by emphasizing Brecht's Marxist affinities, *Sichuan Haoren*'s engagement with Brecht does the opposite—it enables traditional Chinese theatre in the post-Mao era to begin transitioning away from the strict adherence to an official party line, and paves the way for the emergence of multiple perspectives in Chinese theatre, reform and modernization. Couched in terms of theatre reform, the issues that arise in both Brecht's *Mensch* and its contemporary

*chuanju* adaptation have wider ramifications for the national, economic and political environments in which they are situated.

## Notes to Chapter Two

[1] Hayot, Eric, *Chinese Dreams* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 54.
[2] Hayot, *Chinese Dreams*, 55.
[3] For more detailed analyses of Reich-Ranicki's and Esslin's assessments of China in Brecht's works, see Tatlow, Antony, *Mask of Evil* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977). For more on Fuegi's thoughts of Brecht and China, see Eric Hayot, *Chinese Dreams*.
[4] Berg-Pan, Renata, *Bertolt Brecht and China* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979). Tan, Yuan, *Der Chinese in der deutschen Literatur. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung chinesischer Figuren in den Werken von Schiller, Döblin und Brecht* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 2007).
[5] The book consists of a series of aphorisms, parables, conversations and didactic sentences as quoted by Me-ti, also known historically as the Chinese philosopher Mo Tzu and the Latinized Micius. The Chinese philosophers in the text are understood as pseudonyms for Marxist theorists, including Lenin, Marx, Korsch, Stalin and Brecht himself. More regarding *Me-ti, das Buch der Wendungen* can be found in Jameson, Frederic, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1999).
[6] Brecht, Bertolt, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting." *Brecht on Theatre,* ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964). 91-9. 91.
[7] Traditional Chinese theatre and traditional Chinese opera are both translations for the Chinese *xiqu* or *xiju*, and the English translations will be used interchangeably for the purposes of this study.
[8] Brecht, Bertolt, "Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst." *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*. *Schriften 2: Schriften 1933-1942, Teil 1.* Band 22, ed. Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei und Klaus-Detlef Müller (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993), 22.1: 200-10. 206.
[9] Chen, Yong, "The Beijing Production of *Galileo*." *Brecht and East Asian Theatre,* ed. Antony Tatlow and Tak-wai Wong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1982), 88-95. Zhang, Li, "Brecht in China." *Brecht and East Asian Theatre,* 18-27.
[10] Refer to footnote 7 in this chapter regarding *xiqu* and its English translations as used in this study.
[11] Huang, Zuolin, "A Supplement to Brecht's 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting.'" *Brecht and East Asian Theatre*, 96-110. Ding, Yangzhong, "On the Insatiable Appetite and Longevity of Theatre." *The Dramatic Touch of Difference*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Josephine Riley and Michael Gissenwehrer (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1990), 169-77. Ding, Yangzhong, "Brecht's Theatre and Chinese Drama." *Brecht and East Asian Theatre*, 28-43.
[12] Brecht, Bertolt, "Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst," 22.1: 200.
[13] Ibid., 22.1: 206-7.
[14] This passage supports Min Tian's position that Brecht took from Chinese theatrical techniques only what he found useful, and provides evidence for theorists' claims of the potentially derogatory effects that result from an ethnocentric, predominantly Western view of intercultural theatre. See Tian, Min, *The Poetics of Difference and Displacement* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).
[15] Brecht, Bertolt, "Hemmt die Benutzung des Modells die künstlerische Bewegungsfreiheit?" *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe. Schriften 5.* Band 25, ed. Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei und Klaus-Detlef Müller (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993), 25: 386-91.
[16] More on Brecht's (mis)interpretations of Chinese theatre can be found in Min Tian's *The Poetics of Difference and Displacement*. Tian suggests that Brecht is interested in Chinese theatre only for what it can provide him in terms of validation and support for his already-formulated ideas and theories. According to Tian, there is no room for "real" cultural exchange, as Brecht simply takes what he wants and needs from Chinese traditional theatre, without giving consideration to their original significance or socio-historical context.
[17] Brecht himself claims that his concept of the A-effect and epic theatre developed wholly independently of the A-effects as found in Chinese traditional theatre. "Die Experimente des neuen deutschen Theaters entwickelten den V-Effekt ganz und gar selbständig, es fand bisher keine Beeinflussung durch die asiatische Schauspielkunst statt" (22.1: 207). However, the validity of such a statement seems to be thrown into doubt by the analysis of commentators such as the ones cited above.
[18] It is up to the reader to keep in mind that Brecht's perception of Chinese theatre and culture is exactly

that—Brecht's subjective take on traditional Chinese theatre. As astute readers, we must be aware that Brecht's interpretation is the product of many impressions with varying degrees of reliability.
[19] Cited by Tatlow, *Mask of Evil*, 3.
[20] Wekwerth, Manfred, "Der gute Mensch 1976." *Brechts Guter Mensch von Sezuan,* ed. Jan Knopf (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982), 192-207. 199.
[21] Pavis, Patrice, "Introduction. Towards a Theory of Interculturalism in Theatre?" *The Intercultural Performance Reader,* ed. Patrice Pavis (London: Routledge, 1996), 1- 26. 6.
[22] Fuegi, John, *The Essential Brecht* (Los Angeles: Hennessy & Ingalls, 1972), 121.
[23] This weakens the play's original sense of social purpose as envisioned by Brecht. However, the transculturality of the play and its setting may be just as effective to achieving social reform—albeit through different and unintended means. Regardless, the suggestion that Brecht's theatre may achieve its intended effects of social reform via realistic or naturalistic theatre lies outside of the scope of this study.
[24] The city of Chicago and its inhabitants are the subject of plays including *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe, Im Dickicht der Städte,* and *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg der Arturo Ui*. For further information, see Grimm, Reinhold, "Bertolt Brecht's Chicago—A German Myth?" *Critical Essays on Bertolt Brecht,* ed. Siegfried Mews (Boston: GK Hall & Co., 1989), 223-35.
[25] Grimm, "Bertolt Brecht's Chicago—A German Myth?," 224.
[26] Ibid., 232.
[27] Ibid., 233.
[28] See Brecht's journal entries from January 25 and 26, 1941. Brecht, Bertolt, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe. Journale 1,* Band 26, 26: 460.
[29] Tatlow, *Mask of Evil*, 266-7.
[30] Brecht, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe. Journale 1.* Band 26, 26: 397. All punctuation and capitalization retained from the original.
[31] This dialectic between Chinese specificity and the evisceration of specificity may correspond objectively to the character of the world system, thereby achieving a different realism.
[32] This is corroborated by earlier sketches of *Mensch*. See Brecht, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe. Schriften 4,* Band 24, 24: 287-92.
[33] From this point forward I will be differentiating between Sichuan, the geopolitical entity, and Sezuan, Brecht's fictionalized Chinese setting, by referring to the former by its standardized *pinyin* spelling and to the latter by its original German spelling.
[34] Brecht, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe. Briefe 2,* Band 29, 29: 170-1.
[35] An article written by a *Times* correspondent in March 1940 highlighted the growing optimism in China in their war efforts against Japan, while threats of war between Japan and China had been reported upon in the *Times* as early as 1935. See Our Special Correspondent, "China Fights On," *Times* (London, England), 9 March 1940: 5; and Our Own Correspondent, "War-Cloud in the East," *Times* (London, England), 19 Nov 1935: 14. China was also mentioned in German newspapers of the time, such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Deutsche allgemeine Zeitung* out of Berlin. Tidings about the Sino-Japanese War were often reported in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* under the heading "Japanische Erwartungen und Absichten," while the *Deutsche allgemeine Zeitung* had its own Far East correspondent, Wilhelm Schulze, who, along with *DAZ* reporter Erich Wilberg, wrote not only about Japan's war efforts in China, but also more culturally specific articles about China during the same time period. See "Japanische Erwartungen und Absichten," *Frankfurter Zeitung* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany), 20 September 1939; Wilberg, Erich, "Das Jahr des Drachen," *Deutsche allgemeine Zeitung* (Berlin, Germany), 9 March 1940; Wilberg, Erich, "Chinesisches-Neujahr," *Deutsche allegemeine Zeitung* (Berlin, Germany), 28 March 1940; Schulze, Wilhelm, "Wang Ching-weis schwieriger Start," *Deutsche allgemeine Zeitung* (Berlin, Germany), 29 March 1940 and Schulze, Wilhelm, "Harbin: Stadt am Rande der Zivilisation," *Deutsche allgemeine Zeitung* (Berlin, Germany), 7 April 1940 as examples.
[36] Hutchings, Graham, *Modern China: A Guide to a Century of Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 382. All italics in the original.
[37] Here I have chosen to use the historical Wade-Giles romanization system, retaining the political party's own preferred spelling to the *pinyin* equivalent of Guomindang, or GMD. See also footnote 24

in Chapter 4.
[38] Li, Xiaobing, *History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 53-63.
[39] Articles written about Chinese Communists in Sichuan include Our Own Correspondent and Our Own Correspondent, "China's Internal Scourges," *Times* (London, England), 10 July 1933: 13; and Our Correspondent in China, "Red Provinces of China," *Times* (London, England), 22 March 1935: 17+.
[40] The edition of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* used in this study comes from Brecht, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*. *Stücke 6*, Band 6. 6: 175-279. All citations in *Mensch* come from this edition unless stated otherwise.
[41] Hayot, *Chinese Dreams,* 97-8.
[42] In order to understand another person or another culture's perspective, Clifford Geertz proposes that comprehension comes from putting aside one's frameworks and conceptions and "searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms…in terms of which, in each place, people actually [represent] themselves to themselves and to one another." See Geertz, Clifford, "'From the Native's Points of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 55-72. 58. Instead of trying to "think, feel, and perceive like a native" (56), or conversely, to maintain a maximally clinical and detached perspective in order to formulate abstractions from the situation, Geertz suggests that the role of the ethnographer in anthropological analysis should be to balance both concepts and "produce an interpretation of the way a people lives which is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons…nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence" (57).
[43] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 209.
[44] Confucius, *Li Chi: The Book of Rites*. Vol. II, trans. James Legge (New York: University Books, 1967), 89. For the original Chinese text, see http://ctext.org/liji?searchu=struck%20hammer#n60488, accessed 30 Nov 11.
[45] Tatlow, *Mask of Evil*, 267.
[46] The poem quoted by Shui Ta was originally translated by Brecht from Arthur Waley's English version of the poem into German as "Die Decke" in 1938, and later reworked into "Die große Decke." For the full text of the poem, which belongs to the set entitled "Chinesische Gedichte," see Brecht, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*. *Gedichte 1*, Band 11, 11: 257, 261. For a more detailed analysis of Brecht's Chinese poems, see Tatlow, Antony, *Brechts chinesische Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).
[47] Lenin's essay, originally published as a pamphlet in June 1920, warns the reader against the refusal by Left Communists to adapt, compromise or change as dictated by world revolution. Instead, Lenin advocates tactical flexibility in the face of new forms and content, and maintains that the initial ideological success of communism must be followed by a transitional stage whose objective is to lead the masses so that they are capable of carrying out the proletarian revolution. See Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. "'Left-wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder." *Collected Works*. Vol 31: April – December 1920, trans. Julius Katzer (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), 21-118.
[48] Kellner, Douglas, "Brecht's Marxist Aesthetic." *A Bertolt Brecht Reference Companion,* ed. Siegfried Mews (Westport, CN & London: Greenwood Press, 1997), 281-295. 289.
[49] Dauth, Ursula, "Chuanju Troupes." *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, ed. Edward L. Davis (London: Routledge, 2012), 202-3.
[50] Lu, Tao and Huang, Tiejun. "*Chuanju Dianshi Yishupian 'Sichuan Haoren'*." *Dianshi Lianhuanhua*, volume 6, 1989.
[51] *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* was subsequently used in China as the source material for a contemporary *chuanju* entitled *Hao Nüren, Huai Nüren* (*Good Woman, Bad Woman*), written by the contemporary Sichuan playwright Wei Minglun. Originally commissioned for the centennial commemoration of Brecht's birth, Wei Minglun's script was finished in 1998 but never produced. It finally premiered onstage in Chengdu in September 2001 and in Shanghai in October 2002. *Good Woman Bad Woman* kept many of the same characters from Brecht's original play, but drastically changed the story while maintaining the *chuanju* form of the first Chinese stage adaptation. For more regarding Wei's adaptation, see Ding, Yangzhong. "Jiejian yu Chuangxin. Xiandai Chuanju '*Hao Nüren, Huai Nüren*' yu Bushi '*Sichuan Haoren*' de Bijiao ji Qita." *Yishu Yanjiu* (2002): 30-3.

[52] Brandon, James R., "Other Shores in Asia. An Overview." *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia*, ed. Poonam Trivedi and Minami Ryuta (New York: Routledge, 2010), 21-40. 21.
[53] Huang, Alexander C.Y., *Chinese Shakespeares* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 16-7.
[54] Trivedi, Poonam, "Replaying Shakespeare in Asia. An Introduction." *Re-playing Shakespeare in Asia*, 1-8. 2.
[55] Ibid., 2.
[56] Chen, Xiaomei, *Occidentalism*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002), 2.
[57] Ibid., 44.
[58] Ibid., 44.
[59] Ibid., 44.
[60] Ibid., 45.
[61] Davis, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture,* 368.
[62] Hsia, Adrian, "The Reception of Bertolt Brecht in China and its Impact on Chinese Drama." *Brecht and East Asian Theatre,* 46-64. 58.
[63] Chen, Y., "The Beijing Production of *Life of Galileo*," 88-95. 89.
[64] Ibid., 91.
[65] Wichmann, Elizabeth, "Traditional Theater in Contemporary China." *Chinese Theater. From Its Origins to the Present Day,* ed. Colin Mackerras (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), 184-201. 195-6.
[66] Ding, "Brecht and his *Good Person of Sichuan*." *Xiju yu Dianying*. No. 4, 1980. 4-7.
[67] Ibid., 7.
[68] Alternatively, this brief mention of Brecht's political affiliation indirectly reflects a renewed freedom of intellectual thought encouraged during the early post-Mao period, as the hold of state ideology relaxed on different artistic and performative media.
[69] Ding, "Reflections on the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren*." *Xiju Zazhi,* Vol. 1 (1988): 47-50. Liu, Shaocong and Wu, Xiaofei, "To Develop Oneself in the Midst of Acceptance: on the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren*." *Xiju Zazhi,* Vol. 1 (1988): 51-3.
[70] The contradictions and tensions between Brecht's theoretical and aesthetic interpretation of Marxism is discussed in *Bertolt Brecht, Political Theory and Literary Practice*. Ed. Weber, Betty Nance and Hubert Heinen (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980). See in particular Fetscher, Iring. "Brecht and Politics." pp. 11-20 and Kellner, Douglas. "Brecht's Marxist Aesthetic. The Korsch Connection." pp. 29-42.
[71] For more regarding Brecht's stance towards Marxism during the 1940s, See: Mumford, Meg, *Bertolt Brecht* (London: Routledge, 2008), 28-37, and Auslander, Philip, "Boal, Blau, Brecht: The Body." *Playing Boal*, ed. by Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (London: Routledge, 1994), 124-33.
[72] Ding, "Reflections on the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren*."
[73] Ibid., 48.
[74] Ibid., 48.
[75] The use of foreign source material, to be performed in Chinese *xiqu* form, is not the only way in which Chinese theatre can continue to evolve in the present day. Liu Shaocong recognizes the modern *xiqu* operas such as *The Tears of the Mud Horse*, *Big Split Tree* and *Pan Jinlian* as examples of cross-cultural connections taking place in the opposite direction; that is, by "using modern people's perspectives to rationalize traditional *xiqu*, and make it into the so-called 'use the ancient for the present' meaning" (Liu, S. "On the adaptation of the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren*," 13).
[76] Liu and Wu, "To Develop Oneself in the Midst of Acceptance," 50.
[77] Ibid., 50.
[78] Ibid., 52.
[79] Wang, Xiaoying, "Concerning the 'non-sinicization' of the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren.*" *Xiju Zazhi.* Vol. 1 (1988): 53-5. 55.
[80] Dai, Jinhua. "Foreword." *Occidentalism* by Xiaomei Chen, xi-xxiii. xi.
[81] Yahuda, Michael, "The Changing Faces of Chinese Nationalism: The Dimensions of Statehood." *Asian Nationalisms*, ed. Leifer, Michael (London: Routledge, 2000), 21-37. 26.
[82] Ding, "On the Insatiable Appetite and Longevity of Theatre," 174.

[83] Chao, Shunbao, "Chengdu's Dramatic Society Glowingly Praises the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren*." *China Xiju*, Vol. 11 (1987).
[84] Yi, Kai, "Bravely Accepting Brecht's 'Challenges.' Looking back at the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren*." *Siqu Yanjiu Yuekan* (1987): 71-2. 71.
[85] Liu and Wu, "To Develop Oneself in the Midst of Acceptance," 52.
[86] As the English translation of *chou* is only roughly approximate to the character found in traditional Chinese theatre, I have elected to follow the conventions of other Chinese theatre scholars and have kept the Chinese word in its Romanized form in the remainder of the chapter.
[87] Thorpe, Ashley, *The Role of the* Chou *("Clown") in Traditional Chinese Drama* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 4.
[88] Scott, A.C., *The Classical Theatre of China*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 76-77. See also Thorpe, *The Role of the Chou*, 170-3.
[89] Wang, Jia, "The Booking Office Pledge of the *chuanju chou*."
[90] Old Wang the water-seller and one of the three gods were also styled as *chou* characters.
[91] Thorpe, Ashley, *The Role of the* Chou*,* 144.
[92] Yi, "Bravely Accepting Brecht's 'Challenges,'" 72.
[93] Ibid., 72.
[94] Wang, X., "Concerning the 'non-sinicization' of the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren*," 55.
[95] Ibid., 53.
[96] Ibid., 55.
[97] Ibid., 53.
[98] In Yi's article, "Bravely Accepting Brecht's 'Challenges,'" "[the *chuanju* artists] broke traditional models, and on the foundational elements of the abundant traditional skills found in *chuanju*, they constructed a new set of brand-new stage language and forms needed to accommodate Brechtian theatre's contemporary special points" (71). He concludes that the production "did not fail in opening *xiqu* form and skills to newly demonstrate and open a new lease on life on a new road" (72). Hui Min writes, "[t]he adapted text not only embodied Brecht's dramatic perspective, but it was also full of authentic color, and native feeling and emotion. Some people believe this adaptation is one of the most successful works that has in recent years come to Chinese *xiqu* via foreign works." Hui, Min, "The value of the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren* cannot be underestimated." *China Xiju*, Vol. 11 (1987).
[99] After Yi's initial assessment of the production, he continues, "[t]hese artistic handlings, some of them…may have seemed too heavy-handed or forced, and not natural enough or organic" ("Bravely Accepting Brecht's 'Challenges,'" 72). Yi's reservations are echoed by other commentators, who thought that the *chuanju* "'wasn't sufficiently in the *xiqu* style,'…[many people] thought that the background and the costumes weren't beautiful enough, that the performance rationale wasn't fine/meticulous enough, that [the production] lacked an intense, delightful expression of emotion and a splendid, unsurpassable technique, and that it did not succeed in further developing *chuanju*'s 'unique skills'" (Wang, X., "Concerning the 'non-sinicization' of the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren,*" 53). Others found the *chuanju* songs and melodies lacking in complexity, and criticized the brightly lit stage as overly restrictive. See "Summarizing the Symposium," *Xiju Zazhi*, Vol. 1 (1988): 57; and Hui, "The Value of the *chuanju Sichuan Haoren* Cannot Be Underestimated."
[100] For more detail, see Spence, Jonathan D. *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1990), and *China in the Era of Deng Xiaoping,* ed. Michael Ying-Mao Kau and Susan H. Marsh (New York: East Gate, 1993).
[101] Ding, "On the Insatiable Appetite and Longevity of Theatre," 174.
[102] Yi, "Bravely Accepting Brecht's 'Challenges,'" 71.

## Chapter Three

### Shades of Subversion: Kafka, Can Xue and the Great Wall of China

In a postcard to Felice Bauer written from Marienbad in the middle of May 1916, Franz Kafka states:

> Liebe Felice,
>
> der Brief war knapp nach der Ankunft während des wildesten Regens geschrieben, diese Karte kurz vor der Abfahrt. Karlsbad ist recht angenehm, aber Marienbad ist unbegreiflich schön. Ich hätte schon viel früher meinem Instinkt folgen sollen, der mir sagt, daß die Dicksten auch die Klügsten sind. Denn abmagern kann man überall auch ohne Quellenanbetung, aber in solchen Wäldern sich herumtreiben nur hier. Allerdings ist jetzt die Schönheit gesteigert durch die Stille und Leere und durch die Aufnahmsbereitschaft alles Belebten und Unbelebten; dagegen kaum beeinträchtigt durch das trübe, würdige Wetter. Ich denke, wenn ich ein Chinese wäre und gleich nach Hause fahren würde (im Grunde bin ich ja Chinese und fahre nachhause [*sic*]), müßte ich es doch bald erzwingen, wieder herzukommen. Wie würde es Dir gefallen!
>
> Herzlichst Franz[1]

This postcard, quoted here in its entirety, contains a curiously offhand remark in which Kafka identifies himself as "Chinese." Elias Canetti interprets Kafka's self-identification with a Chinese figure as an allusion to his interest in Daoism. Weiyan Meng, on the other hand, uses Kafka's identification with the Chinese figure as further evidence for his theory of the intrinsically "Chinese" qualities of Kafka's works. Meng further suggests that Kafka's assertion can be understood in conjunction with Kafka's sense of foreignness in the eyes of other Europeans.[2] These analyses avoid metaphorical readings of Kafka's identification as Chinese, and instead focus on

locating a deeper connection between Kafka and China. However, the readings rely on spiritual or physical affinities between Kafka and China to make their case. Their interpretations "Orientalize" Kafka by situating him on the side of the Chinese Other, and remain within the Orientalist rhetoric of difference. By doing so, they reinforce the dichotomy between the familiar, rational West and the exotic, mystical East.

Alternatively, and by venturing beyond the bounds of Orientalism, the reader can understand Kafka's acknowledgement of his Chinese nature as a deliberate transgression against Orientalist binaries such as East/West and Self/Other. In the postcard, Kafka utilizes language commonly associated with Orientalism to explore the implications of alluding to China from a non-Chinese perspective. The reader can see this especially in Kafka's parenthetical aside: "im Grunde bin ich ja Chinese und fahre nachhause." Here, Kafka replaces the hypothetical subjunctive in the previous sentence with an indicative statement. By asserting that he is indeed Chinese, Kafka creates a moment of disjuncture by distinguishing between what it means to be Chinese versus what it means to liken oneself to being Chinese. This raises a subtle question with respect to the politics of identity: what does it mean to identify *with* another, as opposed to identifying *as* another? Highlighting this difference through his choice of syntax, Kafka forces the reader to reassess the opposition between Self and Other by intentionally collapsing the space between the two. He also further subverts the typical Orientalist framework by inverting the traditional subject/object positioning of East and West. Kafka's self-identification as a homeward-bound Chinese figure engages with Orientalist tropes while challenging the underlying binary structure of Orientalism.

**China and Kafka's Short Stories**

Kafka's ongoing preoccupation with China continues to find expression throughout his life,[3] especially in the form of his "Chinese" narratives.[4] Written in March of 1917, "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer," Kafka's longest Chinese text, was not published until 1931 by Max Brod.[5] The short story originally in appeared in a collection also entitled *Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer*. Two other posthumously published texts, "Die Truppenaufhebung" and "Die Abweisung," are situated in ancient China as well. During Kafka's lifetime, "Ein altes Blatt" and the parable "Eine kaiserliche Botschaft" (which was included in its entirety in "Mauer") were both published in his 1919 collection *Ein Landarzt*.[6] Kafka's depictions of China, its people and its culture neither reflect a dichotomous relationship to the West nor appear ideologically motivated by assertions of Western superiority. Instead, Kafka's *Chinabilder* introduce the possibility of thinking about China in ways that fall outside of the scope of Orientalism. Through points of ambiguity such as those identified in his postcard to Felice, Kafka's later writings on China continue to challenge the reader's preconceived notions about China and question the validity of Orientalist discourse as a means of understanding the East.

Kafka's "Mauer" and "Ein altes Blatt" exemplify Kafka's preoccupation with China. However, critics often disregard specifically Chinese elements such as the Wall in favor of its symbolic value.[7] Many interpretations view the construct of ancient China in Kafka's works as a way to address issues that appear throughout Kafka's other writings, such as unity, nation and identity. Some commentators have

interpreted the Wall and ancient China as indicative of Kafka's interest in Judaism.[8] While these commentators acknowledge China and the Wall as integral to Kafka's "Mauer," they view the Chinese setting as an allegorical statement grounded in Kafka's personal interests in Judaism and Zionism, or based on the parallels between ancient Chinese and Jewish history. Other commentators understand Kafka's Wall and its construction in an abstractly metaphysical manner, which also fails to take into account the full implications of the narrative's Chinese content.[9] These readings illuminate aspects of Kafka's Chinese writings through allegorical, metaphorical and anti-realist modalities. By doing so, however, these interpretations also subsume Kafka's Chinese short stories under the aegis of Kafka's entire oeuvre. They empty the texts of their specific Chinese referentiality and dismiss the importance of China to the works themselves.

**The "Chineseness" of Kafka's Chinese Narratives**

In *Constructing China: Kafka's Orientalist Discourse*, Rolf J. Goebel suggests that Kafka's narrative construction of China should be resituated in the field of Orientalism; that is, Kafka's version of China should be examined with reference to its specific engagement with China in terms of alterity and otherness. According to Goebel, "Kafka weaves numerous references to China into some of his most fascinating texts…in order to critique the Western project of representing the Orient."[10] By playing with the images, concepts and motifs found in Western discourse about China, Kafka produces texts that engage and subvert Orientalist

discourse in a self-conscious and self-aware manner.[11] Agreeing with Goebel, Robert Lemon also proposes that Kafka's use of China in his texts indicates a self-critical awareness of Western Orientalist discourse. Lemon suggests that Kafka's portrayal of the Orient subverts and parodies Orientalist claims of superiority and of comprehending the Eastern Other. He further argues that Kafka challenges the received notions of Self and Other, which form the basis of Orientalist discourse.[12] Unlike Goebel, who relates Kafka's Chinese narratives to contemporary Chinese history and politics, Lemon proposes that Kafka's Chinese texts refer extradiegetically to the state of the Habsburg Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century.[13] However, Lemon avoids establishing a direct parallel between the ancient Chinese and contemporary Austro-Hungarian empires on the basis of their monarchical ruling systems. Instead, he understands Kafka's critique of Orientalism and the dichotomy between East and West as commentary on similarly divisive separations within the bounds of the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself.

Both Goebel and Lemon focus on the specific materiality of Kafka's Chinese references. This study follows and expands upon their approaches, and examines how Chinese tropes take on new meanings and interpretations in Kafka's texts.[14] Although we are accustomed to reading Kafka's narratives in allegorical or anti-realist modalities, Kafka's focus on China can also be partially understood as a statement about China. In these writings, Kafka's interest in China exists side-by-side with his textual exploration of themes such as identity, nation, unity and the concept of home in the modern era. The Chinese motifs that Kafka utilizes in his narratives are drawn from the shifting images, perceptions and concepts generated during centuries of

contact between Europe and China. However, his implementation of common Chinese themes is far from reductive. The confusing and frequently contradictory portrayals of China, its people and its culture seem to intentionally obfuscate the reader's ability to formulate or perceive Orientalist distinctions between East and West. Indeed, Kafka's writings serve as a deliberate anti-Orientalist response to Orientalism. His Chinese narratives reflectively and metadiscursively comment upon the way in which China is represented in Orientalist texts, unraveling Western discourse about the East while remaining within the confines of the selfsame discursive genre.

**The Great Wall(s) of China: History and Mythology**

The history surrounding the architectural Great Wall(s) of China, which cannot be separated from its legendary qualities, offers intriguing complexity to the fictional Great Wall of China as found in Kafka's "Mauer." The remains of the physical Wall still visible today were constructed during the Ming Dynasty (1386-1644 AD). The Ming Dynasty structure, however, is far from being the first "Great Wall" of China. Instead, theories regarding the origin of the Great Wall of China trace its construction as far back as the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC), if not further.[15] Common knowledge of the Great Wall of China combines the visual elements of the Ming Dynasty Wall, whose ruins we see today, with the historical connotations of the Wall built under the command of Qin Shi Huang, the First Emperor of China.[16] In the West, serious and popular historians continued to propagate misconceptions of the Wall as a symbol of

two thousand years of unified Chinese history and power well throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[17] To this day, the Great Wall of China remains a subject that is both historically and archaeologically under investigation. The lack of a definitive account of the Wall is due partially to the paucity of concrete evidence and specific information in Chinese documents regarding the structure(s), and partially due to "the existence of a large body of misinformation and unreliable analysis found in the substantial popular literature about the Wall, which continues to confuse scholars and ordinary people alike."[18]

In Kafka's time as well as in the present day, the Wall continues to appear in popular imagination and scholarly literature as a mixture of fact and fiction, and serves as an important signifier for China in historical, mythical, cultural and political terms.[19] Of course, the historical Wall and the emperor Qin Shi Huang should not be conflated with Kafka's Wall or his fictitious emperor. Still, the historical contextualization of the Great Wall of China illuminates possible reasons why the Wall represented an attractive topic for Kafka's short story. Kafka acknowledged and embraced the interplay of fact and fiction that inevitably appeared in the process of constructing China in his texts. The Wall, problematically difficult to separate into its mythical and factual components, serves as a fitting cipher in Kafka's longest Chinese narrative.

**Dittmar's Wall vs. Kafka's Wall**

According to John Zilcosky, Kafka was an avid fan of the popular literature series *Schaffsteins Grüne Bändchen*.[20] Published as Volume 24 of this series, Julius Dittmar's *Im neuen China* appeared in 1912. Commentators including Meng and Bender have specifically cited *Im neuen China*, along with Hans Heilmann's 1905 collection entitled *Chinesische Lyrik vom 12. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis zur Gegenwart*, as a probable basis of information for Kafka's "Mauer."[21] Additionally, Goebel refers to *Im neuen China* as an example of contemporary and more typically homogeneous Orientalist discourse against which Kafka's "Mauer" is written.[22] This study utilizes Dittmar's account as a possible source of material for constructing Kafka's China. Furthermore, Dittmar's travelogue offers a popular perspective on China in early twentieth century Europe, and contrasts in tone, manner and intent with Kafka's own writings on the subject.

In Dittmar's *Im neuen China*, the author, who traveled around China in 1910 for approximately six months, recounts his experiences in northern and southern China near the end of the Qing Dynasty.[23] Dittmar mentions the Great Wall of China for the first time as he and his fellow travelers are on their way to the city of Tianjin. Writing for a German-speaking audience, Dittmar briefly clarifies the distinction between the "original" Great Wall of the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC) and the "current" Great Wall of the Ming Dynasty (1386-1644). His explanation corroborates the brief historical sketch of the Wall outlined above. It also indicates that although the general Western impression of the Wall at the turn of the twentieth century may have been of a single,

monolithic and two-thousand-year-old structure, more accurate information about the Wall's many historical iterations was nevertheless available in Europe at the time.

The Ming Dynasty Wall was designed to prevent the invasion of the Manchus and Mongols from the north. When the Manchus eventually succeeded in invading China in 1644, thereby ending the Ming Dynasty and establishing the Qing Dynasty, they relocated the capital city to Beijing, just south of the Great Wall, and continued to expand their territory northwards to incorporate portions of Manchuria and Mongolia. The Wall became obsolete as a defensive barrier at that time.[24] This fact is not lost on Dittmar, who compares the Great Wall of China, in both its ruination and its obsolescence, to the remains of the medieval castles scattered along the Rhine River in Germany: "[H]eute ist [das Bauwerk] nur noch eine Ruine wie bei uns die Ritterburgen am Rhein."[25] Dittmar's description of the Wall "Germanizes" the ancient Chinese structure, and allows his Western readers to envision the Great Wall of China in more familiar architectural terms. It also downplays the historical significance of the Wall by contextualizing it within medieval European history. Its perceived uselessness as described by Dittmar corresponds to Herder's notion of the Chinese empire as "eine balsamirte Mumie, mit Hieroglyphen bemahlt und mit Seide umwunden."[26] Dittmar's description of the Wall can thus be seen as reflecting and supporting German colonialist ideology of the time.

However, commentators such as Russell A. Berman have objected to understanding European travelers' experiences purely within the constraints of epistemological frameworks postulated by some discourse theories or accounts of Orientalism. Instead, Berman proposes that "real travel through space and the

encounter with foreign cultures and society certainly has the potential to elicit qualitatively new experiences,"[27] and suggests that there are multiple ways to understand the traveler's experience of space and alterity. Considered in this manner, Dittmar's comparison of the Wall to medieval German ruins shortens the distance between Dittmar as a representative of the West and the native Chinese inhabitants. The Chinese, with their obsolete Wall, are just like "us," the Europeans, with our obsolete castles. Another similarity resides in the constantly changing nature of the architecture as symbols of Chinese or German national identity. Although both the castles and the Wall had practical purposes in the past, they now serve as physical markers of a bygone era and as a memorial to the people who built them. Furthermore, their significance changes to fit the needs and sentiments of the time. Interpreted through the lens of cultural openness and curiosity, Dittmar's assertion provides a moment of ambiguity in the constructed binary of East and West, and destabilizes the notion of a purely Eurocentric or colonialist perspective in *Im neuen China*.[28]

**Us vs. Them**

In his travelogue, Dittmar occasionally compares China to Europe in ways that challenge the conventional Orientalist claims of the time. Kafka, on the other hand, is much more forceful in exposing the tensions created by the juxtaposition of China and the West. In "Mauer," Kafka's formulation of "us" and "them" intentionally disrupts the Orientalist tropes of Self and Other commonly used to bolster European imperialist

ideology. Displacing the subject into a sinicized context, the shifting layers of perception undermine any sense of unity within a self-identified "us" as it stands in opposition to a similarly established "them." The fluctuating subject/object dichotomy questions the validity of binary relationships, especially within an Orientalist structure.

In Kafka's story, the first person plural is originally used by the Chinese narrator to refer to "wir Chinesen" (*NS* 348), in opposition to the northern barbarians, or "die Nordvölker" (*NS* 347). This demarcates the Chinese from the non-Chinese. However, this location-based distinction changes throughout the text. The narrator reveals, "[i]ch stamme aus dem südöstlichen China. Kein Nordvolk kann uns dort bedrohn (*sic*). Wir lesen von [den Nordvölkern] in den Büchern den Altern…" (*NS* 347) Originally from southeastern China, the narrator uses the pronoun "we" to refer specifically to the southerners. This divides the area originally inhabited by "us," the Chinese people, into "we," the southerners, and "they," the northerners. This distinction simultaneously complicates the specificity of the northerners, as it is unclear whether "die Nordländer" (*NS* 347) refers to the northern Chinese people, the northern nomads, or both. To further restrict the field of "us," the narrator also narrowly identifies his village compatriots. Those "von meiner Heimat" (*NS* 349) constitute who "we" are, and consequently relegates everyone else, including those in the next village or province, to the status of outsiders, or "them." Alternatively, the pronoun "we" is invoked to refer to those involved in the actual construction process of the Wall, also known as "selbst wir die Erbauer" (*NS* 339). In a professional sense, the pronoun "we" serves to distinguish between those who are familiar with the plans and concept of the leadership, and those who believe that the Wall is an imperial edict,

which stems from the emperor. Lastly, "we" can also be understood as a generational distinction. Shifting temporally, the narrator recalls building walls during his childhood. In this instance, "wir als kleine Kinder" (*NS* 340) refers to the narrator and the rest of his schoolmates, who are given their first lesson in the dangers of an unstable foundation by their teacher. In this instance, the children are portrayed as a group, in contrast to the authoritative figure of their teacher.

Kafka's story, narrated by a Chinese protagonist, invites the reader to see the world through an ostensibly Chinese perspective. Through the narrator, the reader is drawn into "our" world, which alternately includes the Chinese people as a whole, the southerners, the villagers, the builders, or the children. This world is contrasted against "their" world; that is, the world of everyone else. The protagonist's oscillating sense of identity, taken in the context of the story, introduces problems inherent in the organization of Orientalist binary relationships. His preoccupation with "us" and "them" should not be understood merely as an allegorical approach to issues of self- and collective identity. Instead, the main character's shifting conceptions regarding who "I" am, who "we" are, and consequently who "they" are, question the validity of the Western Self and the Eastern Other dichotomy typically found in Orientalist discourse. Establishing a Chinese Self against various Chinese "Others," Kafka's narrative also establishes an external reading audience that consists of non-Chinese, presumably Western Others. Uncoupling conventional East/West binaries, "Mauer" deliberately subverts normative Orientalist practices, and sets the narrative stage for a deeper engagement with China.

**Images of China**

Kafka's China conjures up an image of a vast and never-ending land. His depiction of the country is corroborated by Dittmar's written observations and experiences in *Im neuen China*. Dittmar's journey begins in Manuchuria, located in the far north of China and under heavy Japanese influence at the time. He describes the idyllic beauty of the mountains, valleys, forests, mountain streams and plains of the Manchurian countryside in contrast to the filthy, walled city of Mukden (present-day Shenyang).[29] Traveling through the northern Chinese cities of Tianjin and the capital Beijing, Dittmar makes stops in centrally located cities such as Qingdao and Shanghai, before continuing south to Hong Kong and Guangdong. Dittmar's detailed descriptions create a view of China that is both staggeringly large and heavily varied. The expanse and the variety of the land and its people are summarized in his impressions of Guangdong, referred to as Kanton in his travels:

> "Welch seltsame Stadt und welch seltsames Volk! Das war nicht mehr das China der nördlichen Ebene, das China der schroffen Abgeschiedenheit, der kalten Nüchternheit. Hier floß das Blut heiß durch die Adern der Zopfträger, hier war ihr Leben voll Farbe und Klang, hier waren sie Söhne des Südens, die der sonnigen Welt glichen, in der sie wohnten."[30]

In the same way that Dittmar likens the Wall to medieval European ruins, much of Dittmar's China is subsumed under a Western perspective. Nevertheless, it is sometimes possible to interpret his observations in ways that demonstrate a decrease in the gap between China and the West. Contradictorily, the Chinese people described in Dittmar's account are often depicted in exoticized terms, effectively distancing the European reader from the Chinese Other. Although Dittmar wavers between what

Goebel calls "interpretive skepticism" and "orientalist rhetoric,"[31] *Im neuen China* seems to ultimately support Lowe's formulation of Orientalist discourse as a heterogeneous field, complete with unresolved and contradictory depictions of the East.

Dittmar's elaborate depictions of China and its people differ greatly from Kafka's vague portrayals. However, each method sparks different ways to perceive the country in its expansiveness. In stark opposition to Dittmar, Kafka's text refutes Orientalist representation through its lack of specificity. "Mauer" presents very few distinct features regarding the land or its people. The fragments of the Wall are referred to as "[d]iese in öder Gegend verlassen stehenden Mauerteile" (*NS* 338). This description of the Wall emphasizes the distance and the loneliness involved in traveling to far-flung locations across the country for the purpose of building unconnected fragments of the structure. Kafka's sparse descriptions contribute to an image of China that seems to stretch on forever in its desolation, as opposed to in its endless variety. Kafka's abstraction of China counters Dittmar's detailed depiction through its written style and its unstated implications. Compelling the reader to "see" China as a blank slate, Kafka's narrative encourages the reader to reflect upon different textual constructs of China, and how they influence the reader's perception of the land, its people and its culture. Kafka's descriptions problematize binary oppositions traditionally assumed to be part of the fixed, underlying structure of Western discourse about China. His deliberate avoidance of specific sights and sounds allows the reader to imagine China in a new space that exists outside of the

confines of an Orientalist gaze. The narrative speaks out against Orientalism through its descriptive silence.

## The Piecemeal Construction Process as Critique of Orientalist Discourse

In his analysis of "Mauer," Goebel demonstrates how the Chinese protagonist, versed in Western methodologies of science and historiography, is unable to maintain a consistent stance towards his own culture.[32] Through the figure of the narrator, Goebels suggests that Kafka highlights the indecipherability of the Orient as a subject matter, and questions one's ability to fully understand it from either a "native" point of view or an outsider's perspective. Goebel's argument can be further expanded through an analysis of the narrator's depiction of the Wall and his investigation of its fragmentary construction method. The difficulties that the Chinese narrator encounters in comprehending and explaining the Wall reflect the problems that Kafka experiences in his attempt to write about and understand China as a cultural site. In other words, the struggles that the Chinese narrator undergoes when attempting to talk coherently about the Wall and its construction mirror the difficulties that Kafka encounters metadiscursively while writing about China. The narrator's discussion about the Wall inscribes problems of understanding directly onto the text, and challenges the ability of Orientalist discourse to make China or aspects of Chinese culture comprehensible.

Wholly Kafka's invention, the Wall in Kafka's narrative is built in sections. Two portions of the structure, five hundred meters' length apiece, are started from

opposite ends and unified after a construction period of approximately five years. This leaves many holes, "die erst nach und nach langsam ausgefüllt wurden, manche sogar erst nachdem der Mauerbau schon als vollendet verkündigt worden war" (*NS* 338). The gaps are a self-evident part of the Wall, perhaps as natural as the completed sections themselves. The fact that some of the spaces are filled in only after the Wall has been deemed complete indicates the secondary importance attributed to the Wall as a single, expansive and unbroken structure.

On a textual level, the nonchalant treatment of gaps in the site supports an analysis of the Wall as a unifying endeavor, as opposed to a protective barrier. However, as the narrator remarks, the implementation of piecewise construction as a method to increase sentiments of unity and brotherhood amongst the Chinese people is only one way in which "das System des Teilbaues [wird] verständlich; aber es hatte doch wohl noch andere Gründe" (*NS* 342). The allusion to "andere Gründe" may refer to extradiegetic explanations for the piecemeal method of construction. Metatexually, the narrator's attempt to understand the Wall and its fragmentary method of construction alludes to the difficulty in comprehending China as it has been constructed in Western discourse. This further underscores the importance of China to the narrative. Treating the Wall as a metonym for China, the narrator's statement suggests that the West discursively builds knowledge about China in a similarly piecemeal method, and that any attempt to explain the rationale behind this technique will also fall short.

According to the protagonist, the system of piecewise construction is "eine "Kernfrage des ganzen Mauerbaues" (*NS* 342). He maintains, "[w]ill ich den

Gedanken und die Erlebnisse jener Zeit vermitteln und begreiflich machen, kann ich gerade dieser Frage nicht tief genug nachbohren" (*NS* 342). The Chinese narrator believes that comprehending the fragmented building process will allow him to better understand the thoughts and actions of his people at that time. Although the narrator is intent on further probing the implications of the Wall's method of construction and its resultant structure, he is eventually forced to acknowledge the limitations of his investigation. "Die Grenzen, die meine Denkfähigkeit mir setzt, sind ja eng genug, das Gebiet aber, das hier zu durchlaufen wäre, ist das Endlose" (*NS* 346). The narrator's language links his struggle to understand the building process of the Wall to his earlier description of China's geographical breadth. His inability to grasp the reasoning behind fragmentary construction is couched in terms of "Grenzen," or physical boundaries, which can be contextually related to the Wall as a physical structure. Like the Wall that delineates China from the northern border territories, the boundaries that the protagonist refers to demarcate his own particular ability to understand the fragmentary construction method of the Wall from the vast region of possible explanations for it, which is situated beyond those limits. This area of potentially boundless knowledge is referred to as "das Endlose," and is strongly reminiscent of the narrator's earlier description of "das unendliche China" (*NS* 342).

In this particular passage, Kafka's narrator attempts to come to terms with the construction process used to erect the Great Wall of China. He specifically seeks to make sense of an aspect of Chinese culture as it has been constructed in the story. His inability to do so, along with the ambiguousness of the text's resolution regarding the issue of piecewise building, echoes the difficulty in achieving similar clarity about

China through its portrayal in Orientalist discourse. The endless field of knowledge alluded to by Kafka's "unendliche China" can be likened to the infinite ways in which China can be constructed, interpreted and understood in European writing. With an indecipherable Wall and construction method as its central image, the narrative demonstrates the power of Orientalist discourse to form and shape popular conceptions about China in Europe.

Kafka's Wall, like the Western understanding of China, is an inevitable combination of fact and fiction. The inability of the narrator to work through the Great Wall of China as a meaningful object in the text reflects the struggles faced by Kafka, who utilizes his Chinese narratives to work through the chasm created by the construct of China in European literature and its actual geopolitical and historical referent. In "Mauer," the opacity of the Wall and its construction method further demonstrate Kafka's awareness of the problems in writing about China. The spaces in his Wall enable anti-Orientalist readings, and allow the text to comment critically upon Orientalism while perceptually remaining within the discourse.

### "Ein altes Blatt"

An inversion of perspective regarding the typical subject and object positions in Orientalist discourse can also be seen in Kafka's short story, "Ein altes Blatt." Originally entitled "Ein altes Blatt aus China,"[33] this narrative, written around the same time as "Mauer," provides the reader with another account of the relationship between the Chinese inhabitants and the northern nomadic invaders. Told from the

viewpoint of a Chinese shoemaker, the non-Chinese foreigners find themselves the object of the Chinese gaze. Like the perspective utilized in "Mauer," this position reverses the standard practice of seeing Chinese people through a Western lens, while illustrating that similar problems in perception remain. Re-employing images, tropes and concepts commonly associated with Orientalist discourse in their inverted and parodied forms, Kafka's "Blatt" questions the cost of self-identification at the expense of others by exaggerating the divide between the Chinese inhabitants and the foreign barbarians. Furthermore, Kafka's "Blatt" specifically addresses the subject of China in Western writings, which can be demonstrated by focusing specifically on the linguistic differences discussed in the narrative.

As understood from the Chinese narrator's point of view, the foreign invaders are unable to comprehend the Chinese villagers. This is due to the inherent linguistic deficiencies ascribed to the barbarians, as opposed to the unintelligibility of the Chinese language. The northern invaders, who communicate only in bird-like sounds, assume the role often attributed to the Chinese Other in Orientalist discourse. "Unsere Sprache kennen [die Nomaden] nicht, ja sie haben kaum eine eigene. Unter einander verständigen sie sich ähnlich wie Dohlen…Infolgedessen zeigen sie sich auch gegen jede Zeichensprache ablehnend" (*DL* 264-5). The barbarians are not only incomprehensible, but according to the Chinese narrator in "Blatt," they barely even possess language in the first place. The narrative displays a clear Chinese subjectivity, and treats the foreign opposition in a detached and objectified manner.

The connection between the northern nomads in Kafka's short story and the Western imperialists in the geopolitical entity of China at the time is made clearer through linguistic markers left in the text itself. Kafka's authorial voice is not completely detached from the "voice" of the dehumanized foreign intruders, and is alluded to in the reference to the "Dohlen" cited above. *Dohle*, which means jackdaw in English, is *kavka* in Czech. Thus, writing about *Dohlen* can be seen as a way for Kafka to insert his own name into the story and associate himself with the invaders, both real and imagined. Goebel suggests that Kafka employs this method as a form of self-parody, in order to reconcile his objections towards Orientalist discourse with his self-awareness of simultaneously contributing to the genre.[34] Kafka, conscious of the problems that one may encounter when writing about China, is also cognizant of his own inability to escape those problems. Unable to avoid writing or being read in the vein of Orientalist discourse, Kafka takes the opposite approach. He deliberately acknowledges the situation in the form of a narrative trace, which appears during a moment of linguistic breakdown in the text and serves as a metadiscursive comment on the confines of language in written discourse.

The northern antagonists are depicted in such a way that the reader necessarily relates to the Chinese protagonists: the northerners have no discernible language, and are portrayed as animalistic savages who grimace wildly and eagerly devour raw flesh. Moreover, the reader's identification with the Chinese inhabitants also delineates the reader from the nomads, while simultaneously establishing an uncomfortable parallel between the fictitious barbarians from the north and the very real imperialist forces coming into China from the west. Taking the perspective of the native inhabitants as

opposed to the attackers, Kafka's narrative subverts the typical Orientalist position of seeing the East through Western eyes. In addition, the exaggeratedly bestial portrayal of the wild and unintelligible northerners also alerts the reader to the artificiality of Kafka's China as it is established in opposition to the barbarians. Through its unconventional depictions of China and not-China, Kafka's text encourages the reader to reflect upon the agenda and ramifications of Orientalist discourse, especially as it pertains to various European constructs of China—including his own. "Blatt" speaks out against the imperialist aspirations of the West while simultaneously parodying the Orientalist representations of Chinese inhabitants used to justify those aims.

**The Significance of China in Kafka's works**

The ambiguity found in both "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer" and "Ein altes Blatt" is characteristic of Kafka's late works, distinguished by Stanley Corngold and Martin Greenberg as "'thought' stories rather than 'dream' stories, the reflections of a narrator absorbed in exquisitely refined 'research.'"[35] Employing "chiastic recursion,"[36] Kafka's late narratives and aphorisms are written in such a way that the final concluding statement or action—the one that resolves the contradictions in everything that came beforehand—is perpetually postponed. In "Mauer," the reason behind piecemeal construction is neither satisfactorily sought out nor answered; the imperial message never reaches its recipient; and the continued existence of the Wall is shown to be dependent on the nomads against whom it is meant to defend. In "Blatt," the uneasy co-existence of the Chinese villagers with the northern barbarians

seems destined to last indefinitely, without any indication of recognition from the imperial court. By writing through instances of recursion in his texts, Kafka “achieves a power that has something to do with the *truth*.”[37] In both of the short stories discussed in this chapter, the truth of the situation can be interpreted as Kafka’s acknowledgment of the inability to achieve a perfect understanding of his subject matter; that is, a “whole,” complete understanding of China. The act of writing gives Kafka the chance to express this knowledge through textual means. In stories such as “Mauer” and “Blatt,” writing through the construct of China and exposing its contradictory nature enables Kafka to illustrate how a conception of China can be sought out but never attained through the framework of Orientalism.

Kafka takes images and ideas of China that existed in the popular European imagination of the early twentieth century, and imbues them with new conflicting implications and meanings. Due in part to the inconsistencies and irresolvable paradoxes found in Kafka’s Chinese narratives, these writings fit broadly within the realm of his “thought texts.” However, this particular subset of texts is concerned specifically with thinking through various constructs of China, and cannot be discussed without examining their distinctively Chinese aspects. Written from the perspective of self-identified Chinese figures, Kafka’s postcard and short stories challenge the reader to reconsider how preconceived notions of identity, nation and culture can generate faulty or incomplete knowledge about China in the West. Instead of denying the influence of Orientalism on his own writings, Kafka actively utilizes Orientalist discourse to expose and critically address its problems. Anti-Orientalist in nature, Kafka’s writings on China dismantle the structural framework of existing

Orientalist discourse by deliberately challenging its ideological motivations and conventional representations of the East.

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**Kafka, Can Xue and "Building in Sections: The Artist's Way of Life"**

Can Xue is the pen name for Deng Xiaohua, who was officially recognized as a professional writer by the Chinese government in 1988. Her pseudonym means "the dirty snow that refuses to melt."[38] Born in 1953 in Changsha City, Hunan province, China, Can Xue's parents were condemned as ultra-rightists during the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957. In 1959, her entire family moved to the foot of Yueyu mountain, living there in extreme poverty and hardship until 1966. Can Xue's family did not fare better under the Cultural Revolution. Instead, both parents were sent away for labor reform and her siblings were sent down to the countryside. Can Xue, who had completed primary school by the outset of the Cultural Revolution, was unable to continue her education and instead found work as an ironworker and an assembler, living alone in an assigned room in the city. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Can Xue and her husband became self-employed tailors in 1980. She began writing three years later.[39] Since then, Can Xue has written numerous short stories, novels and books of commentary on authors such as Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Bruno Schultz, Goethe and Dante.

In 1999, Can Xue published a book of commentary on Kafka entitled *Understanding Kafka: The Castle of the Soul*. Included within the commentaries is an essay written in 1997 on Kafka's "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer" called "Building in Sections: the Artist's Way of Life."[40] "Building in Sections" offers a unique modern-day perspective on Kafka in addition to the Great Wall of China. Highly allegorical, her interpretation says as much about her own writing style and philosophy as it does about Kafka's original narrative. However, Can Xue's essay, like Kafka's text, utilizes and subverts the dominant discourse of its day. This holds true even given Can Xue's assertions of the non-political and inward-facing nature of her works, and makes the similarities between Kafka's deliberate anti-Orientalism and Can Xue's refusal of any ideological agenda all the more striking.

Through her construction of the Wall, Can Xue's "literary recreation"[41] problematizes issues of Chinese identity and nationalism in late twentieth-century China. While Kafka's narrative responds to the prevailing Orientalist discourse about China at the time, Can Xue's commentary provides an alternative to state-sponsored Chinese rhetoric about the Wall. Each author's work complicates the reader's comprehension of the Wall as a representative symbol of China. By doing so, both texts address issues of self-identity, unity, nation, and the effects of intercultural exchange. These notions surface in Can Xue's writing in other ways as well. On a metatextual level, "Building in Sections" echoes greater social, political and economic concerns regarding modernization, Westernization, and the struggles to establish Chinese national identity in late twentieth-century China.

**Can Xue, Politics and the "Real"**

In an interview conducted by Laura McCandlish in 2002, Can Xue claims, "There's no political cause in my work. In my younger days, I believed that if you wanted to change the world, you must change your soul first…Through [my first work] *Yellow Mud Street*, I realized my real purpose to write literature of the individual."[42] In the same interview, Can Xue also expresses her concern at being misunderstood as a sociopolitical writer, especially in translation.[43] Instead, she considers her writing "literature of the soul," which is unconcerned with and disinterested in the external world. In a different interview with Jonathan Griffith in 2010, Can Xue explains, "[t]he works don't want to tell realistic stories. Their stories are the ones about souls, humanity, and writing itself. They are full of exploring spirit, and their reading requires great initiative on the part of readers."[44] Although Can Xue is explicitly referring to her fictional works, these statements hold true for her essays and commentaries as well. "Building in Sections" interprets the building process as a metaphor for the artistic process of creation. Her reading resituates the Wall firmly within "a beautiful soul world that is much more important than the realistic world."[45]

Despite her intentions, however, Can Xue cannot fully disentangle her literary Wall from its external referents. Asked about how her writing connects to other aspects of Chinese culture, Can Xue responds, "…Chinese culture comes from my heart. I was born here. I live here, so I don't need to consciously learn what comes from my heart."[46] Can Xue's interpretation of the Wall is partially based on Kafka's narrative, but it also draws on her knowledge of the Wall's significance to China and

Chinese culture. Her essay, written in Chinese and intended for a Chinese audience, cannot avoid evoking modern Chinese associations of the Wall. The cultural, historical and political associations of the "real" Wall incorporate themselves into Can Xue's literary construct of the Wall, and vice versa. Unable to completely eliminate sociopolitical connotations from her writing, Can Xue's essay interacts with the continually evolving understanding of the Wall as a symbol of national Chinese identity and culture.

**The Wall in Twentieth-century China**

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the Wall was primarily looked upon with indifference by the Chinese people—an observation that Westerners such as Macartney and his colleagues remarked upon with surprise in journal entries written as early as 1793.[47] While the late eighteenth century brought the West first-hand accounts of the Wall as a symbol of majesty, wonder and awe, the Chinese people did not regard the barrier in a similar fashion until after the founding of Republican China in 1911. Sun Yat-sen's 1918 *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary: A Program of National Reconstruction for China* is the first instance of a modern Chinese text that celebrates the Wall's accomplishments over its costs.[48] Following the popular Western understanding of the Wall, Sun encouraged the Chinese people to perceive the structure as a source of national pride and the embodiment of an ancient Chinese spirit.[49] In 1935, Mao Zedong wrote the poem "Mount Liupan," which contains the often-quoted line, "If you do not reach the Great Wall, you are not a real man."[50]

Written during the Long March, the Red Army was headed towards Yan'an in northwest China at the time, making Mao's reference to the Wall purely metaphorical. In the context of the poem, the Wall appears as a proverbial barrier for the Red Army to overcome. At the same time, the Wall also represents a unifying symbol of hope, from which the members of the Red Army could draw encouragement as they continued to march onwards together. The symbolic importance of the Wall to the Chinese people continued to increase during the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-1945. It was celebrated through verse and song, and recognized not only as a unifying intra-national structure, but also as a patriotic symbol of Chinese defiance and strength against Japanese imperialism.

Following the end of the war and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chinese discourse about the Wall gradually shifted from an idealized image of national resistance to a proud emblem of the People's Republic of China. This has been aided by the repair and reconstruction of selected portions of the Wall, an ongoing project first proposed by Guo Moruo in 1953. Originally envisioned as an excursion for foreign dignitaries visiting Beijing, these heavily reconstructed areas of the Wall have since become one of China's greatest domestic and international tourist attractions.[51] In contemporary China, the Wall has continued to undergo further transformation, appearing as a brand name for products and corporations ranging from cigarettes to life insurance. Since 1988 (but backdated to 1980), the image of the Wall has been featured on the back of China's one *yuan* note.[52] It also appears on passport visas issued to international travelers to China. Commodification and commercialization of the Wall in the post-Mao era has gradually transformed the

structure from a symbol of national, state-endorsed pride into one that exerts global influence on sociocultural, economic and political levels.[53]

**Can Xue's Wall**

Can Xue's interpretation of "Mauer," entitled "Building in Sections, " begins as a retelling of Kafka's original narrative. Her version of the Wall consists of "an eccentric structure. The bottom part of the wall is disjointed and solid, it reaches a length of ten thousand *li*. The top portion, on the other hand, is an inconceivably high tower" (431). The length of the Great Wall, given as ten thousand *li*, corresponds to a description of the Qin Wall written during the Han Dynasty by the Grand Historiographer Sima Qian.[54] As Carlos Rojas has discussed, the length of the Wall is a highly approximate and possibly formulaic number.[55] By attributing 10,000 *li* to the Wall, Can Xue's essay preserves the endless and incomprehensible quality of the structure as described in Kafka's original narrative, as well as in the Chinese popular imagination. The addition of the tower onto the structure magnifies the fictional scope of Can Xue's Wall. This tower clearly alludes to the Tower of Babel discussed in Kafka's "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer." While Kafka's use of the Tower of Babel in his Chinese narrative problematizes binary distinctions in typical Orientalist discourse by juxtaposing Far Eastern, Near Eastern and Western cultural and religious images, Can Xue's tower remains open and ambiguous in meaning. She does not elaborate on the utilization of the tower or its significance to the Wall in the rest of her essay. Instead, the "exceedingly tall tower" is left as an unexplained and inexplicable

component of the Wall. It injects a fantastical quality into the already story-like elements of “Building in Sections.”

Can Xue’s Wall, complete with its skyward-reaching tower, is situated firmly on the side of the literary unreal. The complex architecture of her Wall denies its realization as a potential brick-and-mortar structure. In her essay, Can Xue refutes both its functional capabilities and the feasibility of its construction. “Speaking from a logical perspective, the barrier is unable to withstand the invading troops. It is also impossible to connect the exceedingly high tower to this type of wall” (433). This admission contradicts the Wall as it was previously described in the beginning of her essay. Her statement is also reminiscent of similarly conflicting statements uttered by the narrator in Kafka’s “Mauer.” The inconsistent nature of Can Xue’s statements problematizes the Wall depicted in her text. Its structural impossibility suggests allegorical or metaphysical interpretations as a means of understanding her essay.

**The Wall as Allegory**

Throughout her commentary, Can Xue acknowledges the futility of building as a means to an end, and offers alternative reasons for construction. “It’s probable that this type of structure cannot be finished. At most it’s probably just a type of emblem of the mind” (431). Remarks such as this one clearly distinguish the symbolic significance of the Wall from its apparent purpose as a defensive barrier. “In truth, the objective is found in the midst of the labor. Outside of this [labor], everything else is just self-deception” (433). Can Xue proposes that the bricklayers are aware of the

impossibility of completing the structure, but that they are nevertheless willing to obey the orders of the leadership and continue working. This may contain an implied criticism of the tacitly compliant attitude of the Chinese people. However, Can Xue avoids any further language that makes this analysis more convincing. Instead, Can Xue suggests that the "hidden goal of the leadership" (434) is to instill the bricklayers with a passion for the labor itself. Rather than viewing the builders as passive subjects tacitly obeying the directives of the leadership, Can Xue sees them as active participants who continue persevering in the face of an almost certainly acknowledged defeat. The title of the essay directly connects the piecewise construction method of building the Wall to the method used to create an artistic or written work. Her essay celebrates the efforts of the bricklayers (and by extension, the artist) and praises their acceptance of laboring as an end unto itself.

**Wall and Castle**

In many ways, Can Xue's highly allegorical interpretation of the Wall in Kafka's "Mauer" parallels her reading of the castle in Kafka's *Das Schloss.* According to Can Xue, the castle, through its very existence, offers two choices to those intent on reaching it: "[Y]ou must either die or create, there is no other alternative."[56] K's unrelenting determination to enter the castle, despite the equally bleak outlook offered by the castle itself, is what ultimately fosters creativity. In the aforementioned interview with Griffith, Can Xue goes on to clarify her notions. "I think if you enter the artistic system, exerting your desire to the maximum within the

system, you will experience freedom."[57] According to Can Xue, desire, which can also be understood as "emotion, or original force," must be applied against the system of rationality or control, also understood as Logos.[58] Only through the constant interplay of desire and Logos can a person achieve artistic and spiritual growth. Allegorically, K's efforts to enter the castle, and the bricklayers' efforts to construct an impossible barrier, are both fueled by the same impulse of desire. The castle and the Wall represent obstacles that resist attainability, yet the artist must nevertheless continue to approach them. "Yes, for me, as an artist, forcing myself into an untenable situation is an ever-present process."[59] Only by persevering in the face of impossibility can one achieve artistic freedom.

Can Xue's interpretations of *Das Schloss* and "Mauer" take a similar approach to the architectural structures found in the title of each work. Comprehended in such a manner, Can Xue's Wall avoids any link to the Great Wall of China as a geopolitical entity, or to its sociocultural associations. This interpretation corresponds most closely to Can Xue's stated intentions and understanding of Kafka. Understood ahistorically and virtually context-free from its Western modernist roots, her explication of the motifs in these two works relate best to Can Xue's personal outlook on the creative process of writing. However, this does not make a more socioculturally informed approach to Can Xue's "Building in Sections" any less relevant.

Despite Can Xue's staunch aversion to political and social commentary, her portrayal of the Wall in "Building in Sections" has far-reaching consequences for the Wall as it exists in the collective cultural consciousness of contemporary Chinese

society. Can Xue's essay employs language found in the state's portrayal of the structure as a national emblem. Taking a closer look at an example of this official discourse, the reader can better see how Can Xue's construct of the Wall engages, interacts and interferes with the popularized conceptions of the barrier, her original unpolitical intentions notwithstanding. The following section briefly examines the popular Chinese song "The Great Wall is Long," written in the same time period as Can Xue's text.

**"The Great Wall is Long"**

Penned in 1992, the song "*Changcheng chang,*" or "The Great Wall is Long," was popularized in 1994 on China Central Television (CCTV) in Beijing.[60] During the mid-1990s, it was often broadcast on CCTV-3, a television channel established in 1995 by CCTV that focused primarily on Chinese music, dance and arts entertainment. Dong Wenhua, a famous professional singer employed by the state, sang the song, whose lyrics and music were composed by well-known military composers Yan Su and Meng Qingyun, respectively. According to Nimrod Baranovitch, "The Great Wall is Long" is a "representative song that illustrates the propagandistic and didactic use of popular music in China by the party-state."[61] For the purposes of this study, the song's description of the Wall serves as an instructive counterexample to the Wall portrayed in Can Xue's commentary. Both discourses use similar language to emphasize the importance of the Wall as an internalized construct; however, they differ greatly in tone and intent.

The two stanzas of "The Great Wall is Long" begin with the same question and answer:

> Everyone says that homeland exists on both sides of the Great Wall
> Do you know how long the Great Wall is?
> On one end, it stirs up the cold moon on the border of the great desert,
> On the other end, it connects the minds and souls of the sons and daughters of ancient China [*huaxia*].[62]

This description of the Wall evokes both temporal and spatial longevity. Not only does the Wall span physical distance, extending towards the edge of the Gobi desert, but it also spans historical time, as the Chinese term *huaxia* can refer to the ancestors of the Han ethnic group in China as well as more generally to Chinese civilization, identity and culture. The lyrics directly connect the physical structure of the Wall to the "minds and souls" of the Chinese people in the present day. Utilizing the national symbol of the Great Wall of China, the song is meant to instill a sense of national pride in its listeners, and was designed by the state "to maintain stability, unity and its own legitimacy in an era of liberalization, pluralism and diversity."[63]

The use of the Wall as an ideological symbol of Chinese unity and pride is especially evident in the closing lines of each stanza. Repeating the same question, the concluding responses contain undeniably strong nationalistic imagery:

> If you want to know where the Great Wall is,
> Then just look at all of the bodies, all of the bodies in their green army uniforms.
> […]
> If you want to know where the Great Wall is,
> It is within the hearts of us, the common people, within [our] hearts.

The concluding lines of each stanza re-emphasize the relationship between the state and the people, and link them through the motif of the Great Wall of China. The

conclusion of the first stanza focuses on the substitution of the state for the Great Wall of China. This imagery concentrates on the role of the state as a protector, or a unified front. The state also contains and cultivates a purely Chinese identity within its parameters. Furthermore, joining the military and the Wall lends the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) a sense of legitimized presence throughout millennia of Chinese history. The conclusion of the second stanza suggests that the Wall comprises an essential part of Chinese identity. This reinforces the imagery found in the beginning of each stanza, where the Great Wall of China is portrayed as a link between the Chinese people of the present and the ancient past. Unlike the ending of the first stanza, the imagery of the Wall in the concluding lines of the song does not symbolize the functionality of the state. Instead, it aligns the state with the general Chinese population. This final conclusion suggests that the Chinese people are united by their shared national heritage, and that the Great Wall of China is uniquely theirs. The final line of the song stirs emotions of patriotism, national pride and unity among the people. The repeated emphasis on the connection between the state and the Wall redirects those sentiments towards the state itself.

These associations are further reinforced by the accompanying music video. The video is replete with panoramic shots of the Wall, footage of Tiananmen Square, and a narrative loosely centered on interactions between different generations of Chinese people, signifying traditional Chinese roots as well as the country's hope for the future. The song not only establishes the Wall as a common heritage and point of pride for the Chinese people, but it also aims to justify the CCP as a similarly deserving recipient of Chinese loyalty. Sentiments such as good citizenship and

patriotism are evoked by the internalization of the Wall, and reinforced by the phrase "The Great Wall within my heart," a phrase featured prominently in the classroom scenes of the music video.[64] "The Great Wall is Long"and its accompanying music video demonstrate how the Great Wall of China can be used as a national emblem while simultaneously furthering party ideology.[65]

**Can Xue's Wall vs. the Great Wall of China in Standard Modern Discourse**

Can Xue's commentary employs language that is similar in tone and meaning to the lyrics analyzed above. Speaking of the difficulties faced in achieving a monumental task such as the completion of the Wall, Can Xue concludes, "[t]he Great Wall of China can only exist inside each of our own bricklayer-hearts. This seems to be a lamentable thing, but outside of [one's heart], where else can the Wall be?" (434) Can Xue's statement adopts the language of the state only to subvert it. Her language has a satirical edge. The essay asks with feigned amazement how the Wall could be anything other than a mental construct. Denying the existence of an actual structure, the text implies that the Wall is inconsequential in comparison to its symbolic significance.

In "Building in Sections," the bricklayers' willingness to believe in the Wall, regardless of its infeasibility, is identified as both a strength and a weakness. While the collective belief in the Wall is praised for providing "an abstract spiritual backbone" (433) for the builders, the vulnerability of such a belief is also acknowledged here. Creating a contradictory and unreliable object and constructing

feelings of pride, nationalism and unity around it, Can Xue's essay throws doubt upon how such sentiments are established in the first place. This holds true for the Wall as well as the Chinese empire itself:

> "There is no way to verify, in reality, the existence of the empire, just like there is no way to confirm the function of the Great Wall. […] In yearning for the empire and the Great Wall, our petty bodies stick tightly to one another, and every person utters a message to their neighbor: 'it's true, it's true, [the empire and the Wall] exist.' Although this information has yet to be confirmed, we on the other hand definitely need this type of closely connected feeling, because it can ceaselessly help us withstand our crisis of belief" (434-5).

Through the voice of the bricklayer-cum-narrator in her essay, Can Xue also implicates herself in the longing for empire. However, she is aware of the self-deception that it involves, as well as the unavoidability of that self-deception. Can Xue's essay makes the reader cognizant of the role that belief plays in establishing notions of nationalism and identity. By focusing on the bricklayers and their crisis of belief, her text demonstrates how fragile faith can be, as well as how faith can be predicated on an easily disassembled symbol of cultural significance. For Can Xue, the assertion that the Wall exists within the hearts of the bricklayers highlights its insubstantial, yet irrefutable, nature. "[P]eople's imagination is in itself a weakness—the limits of imagination are the firmament. This weakness is exactly what the spirit relies on as the foundation of its existence" (433). Imagination is treated as both a weakness and a necessity. Can Xue's statement exposes the importance of imagination to the creation of community and nation.[66]

**Can Xue, Kafka and Cross-cultural Tension in Chinese Contemporary Writing**

Can Xue's commentary and Kafka's original text both challenge the reader to explore concepts of identity, nation and culture as they are posited with respect to China and the Wall. In each instance, the narrative utilizes language from the official discourse of the time only to subvert it. Kafka's short story protests the prevailing Orientalist strain in literature about the East at the turn of the twentieth century, while Can Xue's commentary questions the strongly nationalistic inclinations of state-approved discourse in China at the turn of the twenty-first century. Can Xue's commentary on Kafka's "Mauer" also reflects a change in the Chinese attitude towards the West through literature. Instead of viewing Kafka's narrative as an emulative model or an untouchable canonical work, Can Xue's essay transforms the original into something entirely new. Her narrative re-establishes ownership over the story and its subject matter. However, the ambiguities and irresolvable contradictions within Can Xue's essay indicate her difficulties in maintaining an assertive Chinese voice while still addressing her narrative debt to Kafka.

Can Xue views Kafka as a kindred spirit—an author whose writing style is closely aligned with her own. She does not attempt to relate her reading of Kafka to greater issues of sociopolitical concern, in China or elsewhere. Nor does she seek to justify Kafka's importance to society as a whole. Instead, Can Xue focuses on the power of Kafka's literature to transform the individual's spirit or consciousness.[67] She finds similarities between her and Kafka's aims, and reads him in a way that reflects her personal writing philosophy. She shows how Kafka's "Mauer" espouses "her own

project of writing from a spiritual individual core."[68] In her interview with Griffith, Can Xue explains,

> "From the beginning, I felt that I was entering into a system when I wrote. At that time I didn't know clearly what happened inside me. I just practiced my writing, year after year. Then suddenly, one day (when I was forty-five years old) I recognized the system (or structure) in other writers' works. I thought they were the first rank, so they were my mirrors. That is to say, in a certain sense, I recognized Can Xue's system too."[69]

In the above statement, Can Xue is referring to modernist writers such as Kafka and Borges. According to Can Xue, her writing is not consciously modeled after the authors that she admires. Although their works can be regarded as a source of inspiration, she discovers a parallel development between her own literature and Western modern literature only after years of writing. While this does not downplay the importance or influence of Western modernism upon her works, it does reflect a subtle shift in Can Xue's acknowledgment of a supposedly authoritative or elite Western canon. Can Xue expresses her admiration for Western writers while viewing them as equals rather than superiors. She says of her own texts, "'My works are like a plant. My ideas grow up in the West, but I dig them up and replant them in China's deep ground, a rich five thousand year history.' My works aren't like those from the West or from China but are my own plant, my own creation."[70] Can Xue describes implementing Western culture as "a hoe to unearth our ancient [Chinese] culture, so we can realize its proper value."[71] In this way, she protects her writing from appearing overly derivative of Western modernist literature.

The difficulty in defining the role of the West in Can Xue's "Building in Sections" is also apparent in its structural elements. The only direct reference to

Kafka or his short story is in the sub-caption to her commentary. In its non-abbreviated form, Can Xue's text is entitled "Building in Sections: The Artist's Way of Life. Reading Kafka's 'Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer.'" Embedding a reference to Kafka's narrative within the sub-caption of her text places secondary emphasis on its connection to Kafka's original short story, and instead draws the reader's attention towards the concept of piecemeal construction. Without the sub-caption or the work's inclusion in a collection of essays about Kafka, one could easily interpret Can Xue's commentary as a purely fictitious text. Disregarding the full title, Can Xue's account of the Wall appears to discuss a Chinese landmark from a Chinese perspective. As written, Can Xue's commentary seems to deliberately obscure the fact that her piece is a reflection on Kafka's literary construct of the Wall.

In "Building in Sections," Can Xue reinterprets and rewrites Kafka's "Mauer" as if she, too, were one of the builders in Kafka's original text. This approach blurs the line between understanding Can Xue's text as an objective commentary on Kafka's "Mauer," and comprehending the piece as a fictional work based on Kafka's short story. It is unclear whether Can Xue's authorial voice is intended to be objective, fictitious, or deliberately equivocal. For Can Xue, assuming the role of an objective observer could support the notion that Kafka's narrative is part of an esteemed and untouchable canon. Alternatively, speaking from within the text itself—namely, from the perspective of the narrator in Kafka's story—allows Can Xue to assert her role as a creative writer who engages with the Western canon while downplaying its authoritative significance. By wavering between these two voices,

however, Can Xue's text indicates an uncertain and constantly fluctuating stance towards Kafka and his Wall.

By treating Kafka's text in an ahistorical and non-contextual manner, Can Xue endeavors to empty Kafka's original narrative of its ties to the West. Although Western literature was held in high regard in China at the time, Can Xue nevertheless emphasizes her own individuality as a writer, and "distances herself both from the Chinese literary tradition and from an imitation of the West."[72] This explains Can Xue's interest and preoccupation with Western authors on an individual, personal and "inner" level: it allows her to engage with writers such as Kafka and Borges while sidestepping their status as authoritative or canonical figures. Avoiding any discussion of their importance to the greater literary world, however, also highlights her awareness of their authorial status. It further illuminates the tension that Chinese writers such as Can Xue experience when acknowledging Western influences on their own works. Through her highly subjective and selective utilization of Kafka's original narrative, Can Xue demonstrates her implicit understanding of the struggle to balance a distinctive Chinese viewpoint against the Western source that inspired it in the first place. Striving to distinguish her works from those by authors such as Kafka and Borges, Can Xue reveals even more similarities between them. Her approach towards literature breaks from the realist movements that dominated Chinese cultural arts in the early post-Mao era, and also attempts to remain detached from Western influences. Can Xue's attitude is reminiscent of the adversarial stance that Western modernist authors in the early twentieth century took towards tradition and their own earlier literary influences.

**Summation**

"Building in Sections" and its original source material, "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer," both address a famous Chinese landmark from the perspective of a Chinese narrator. The disjunction between Kafka's authorial position as a European writer and his narrative position as a Chinese historian is readily apparent. In Can Xue's case, however, the relationship between the authorial and narrative roles remains ambiguous. Writing in a way that drastically reduces the acknowledged influence of Kafka to her essay, Can Xue reclaims the Wall as a symbol that belongs to the Chinese people. Her writing style weakens the perception of Western influence on her text as a whole. However, these stylistic decisions affect the structure, form, content and perception of her commentary. Her writing is often contradictory, ambiguous or otherwise unexplainable. The irresolvable tensions found in her work result partially from the inability to assign set values to the distinct Chinese and Western aspects of her text.

Can Xue's assessment of Kafka indicates a change in how Chinese authors view their Western literary counterparts. Instead of deferring to Western authors, Chinese authors such as Can Xue appear more willing to express their own thoughts, ideas and opinions on Chinese and Western literary works. This parallels the direction taken by China in the 1990s with respect to modernization and the West. While in the immediate post-Mao period, reformers insisted on the total Westernization of China in order to "catch up" to the rest of the world, the 1990s brought with it the beginnings of China's economic boom, as well as the emergence of the "four small dragons" in Asia:

Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. Their successes were attributed partially to the influence of Confucianism. As a result, the Chinese state began to turn away from complete Westernization in favor of establishing a stronger Chinese national identity and culture as part of its modernization process.[73] Can Xue's interpretation of Kafka demonstrates this phenomenon and its challenges on the literary level, both textually and metatextually. Can Xue's subversive take on the Great Wall of China indicates that alternatives to the state-sponsored views on Chinese nationalism existed at the time, and that the idea of a cohesive Chinese identity, which had previously been dictated by the state, was coming under question. Her treatment of the Wall, which can be read as an interpretation of Kafka's short story as well as a reaction to official Chinese discourse, reflects the greater Chinese struggle to formulate a sociopolitical view of China for itself and the rest of the world. Similarly, the intriguing and often contradictory nature of her essay mirrors China's complicated and unresolved position towards the West at the end of the twentieth century.

## Notes to Chapter Three

[1] Kafka, Franz, *Briefe an Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1967), 657.
[2] See Canetti, Elias, *Kafka's Other Trial* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974) and Meng, Weiyan, "China and Chinese in Kafka's Works." *Kafka and China,* ed. Adrian Hsia (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 1996), 75-96. For other views on Kafka's self-identification as Chinese, see also Goebel, Rolf J., *Constructing China.* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2007), 62; and Hsia, Adrian, "China as Ethical Construct and Reflector of Europe's Self Perception." *Kafka and China*, 5-26. 26.
[3] Kafka's fascination with China has been documented as late as 1923. In a letter addressed to his publisher Kurt Wolff in late November 1923, Kafka requested a list of books, including two books on China: *Chinesische Landschaft* by Otto Fischer, and *Von Chinas Göttern* by Friedrich Perzynski (erroneously listed by Kafka as *Chinesische Götter*), both published in 1920. See Kafka, Franz, *Briefe 1902-1924,* ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1958), 467.
[4] Labeling these narratives "Chinese" is an attempt to distinguish them from the rest of Kafka's oeuvre, which are not geographically implied to be situated in China, do not deal with Chinese subject matter or are not told from a fictional Chinese perspective. Far from claiming that Kafka's texts are in any way authentically or authoritatively Chinese, this study goes on to further address the so-called Chineseness of these texts. The term "Chinese" here and henceforth is utilized as a term of categorization within the greater context of Kafka's works in general.
[5] Kafka, Franz, *Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer,* ed. Max Brod and Hans Joachim Schoeps (Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1931, 1948). For more critical information regarding the text, see Binder, Helmut, *Kafka-Kommentar* (München: Winkler Verlag,1975), 218-21.
[6] All further references to Kafka's "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer" are taken from Kafka, Franz, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente, Band I,* ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1993), 337-356, and marked as *NS*. All further references to Kafka's "Ein altes Blatt" are taken from Kafka, Franz, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten,* ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1994), 263-7, and marked as *DL*.
[7] For example, Herbert Taube suggests that the Wall is an expression of the "will to earthly perfection," Taube, Herbert, *Franz Kafka: An Interpretation of His Works* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1968): 125-126. See also Kopper, John M., "Building Walls and Jumping over Them: Constructions in Franz Kafka's 'Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer.'" *MLN*, Vol. 98, No. 3, German Issue. (Apr., 1983): 351-365. 351. Kimberly Sparks views Kafka's Wall as an object that completes the spatial template of space and time in her article, "Radicalization of Space in Kafka's Stories." *On Kafka: Semi-Centenary Perspectives*, ed. Franz Kuna (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1976), 112-27.
[8] Clement Greenberg sees the Wall as a symbolic representation of Jewish law, or even as a representation of culture in general. Greenberg, Clement, "At the Building of the Great Wall of China." *Franz Kafka Today*, ed. Angel Flores and Homer Swander (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958): 77-81. Meng takes Kafka's use of China and the Wall in "Mauer" as a collective reference to the Jews as a nation. See Meng, "China and Chinese in Kafka's Works." Werner Hoffman understands Kafka's interest in China as a metaphorical expression of his interest in Judaism, citing parallels between Chinese and Jewish history. Hoffmann, Werner, *"Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze": Aphorismen und Spätwerk Kafkas* (Bern: Francke, 1984): 48-9. Ritchie Robertson has also found allusions to Judaism, the history of the Jews and the political discourse of his time in Kafka's narrative. Robertson, Ritchie. *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
[9] According to Wilhelm Emrich, the process of piecemeal construction results from an essential characteristic of human nature in the face of an immense task. Emrich sees China as a symbol of humanity and of the universe itself. Working on the Wall at the edges of the land conveys the work being done to secure the boundaries of human existence. Emrich, Wilhelm, *Franz Kafka: A Critical Study of His Writings* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1958), 225-8. Walter Benjamin equates the *Führerschaft* with fate. The high command provides direction for the builders, who are otherwise unable to comprehend societal organization or function. His focus on the timeless and ahistorical quality of Kafka's work emphasizes Kafka's China as a model of universalized archaism. See Benjamin, Walter, "Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death." *Illuminations* (New

York: Schocken Books, 1986), 111-40. Kopper sees the Wall and its piecemeal construction as a process that mirrors the reader's own relationship to the text and its author. Kopper, "Building Walls and Jumping over Them." In his article "The Great Wall of China: The Elaboration of an Intellectual Dilemma," Christian Goodden views the construction of the Wall as a generalized type of quest. He interprets the action of building as an endless process that represents a continual striving for an objective without ever attaining it. According to Goodden, critical awareness of the Wall is built alongside the construction of the Wall itself, and leads to a dilemma: should the builders continue building for the psychological and existential comfort and the benefit that it brings, or should they stop building altogether, since the development of consciousness during the construction process makes them even more aware of the Wall's unachievable goal? Goodden refers to this quandary as the crisis of consciousness. Goodden, Christian, "The Great Wall of China: The Elaboration of an Intellectual Dilemma." *On Kafka: Semi-Centenary Perspectives*, 128-145. In a similarly generalizing manner, J.J. White sees the building of the Wall as a metaphor for the creation of knowledge. According to White, the incomplete state of the Wall can be seen as a metaphor for the reader's attempts at understanding. Its non-linear structure and piecewise building method further problematize the conclusions and the linearity common to form and motifs such as a quest, a journey or a long task—each of which is crucial to Kafka's conceptions of time, judgment and human frailty. White, J.J. "Endings and Non-endings in Kafka's Fiction." *On Kafka: Semi-Centenary Perspectives*, 146-67.

[10] Goebel, Rolf J., *Constructing China*, 2.

[11] Ibid., 7-8.

[12] Lemon, Robert, *Imperial Messages* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 8-10.

[13] This in and of itself is nothing new. In his 1986 study *Kafka und China*, Meng suggests that "[d]as alte Österreich mit dem alten China zu vergleichen, gehört schon fast zur Tradition in Europa" (17).

[14] References to China and Chinese culture in Kafka's works have been analyzed by various commentators. See Meng, "China and Chinese in Kafka's Works" as well as Meng's book, *Kafka und China*, especially pp. 53-67. Hartmut Binder has also gone into great detail regarding the influence of Chinese poetry on Kafka's writing. See his *Kafka-Handbuch Band I* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1979), 319, and his *Kafka-Kommentar,* 218-221. Adrian Hsia has cited additional sources as well. Please see Hsia, "China as Ethical Construct and Reflector of Europe's Self Perception."

[15] Lovell, Julia, *The Great Wall* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), 46.

[16] Lovell suggests that Lord Macartney and his companions were responsible for introducing this erroneous mixture of fact and fiction regarding the Wall to the West at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This was based on their written accounts of their experiences in China as members of the embassy trade mission from Britain in 1792-1794. *The Great Wall*, 7-8.

[17] Chinese accounts of the Wall, on the other hand, did not recognize the structure as a potentially significant symbol of Chinese nationalism, identity and unity until the establishment of modern China and the People's Republic. Furthermore, their admiration for the Wall was based on Western accounts. Lovell, *The Great Wall,* 55.

[18] Waldron, Arthur. *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 5.

[19] Presently, it remains decidedly difficult to separate myth from historical fact. For example, the role of Qin Shi Huang and the monumental task of building the Great Wall of China in its "original" form has been questioned due to the lack of specificity and evidence in Chinese historical writings about the Qin Dynasty, such as Sima Qian's *Historical Records*, or *Shiji.* For more on the dubious beginnings of the Great Wall of China, see Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*; Sima Qian. *The First Emperor*, trans. Raymond Dawson (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Lovell, *The Great Wall.* For more on the image of the Wall in China as an unbroken structure in the post-Han and pre-Ming Dynasties, see Rojas, Carlos, *The Great Wall: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010): 92-125.

[20] Zilcosky, John, *Kafka's Travels* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). In his study, Zilcosky undertakes a detailed analysis of this series to support Kafka's interest in travel and travel literature, and examines their influence on Kafka's personal life and writings.

[21] Binder, *Kafka-Kommentar*, 218-221, and Meng, *Kafka und China*, 62-4. Undergoing specific textual comparisons, both Meng and Bender list instances where Kafka's text borrows images, tropes and

motifs from these sources and others. Some of these borrowings will be discussed in greater detail later in this study.
[22] Goebel, *Constructing China*, 67.
[23] Dittmar, Julius, *Im neuen China. Reiseeindrücke von J. Dittmar* (Cöln am Rhein: Hermann & Friedrich Schaffstein, 1912).
[24] Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 257-61.
[25] Dittmar, *Im neuen China*, 30.
[26] Herder, Johann Gottfried von, *Sämmtliche Werke zur Philosophie und Geschichte, 5. Teil. Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit,* ed. Johann von Müller (Tübingen: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1806), 3. Teil, 11. Buch, 17. See also Goebel, Rolf J. "China as an Embalmed Mummy: Herder's Orientalist Poetics." *South Atlantic Review*. Vol. 60, No. 1 (Jan 1995): 111-29.
[27] Berman, *Enlightenment or Empire?,* 4-5.
[28] Additional moments of ambivalence and ambiguity in Dittmar's travelogue are discussed in Goebel's *Constructing China,* 65-90.
[29] Dittmar, *Im neuen China,* 16-7, 23.
[30] Ibid., 106.
[31] Goebel, *Constructing China*, 72.
[32] Ibid., 73-77.
[33] Goebel, *Constructing China*, 99; Meng, *Kafka und China*, 81-2. Indications of the original Chineseness of "Blatt" can also be found in Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I*, 361.
[34] Goebel, *Constructing China,* 98.
[35] Corngold, Stanley, "Kafka's Later Stories and Aphorisms." *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. Julian Pierce (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 95-110. 95.
[36] Corngold, "Kafka's Later Stories and Aphorisms," 102.
[37] Ibid., 107, all italics in the original.
[38] According to a brief biography of Can Xue provided by the Contemporary Chinese Writers project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the pseudonym Can Xue also means "the purest snow at the top of a high mountain." http://web.mit.edu/ccw/can-xue/biography.shtml. Accessed 24 October 2012.
[39] Can Xue, "Foreward: A Summer Day in the Beautiful South." *Dialogues in Paradise*, trans. Ronald R. Janssen and Jian Zhang (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 1-13. See also: Cai, Rong, *The Subject in Crisis in Contemporary Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 98.
[40] This essay is included in Can Xue's collection entitled *The Castle of the Soul. Understanding Kafka* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1999), 431-435. "Building in Sections'" was originally published in *Sijie Wenxue*, No. 6 (1997): 286-9. Page numbers in this study are taken from the version found in Can Xue's *The Castle of the Soul*.
[41] Here I borrow Andrea Bachner's term. See Bachner, Andrea, "New Spaces for Literature: Can Xue and Hélène Cixous on Writing." *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2005): 155-82. 171.
[42] McCandlish, Laura, "Stubbornly Illuminating 'the Dirty Snow that Refuses to Melt': A Conversation with Can Xue" (MCLC Resource Center Publication, 2002). URL: http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/mccandlish.htm. Accessed 24 October 2012.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Griffith, Jonathan, "The Aesthetic Activity in Modern Fiction." (Unpublished interview, February 2010): 12. URL: http://web.mit.edu/ccw/can-xue/files/CanXue-Interview.pdf. Accessed 24 October 2012.
[45] McCandlish, "Stubbornly Illuminating 'the Dirty Snow that Refuses to Melt."
[46] Ibid.
[47] Lovell, *The Great Wall,* 12. Rojas, *The Great Wall. A Cultural History*, 117.
[48] Lovell, *The Great Wall,* 302-304.
[49] According to Sun, "[t]he best-known architectural achievement in China is the so-called Great Wall. […] If there had been no wall, the Chinese people would not have flourished later on: it would not have been so strong in the Han-Tong dynasties, and would not have been able to unite with itself the southern peoples of China." Sun, Yat-sen, *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary* (Taipei: Chinese Cultural Service, 1953), 56-7.

[50] The original line in Mao's poem is "*bu dao changcheng fei hao han*."
[51] Lovell, *The Great Wall*, 317. Rojas, *The Great Wall. A Cultural History*, 140-1.
[52] Rojas, *The Great Wall. A Cultural History*, 154.
[53] Unofficial discourse regarding the Wall in twentieth-century China has appeared in reaction to its official portrayal as well. In 1925, Lu Xun wrote a brief essay entitled "*Changcheng*," or "The Great Wall." Originally published on May 15, 1925 in the journal "*mangyuan*," or "Wilderness," Lu Xun uses the imagery of the Wall to criticize Chinese traditionalism, even in (or particularly in) the face of Western recognition. Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Quan Ji*, Vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), 3:58-9. After the Cultural Revolution and continuing through the present day, the Wall in its physical and symbolic forms has also been utilized to make cultural and political statements via poetry, film, performance art and large-scale installations. These more critically-minded perspectives stand in contrast to the official, state-sanctioned view of the Wall, and contribute to a new understanding of the structure as a symbol of Chinese identity in the contemporary era.
[54] Sima Qian, *The First Emperor,* 53. The Great Wall of China is also known by its specification by Sima Qian as the *wanli changcheng*, or the 10,000 *li*-long Long Wall. See Rojas, *The Great Wall. A cultural History,* 15.
[55] Rojas, *The Great Wall. A Cultural History*, 15.
[56] Can Xue, "The Castle's Will: Reading Kafka's *Castle*, VI," trans. Joachim Kurtz. *Green Integer* No. 1 (Jan-Feb 2006). URL: http://www.greeninteger.com/green_integer_review/issue_1/Can-Xue-kafka.htm. Accessed 22 Oct 2012.
[57] Griffith, Jonathan, "The Aesthetic Activity in Modern Fiction," 4.
[58] Ibid., 4.
[59] Ibid., 9.
[60] Baranovitch, Nimrod, *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender, and Politics, 1978-1997* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 287.
[61] Ibid., 197.
[62] Complete Chinese text to the song can be found at http://www.666ccc.com/lrc/258/8765.htm, accessed 24 Nov 2012. English translation is the author's own.
[63] Baranovitch, *China's New Voices,* 199.
[64] "Wo xinzhong de changcheng" is written on the blackboard in the music video for "The Great Wall is Long." See http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMTgzNDg1MjQ=.html for the music video (accessed 20 Nov 2012).
[65] State-sponsored discourse on the Wall, while hegemonic, also demonstrates already the first seeds of change within itself. As Baranovitch has demonstrated, even though the state continues to use post-revolutionary music with educational and ideological intentions, it is too simplistic to interpret the "official" popular music of the post-Mao era as a static and non-negotiable form of cultural hegemony or control. Instead, "every hegemonic utterance contains some signs of previous or current resistance" (*China's New Voices*, 222). By allowing itself to be more open and negotiable to criticism and alternative perspectives, state-sanctioned popular music holds within itself indications of change and compromise.
[66] Anderson explains this concept in detail in *Imagined Communities*.
[67] Can Xue, "Kafka's Undertaking. Revised Preface." *Understanding Kafka: The Castle of the Soul* (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue chubanshe, 2006), 1-4.
[68] Bachner, "New Spaces for Literature: Can Xue and Hélène Cixous on Writing," 170.
[69] Griffith, "The Aesthetic Activity in Modern Fiction," 10.
[70] McCandlish, "Stubbornly Illuminating 'the Dirty Snow that Refuses to Melt.'"
[71] Suher, Dylan and Joan Hua, "An interview with Can Xue." *Asymptote*. Vol. 3, Issue 3 (July 2013). URL: http://asymptotejournal.com/article.php?cat=Interview&id=22&curr_index=34&curPage, accessed 4 September 2013.
[72] Bachner, "New Spaces for Literature: Can Xue and Hélène Cixous on Writing," 172.
[73] Guo, Yingjie, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), xii.

# Chapter Four

## Politics and the Apolitical: Zweig's *Brief einer Unbekannten* in Beijing

First published in 1922, Stefan Zweig's *Brief einer Unbekannten* invites its readers to enter into the psychological, internal world of the anonymous female protagonist.[1] According to biographer Donald A. Prater, Zweig formulated "the concept of a 'typology of the spirit'" which focused on the "depiction of the dark passions lying just beneath the surface of our daily life."[2] Writing novellas such as *Brief* during the early interwar period allowed Zweig to explore the depths of the unconscious mind.[3] Avoiding almost all allusions to the external world, the novella's prewar Viennese setting appears ahistorical and apolitical. This reticence to describe the fictional context contrasts with Zweig's literary output during the War, both in terms of writing style and the level of his political engagement. Not only had he held an official military position in the Viennese *Kriegsarchiv* from the start of the War in 1914 through the end of 1917, but he also directly and indirectly engaged with issues of nationalism and pacifism through private correspondence and published works. In his writings during World War I, Zweig actively championed peace, brotherhood and defeatism; that is, the concept of "seek[ing] the renewal of the spirit in defeat itself."[4]

Living in Salzburg in the years immediately following the end of World War I, Zweig claimed to have written *Brief* "in völlig unaktivistischer Gelassenheit,"[5] while around him "[m]it einem Ruck emanzipierte sich die Nachkriegsgeneration brutal von allem bisher Gültigen und wandte jedweder Tradition den Rücken zu […]."[6]

According to Lionel B. Steiman, Zweig's work during this time "bore witness to a vanished world and celebrated its ideals of tolerance, progress, and the individual, which even after the great lie of war remained the only means for advancing the cause of truth and peace."[7] His optimism towards the future, his belief in the continual progression of history and his faith in instinctual brotherly love were countered not only by the irrationality of war, but also by his ongoing skepticism of the individual's ability to affect history. Steiman and others have commented on Zweig's distaste for political action, and on "the eternal contradiction Zweig saw between men of the study and men of the deed."[8] They have suggested that his suicide in Brazil in 1942 was related to his ongoing inability to reconcile an idealistic humanism with the political realities of the era. Setting his fictional works in the past may have allowed Zweig to express his "ideology of ultimate human perfection"[9] without having to address its unattainable nature in the real world. It meant that Zweig could revisit a period of optimism in early twentieth-century Europe without concerning himself with its inevitable outcome, which was inconsonant with his worldview.

Although Brief is abstracted from its particular historico-political context, it nevertheless contains political implications. The novella takes place in prewar Vienna, during a time that Zweig has nostalgically referred to as "das goldene Zeitalter der Sicherheit"[10] under the Dual Monarchy. Leon Botstein suggests that Zweig's avoidance of politics throughout his lifetime included a "bizarre denial of the realities in which he grew up and lived."[11] Zweig makes no mention of the "immense social conflict, poverty, overcrowding, anti-Semitism, [and] ethnic and religious segregation"[12] in his descriptions of fin-de-siécle Vienna. On the contrary, Zweig's

outlook towards the city of his youth hints at escapism and even self-deception. His sanitized portrayal of early twentieth-century cosmopolitan Vienna can be seen as a reaction against his perception of Europe during and after the war. In addition, setting the text in the past allowed Zweig to ignore the upheavals of the early postwar period, especially as they concerned the formation of the newly-formed First Republic of Austria and his feelings towards it:

> "Zum erstenmal meines Wissens im Lauf der Geschichte ergab sich der paradoxe Fall, daß man ein Land zu einer Selständigkeit zwang, die es selber erbittert ablehnte. Österreich wünschte entweder mit den alten Nachbarstaaten wieder vereinigt zu werden oder mit dem Stammesverwandten Deutschland, keinesfalls aber in dieser verstümmelten Form ein erniedrigtes Bettlerdasein zu führen."[13]

Zweig's decision to write Brief without regard to the issues and concerns of the time can be seen as a political statement in and of itself. Setting the narrative in the past enabled Zweig to recreate the European world of ideals without addressing its trajectory or the aftermath that followed, especially as it concerned his native country.

Zweig's novella runs counter to discourses that prevailed during the early post-World War I years in Europe and the First Republic of Austria. Zweig distances himself from discourses as different as radical nationalism and avant-garde experimentalism in art, and thus indirectly demonstrates his awareness of—and his refusal to participate directly in—such movements. Zweig's narrative proposes alternative ways of examining concepts of self-identity, culture and nation—methods that engage with the inward-looking self as opposed to the outward-looking other. This includes using a predominantly feminine lens to examine the expression of desire

and its effects on one's psyche. By doing so, Zweig engages directly with the personal politics of desire, and invites the reader to consider the impact of gender, passion and personal freedom upon greater political and sociopolitical issues. For instance, the novella's acknowledgment of female desire and sexuality suggests that Zweig's narrative can be read as a critique of social morality and gender roles in early twentieth century Europe. Similar to the other German-language texts analyzed in this study, *Brief* can be understood as a counter-response to its times and to the author's contemporary circumstances.

Zweig's narrative is of interest in this particular context because it has been adapted as a film for Chinese audiences. The Chinese version of Zweig's *Brief*, which serves as the focal point of this chapter, continues along the same thematic trajectory established by the sinicization of Brecht's *Mensch* into Sichuan opera form and Can Xue's essayistic interpretation of Kafka's "Mauer." The filmed version of *Brief* reflects the increasing accessibility and malleability of cultural goods imported into China from the West, as well as the more accepting attitude of the Chinese people toward such imports. No longer concerned exclusively with the Western literary canon, the use of Zweig's *Brief* as a basis for contemporary Chinese cinema suggests a shift in China's perspective of the West through literature.[14] While the works by Brecht and Kafka may have lent themselves to transnational adaptations due to their specific engagement with ostensibly Chinese material, Zweig's novella does not carry any immanent marker of Chinese substance. Its adaptation has a different character altogether. The sinicization of Zweig's *Brief* demonstrates another way in which Western literature, combined with Chinese images and references, can be used to

formulate a uniquely Chinese identity. Looking at Zweig's *Brief* by way of its Chinese film interpretation helps us better trace the evolution of China's relationship to the West in the post-Mao era. It also demonstrates the continued influence and relevance of early twentieth-century German-language works to the world today, especially through their engagement with issues of nation, identity and culture.

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**Chinese Women's Films, Feminism and Politics**

In her 2003 study entitled *Women Through the Lens*, Shuqin Cui examines the intersection of gender and nationalism in Chinese cinema.[15] Tracing Chinese cinema throughout the twentieth century, Cui demonstrates how feminist issues in China have often been subsumed under the more general rubric of Chinese nationalism. Cui highlights how women's rights and the notion of gender equality in twentieth century China have been carried out first under the aegis of modernization and modernity, and later under socialism. This integration of emancipation into a socialist program stands in opposition to the realization of women's rights as an independent concept raised by—or on behalf of—a female subject.[16] The potentially problematic interdependence of feminism and nationalism can be seen in Chinese film, including the subgenre of Chinese "women's cinema," generally defined as films made and mostly directed by women.[17]

Cui suggests that the rise of gender consciousness in Chinese women's cinema has not yet been accompanied by a corresponding rise in feminine aesthetics; that is, female directors, working under the blanket of social realism or cultural traditionalism, have not yet found a way to effectively position the female voice in their films in relation to those conditions. According to Cui, "[w]hat has emerged from the work of Chinese female directors attests to a narrative and psychological dilemma where personal desires conflict with dominant ideologies."[18] Although Cui concludes that the majority of the productions that she analyzes are unable to fully express personal, feminine desires due to the political constraints upon them at the time, she is nevertheless optimistic that the attempts to do so in Chinese women's cinema ultimately speaks in favor of the existence and vitality of feminism in Chinese film.

Cui's observations regarding feminism and nationalism in Chinese film, as well as her assessment of Chinese women's cinema in particular, can be used as a basis for further examining Xu's *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. Like its predecessors in Chinese women's cinema, this film demonstrates the interplay of politics and women's rights. However, *Letter* also reveals changes to the power balance between gender and politics identified by Cui. The film challenges static notions of Chinese nationalism and directly addresses issues of female authorship and subjectivity. The assertively female voice of Xu's film interacts and overlaps with nationalist discourse in the film, while shifting the emphasis from nationalism to feminism. Instead of addressing women's issues from a nationalist perspective, the female protagonist's nationalist sentiments are shown as secondary to the expression and attainment of her personal desires. Examining the actions and behavior of the

female protagonist against the historical backdrop of the film gives the reader a more nuanced perspective on the interplay among state ideology, popular nationalism and gender issues as they appear in early twenty-first century Chinese cinema.

**Xu Jinglei's *Letter from an Unknown Woman*: Overview**

In 2004, Xu Jinglei received the Silver Shell award for Best Director at the San Sebastian International Film Festival in Spain for her film, an adaptation of Zweig's *Brief einer Unbekannten* entitled *Yige Mosheng Nüren de Laixin,* translated into English as *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.[19] Xu, who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy's School of Performing Art, also stars as the main female character in the film. Xu's *Letter* is "the first independent Mandarin film that employs a piece of Western literary property as its resource."[20] Seventeen years after the premiere of the Third Chengdu City Sichuan Opera Troupe's *Sichuan Haoren*, China has once again experienced a transcultural "first": the independent, non-state-supported cinematic appropriation of a modern Western literary source into a Chinese setting.

Zhang Zhen has included Xu among the group of contemporary young Chinese filmmakers dubbed "the Urban Generation," who are "defined by their different social and professional identities as well as by their aesthetic outlooks."[21] As a director, her self-stated objectives for the film are simple and modest: "My film doesn't want to enlighten or educate other people, it is just expressing passion in order to move the audience…My *Letter* is just an extremely pure love story that contemporary [women] are able to relate to."[22] This agenda contrasts with the objectives of directors

associated with earlier Chinese film movements, such as New Wave cinema of the 1980s. Many Fifth Generation filmmakers, who were active in New Wave cinema, received international acclaim for the ways in which they confronted collective memory and trauma through cinematic portrayals of China as national allegory.[23] Xu's film, on the other hand, is not intended to evoke veiled critique or provide recourse for reflection on China in the past or the present. On the contrary, the film's depiction of one woman's sentiments is designed to evoke personal and subjective emotional responses from the audience, while the stylized and nostalgic depiction of pre-revolutionary China emphasizes its aesthetic value and simultaneously suppresses its historico-political implications.

***Letter* and Pre-revolutionary Beijing**

Xu understands Zweig's original novella as a politically unencumbered love story, and searches for a temporal and locational setting that allows her to tell the story in those terms. However, Xu's filmic treatment of Zweig's *Brief* belies an uncomplicated, unpolitical reading. By setting the narrative in 1930s and 40s Beijing, Xu transplants the story into one of the most politically turbulent times in modern Chinese history. Set over a period of eighteen years, Xu's *Letter* alludes to the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan (1931/1937-1945) as well as the ongoing Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT),[24] which began in 1927 and ended in 1949. By doing so, Xu's *Letter* cannot help but engage with issues of Chinese

nationalism and identity on multiple levels. The film offers a counterintuitive agenda for Zweig's seemingly unpolitical narrative, which holds a general disregard for historical context.

The political significance of the film's historical background is unavoidable. By referencing historical Sino-Chinese relations, Xu engages with a topic commonly addressed in popular nationalist discourse of the contemporary era. Through allusions to the Chinese Civil War, Xu also touches upon the establishment of the CCP and the People's Republic of China. Xu's insistence on viewing the film as a "pure love story" seems incongruous with the film's highly charged political setting.

Xu's attitude is correspondingly ambivalent regarding gender and its importance to contemporary Chinese cinema. When asked by foreign reporters at the San Sebastian film festival about potential difficulties as a female director in China, Xu repeatedly denied having experienced difficulties, responding that gender differences were slight and that China had always pursued gender equality.[25] Xu's response to reporters may reflect the influence of socialist ideology upon the concept of female emancipation in the People's Republic of China. Her answer can also be seen as a guarded reply that deflects criticism of the Chinese regime abroad.

It is possible that Xu's dismissal of any political allegory behind the film suggests her unawareness of the film's deeper implications; that is, as an artist, Xu is not necessarily the best judge of her own work. Although this study contends that Xu's film does not exhibit signs of struggle or tension to conform to state-sponsored political discourse, the film's historico-political context nevertheless invites further consideration regarding past and present portrayals of the pre-revolutionary era in

China. The framing of the film, which has the potential to be strongly politicized, seems to occupy a primarily historicist and apolitical position instead. In order to address this shift in the treatment, perception and significance of the film's historico-political setting more effectively, it is first necessary to differentiate between the various types of nationalism found in contemporary China.

## Chinese Nationalisms in Post-Mao China: State, Cultural and Popular Nationalism

China experienced a resurgence in state nationalism after the student protests in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. Convinced that a decrease in patriotism, susceptibility to "bourgeois liberalization" and the influence of "cultural nihilism" were the main causes of the protests,[26] the CCP launched a series of political campaigns aimed at garnering popular support for the Party. The Party implemented educational programs and requirements within schools, and saturated the media with official nationalist rhetoric. This included placing a strong emphasis on patriotism, national interest and national spirit. The CCP's behavior towards nationalism in China after 1989 can also be attributed to the increasing importance of capitalism to China's economic growth and development. The CCP saw nationalism as an answer to the power vacuum left by the incompatibility of socialist ideology with contemporary Chinese (capitalist) reality.

For their efforts, however, the state seemed satisfied with relatively modest outcomes. The Party chose not to intervene in people's lives as long as they refrained

from issuing explicit challenges to socialism or the CCP.[27] In other words, the CCP no longer attempted to instill Party ideology within the hearts and minds of the Chinese people. Instead, a "correct" attitude towards the Party was defined only as a lack of outright opposition towards it. The CCP's approach to state nationalism, or the "official version of patriotism,"[28] has only been dubiously effective with the Chinese population at large, and has led to the growth of alternative nationalist discourses such as cultural nationalism and popular nationalism. Official state nationalism now finds itself necessarily working with and against these other discourses in order to negotiate—as opposed to dictate—the terms of Chinese nationalism, identity, culture and national interest.

Cultural nationalism often clashes with state nationalism, on the grounds that "cultural nationalism is fundamentally against party ideology."[29] Arguing that national Chinese identity and the creation of a Chinese nation-state should be based on a common Chinese cultural heritage, cultural nationalists disregard the state's claims of importance to the development of China altogether. Furthermore, cultural nationalists often hold the CCP responsible for the anti-traditionalism prevalent in early reform-era China, and for the subsequent devaluation of Confucianism and other Chinese traditions.[30] Formulated and supported largely by intellectuals, cultural nationalism represents the revival of a new Chinese cultural elitism more able to freely disagree with the official state line than before.

Unlike state or cultural nationalism, popular nationalist discourse avoids state ideology and instead asserts the importance of Chinese values and Chineseness to the formulation of the Chinese nation-state and national identity. The popular

understanding of Chinese national identity is largely shaped by two main factors: how China perceives and is perceived by foreign countries, and how China views and interprets its own past.[31] As China's regard for itself and others evolves over time, so too does its sense of national identity. One way that China has elected to perceive its past is by recounting the events of the so-called "Century of Humiliation." China's victimization by Japan and the West provides a collective rallying point for popular Chinese nationalism. According to popular Chinese sentiment, Chinese suffering at the hands of the Japanese included losses incurred during the First Sino-Japanese War, the resultant Treaty of Shimoneseki, and the Second Sino-Japanese War, also known as the War of Resistance Against Japan.[32] This systematic categorization of China's suffering in the twentieth century is "central to the contested and evolving meaning of being 'Chinese' today."[33] The victimization narrative allows Chinese people to confront their vulnerability and weaknesses as a nation.

While Xu's film depicts historical events, her treatment of them does not evoke a strongly political stance. The film asserts neither a strong hero or victor narrative, commonly associated with portrayals of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, nor a strong victimization narrative, frequently seen in the Chinese depiction of Sino-Japanese relations. Primarily contributing to the stylized aesthetics of the film, the historico-political imagery in *Letter* adds to the nostalgia of a bygone era while often serving as a plot device. The seemingly offhand manner in which these occurrences are portrayed suggests a surprisingly neutral approach to these politically charged issues. Nevertheless, it is simplistic to state that *Letter* can therefore be read apolitically.

## The War of Resistance in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*

Xu's *Letter*, which spans the years 1930 to 1948, is set in a time period that encompasses the entirety of the War of Resistance. Throughout the film, the War of Resistance surfaces at crucial moments in the female protagonist's life. It drifts in and out of her life in a manner reminiscent of her encounters with the writer. By making references to the War, Xu's film necessarily engages with issues of nationalism and national identity as they relate to the Chinese people. However, through the restrained depiction of the War and the characters' generally equivocal responses towards the War, *Letter* shifts the focus away from the trauma of the Japanese invasion. Instead, the film explores the subjective emotional experiences of the characters, particularly those of the unknown woman.

*Letter* demonstrates a different attitude towards the representation of historical events in contemporary Chinese cinema. In the film, the War of Resistance underscores important moments in the female protagonist's life. This utilization of the War downplays its political importance as a historical event, and demonstrates a change in thematic focus in contemporary Chinese cinema. The portrayal of nationalism in the film offers the viewer an alternative perspective on nationalism in 1930s and 40s China, while also commenting on the development of popular nationalism in the present day.

*Letter* is divided roughly into three sections, which correspond to different periods in the life of the unknown woman, and are framed by the writer's reception and reading of the letter itself. The second section of the film begins as the female

protagonist returns to Beijing as a newly matriculated university student. It is 1936 and the War of Resistance has not yet begun. However, nationalist sentiments are running high, culminating in a student protest march held in the streets. Xu Jinglei's character participates in the march, along with several of her female friends. The protest seems peaceful, and small groups converse quietly while holding yellow banners denouncing the Japanese presence in China. Suddenly, shots are fired and the crowd goes into a panic. Separated from her friends, Xu's character finds herself pulled out of the chaos and into a building. The writer, who had been taking photographs of the march on the threshold of the newspaper department building, rescues Xu's character from the mob.

Later that evening, the two of them are shown walking through a narrow alley on their way to a restaurant. While the writer expresses his admiration of her spirit and interest in national matters, Xu's character replies, "It's the rise and fall of a nation. In other words, all of the students are going." This is one of the very few snippets of conversation the audience catches during the couple's entire night together. The female protagonist's seemingly offhand remark that "all of the students are going" belittles the meaningfulness of her actions; that is, it downplays her concern for China's fate in the face of Japanese aggression. She is attributing her own actions to a kind of student conformism. The expression that she uses, *tianxia xingwang*, is the first half of the longer aphoristic saying, *tianxia xingwang*, *pifu youze*. Written by Gu Yanwu, a renowned Confucian scholar who lived during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the phrase can be translated as "everyone carries responsibility for the rise and fall of a nation." All citizens must do their part in order to ensure the health and

prosperity of their nation. While this is the intended meaning of the expression, the way in which Xu's character applies the saying does not carry the same moral and ethical connotation as the original. In her interpretation of the aphorism, civic duty and personal responsibility to the nation have been replaced with a type of conformist activism, as opposed to the construction of her own informed political beliefs and convictions.

Xu's character participates in the march in order to demonstrate youthful solidarity with the rest of the protesters. This is supported by her response to the writer, and by the manner in which she and her friends are portrayed during the march itself. Although they are physically present, even carrying protest banners, their minds are elsewhere. The snippets of their conversation made audible to the viewer revolve around food and making plans for going out later. Their concerns are far removed from the actual protest, and indicate the female protagonist's indifferent and seemingly nonchalant attitude towards the Japanese threat.

This attitude towards the War, as well as the utilization of the War as a plot device, recurs in other moments of the film as well. Shortly after the writer and the female protagonist begin spending time together, the writer must travel to Wanping fortress to report on the increasingly tense situation between Chinese and Japanese forces. Historically, the significance of Wanping Fortress cannot be lost on a Chinese audience. Directly to the east of the fortress lies the Marco Polo Bridge. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 1937, which was the impetus for the Japanese invasion of China from the Northeast, constitutes part of the narrative of the Century of Humiliation and is considered the beginning of the War of Resistance.[34] Today,

Wanping Fortress is the site of the Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. Opened in 1987—fifty years after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident—the museum is the most comprehensive museum in China regarding the Second Sino-Japanese War.[35]

The film's reference to this specific time and place creates a connection between the fictional characters and the true, historical events in China. However, the manner in which the incident is brought up is not intended to evoke "an irremovable, painful memory for the Chinese and part of their perception of Japan."[36] Instead, the importance of the historico-political reference to Wanping fortress is diminished in relation to its immediate consequences for the female protagonist and her time together with the writer. "I'll be here at school," is her only response to the writer's account of the situation; that is, she will be waiting for him after he returns from his assignment.

In a parallel sequence that takes place after their last night together in the third and final section of the film, the two characters are sitting down at breakfast while the writer summarizes the current national state of affairs. Looking at the newspaper, he mentions the increasing tension between the Nationalist and Communist Parties, and predicts the future inconsequentiality and dissolution of the Double Tenth Agreement.[37] He tells the female protagonist that he must go to Zhangjiakou, a city located northwest of Beijing.[38] In response to his comment, the female protagonist utters a single phrase: "Such a pity." Unaware of the hidden implications of her statement, the writer asks her to clarify. Xu's character answers that it is a reply to the national state of affairs as well as the writer's necessary departure. Here as in the

previously analyzed scene, the importance of national affairs is overshadowed by its personal affects on the woman and her relationship to the writer.

*Letter* utilizes moments of national and historical significance as backdrops to the film's romantic narrative. Often found at the heart of issues of Chinese nationalism, Sino-Japanese relations and the Chinese Civil War are portrayed here only insofar as they lead to encounters and interruptions between the female protagonist and the writer. Xu utilizes a strongly politically charged background for her film, but without allowing it to eclipse the "pure love story" that she wants to tell. Xu's narrative displays a new attitude towards China's past, as well as a change in Chinese popular sentiment regarding Japan in the present day. Historical events previously associated with Chinese heroization or victimization narratives are here deemphasized in favor of elevating personal experience.

In *Letter*, the Second Sino-Japanese War appears as an interruption to the progression of the relationship between the writer and the unknown woman. The personal and subjective experiences of the female protagonist in relation to the War neither help the film advance a portrayal of the Chinese people as moral victors in the War, nor does it depict them as noble victims suffering at the hands of the Japanese military. Instead, the relatively minor role that the War of Resistance plays in *Letter* suggests that the topic of the War has become less politically charged over time. This implies that China's perception of its own self-worth is no longer as tightly bound to the narrative of the Century of Humiliation as it used to be. It also signifies a reformulation in the conceptualization of Chinese national identity in the twenty-first century. It is possible that this change is connected to China's recent economic

growth and prosperity. The more neutral stance expressed in *Letter* towards the War seems to indicate that China is gradually moving away from zero-sum relationships with Japan or with the West, and is no longer as concerned about "catching up" with the rest of the world.

**Questioning the Politics of Popular Nationalism**

The female protagonist's attitude towards the War of Resistance subtly undermines the political elements of popular nationalism. By portraying her indifference in the face of nationalist fervor, the film suggests that popular nationalism develops among the masses despite a lack of genuine patriotic obligation or duty. Her casual approach to the War and her participation in the protest suggests that the impression of a strong, unified national front is misleading, and that in spite of numbers, a political movement can nevertheless be weak in political conviction. These observations regarding popular nationalism hold true not only for the pre-revolutionary time period depicted in the film, but they also contain implications for popular nationalism and the formulation of national identity in contemporary China as well.

By using the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War as reasons for the writer's sudden departures, the film downplays their importance as historically significant events for China as a whole while inversely highlighting their effects on the female protagonist as an individual. E. Ann Kaplan suggests that Xu's character situates herself as a subject in history, moving with historical events rather than being

moved by them.[39] This raises the female protagonist above the historical conditions in which she finds herself, and offers a new perspective on female subjectivity with respect to the historico-political forces that surround her. Able to vocally express her feelings in these scenes, her comments directly reflect feminine desire. Xu's character asserts her own centrality despite—or perhaps against—the political actions of the time. Focusing on the unknown woman and her subjective experience, *Letter* demonstrates how the female voice in film can co-exist with the political circumstances of her time without being consumed by them.

Xu's film prioritizes the importance of personal experience over national historico-political narratives, and carries a more relaxed attitude towards nationalism in twenty-first century Chinese cinema. By acknowledging and even elevating the female voice over its historico-political context, *Letter* suggests that the tensions between the manifestation of personal desire and the adherence to the dominant ideology of the time are diminishing in twenty-first century Chinese women's cinema. As state nationalism becomes only one voice among many in the political vacuum left by the instigation of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," other voices, including women's voices, are gradually becoming more pronounced, and indicate the emergence of gender consciousness in film.

## A Self-contained Conception of Love

Xu understands the female protagonist as a strong, independent and assertive woman. Instead of viewing her as a pitiable figure suffering from unrequited love, Xu

admires the woman for actively deciding to live her life in her own way. Xu defends the female protagonist in her film from feminists who accuse the main character of being subjected to the whims and desires of a man. According to Xu, the female character in *Letter* demonstrates agency by choosing to love the writer throughout the course of her entire life.

> "In my view, the love that the woman in *Letter* achieves is something that those people who shout about women's rights can never bring about…[T]he woman in *Letter* …loves by herself, but she doesn't request anything at all from the man. Her own sentiments are already complete. So I think this person is not outdated or conservative at all. I think she is unlike those people whom feminists criticize. She is a completely whole, independent woman."[40]

As seen by Xu, the unknown woman's conception of love is one that does not need reciprocation. Xu quotes Goethe to support her position: "[W]enn ich dich lieb habe, was geht's dich an?"[41] In her interpretation of this phrase, Xu understands love to be an ideal state in which the subject requires nothing from the love-object to be happy in love. Instead, the subject is fulfilled in love simply through and for the sake of maintaining love as an ideal.[42]

Xu's position on the unknown woman's love for the writer can be further expounded upon by looking at Lester H. Hunt's reading of Max Ophuls' 1948 Hollywood adaptation of Zweig's novella.[43] According to Hunt, Lisa, the unknown woman, "is all *eros*. […] In her, we see pure love, at least according to a certain conception of love."[44] Referring to José Ortega y Gasset, Hunt elaborates upon the conception of love as a psychological condition in which the subject feels a symbolic

union with the love-object, but for which possession of the love-object—attributed to desire, not love—is unnecessary.[45]

Xu calls the unknown woman in the film a "hard woman," one who is "ruthless to herself."[46] Although she states that "this girl's [sense of] self is extremely complete…all of the decisions are her own actions,"[47] there are times when Xu's onscreen portrayal of the unknown woman challenges this interpretation, and weakens the character's self-sufficent and strong-willed resolve to love for love's sake. The occasionally contradictory depiction of the female protagonist in *Letter* presents a multifaceted view of love and desire, and explores their implications for issues of gender and feminism.

**The Protest Scene, Revisited**

The protest scene is important for its portrayal of popular nationalist sentiments, as well as for its depiction of desire and female subjectivity. Through their juxtaposition in the same scene, the viewer can see how political issues recede into the background while an assertive female voice announces itself through the expression of female desire. In this scene, the unknown woman shows her sense of agency, which continues to develop as the narrative progresses. However, this scene also establishes the female protagonist's ability to exist simultaneously as a desiring subject and a desired object, demonstrating that the two are not mutually exclusive concepts. The unknown woman's embodiment of subjectivity and objectivity adds

further nuance to the film's female perspective, which "insists on a woman's consciousness—to see as a desiring subject."[48]

It is not at all coincidental that the writer grabs Xu's character during the panic that ensues at the protest. Instead, it appears to be partially due to a previous meeting between the two characters. In a scene that precedes the student protest, the writer becomes fully aware of the female protagonist as a desirable woman for the first time in the film. In this earlier scene, the writer and the female protagonist encounter one another in a narrow alleyway. Seated in separate pedicabs and headed in opposite directions, the two characters exchange a direct glance while their pedicabs come to a momentary standstill in the alley. The first to drop her gaze, Xu's character does not look at the writer again during this scene. Instead, the writer motions to allow the female protagonist to pass by first, and the camera employs a medium shot to show the writer looking intently at the female protagonist as her pedicab continues through the alley. The camera, pulling back into an extreme long shot, shows the writer continuing to scrutinize the female protagonist, even turning around in his seat to get a better look.

This shot/reverse shot sequence appears again during the protest scene. Jiang's character, who has been photographing the march, glances up from his camera lens as he catches sight of the female protagonist looking at him from amongst the crowd. Her direct gaze causes him to do a slight double take before recognizing her as the girl from the pedicab. Unlike in the previous scene, though, Xu's character does not drop her gaze. Cutting back and forth between the two characters, the camera eventually settles on the female protagonist. In this scene, she is the one who twists her head as

she walks by the writer in order to maintain visual contact with him. This inverts the positions of the two characters. Whereas previously the female protagonist served as a passive object of the male gaze, here she is the one who initiates the gaze, becoming an actively viewing subject herself.

The repetition and inversion of the shot/reverse shot sequence accentuates the subtle shift in gender positioning that occurs from the first scene to the next. During the protest scene, the female protagonist focuses her gaze on the writer.[49] By maintaining eye contact, she also controls how the writer looks back at her; that is, she exhibits a degree of command over her position as the object of the male gaze. Her actions challenge societal notions of femininity in Chinese culture and the prescribed conventions regarding female behavior at the time. Here, the female protagonist boldly expresses her desire through visual cues. Her actions contrast directly with her behavior in the previous scene and signal a turning point in the film. The unknown woman's behavior in this scene marks the arrival of a new and more confident woman—one who freely conveys her desire regardless of its sociopolitical implications. From this moment on, the female protagonist increasingly demonstrates agency and conscious choice. This surfaces especially in her interactions with men during the third section of the film.

**The Unknown Woman Grows Up**

The third section of the film begins with an insert informing the audience that the year is now 1944. Xu's character, once again living in Beijing, has become a

socialite with a young son. Through a succession of scenes that introduce this section, the audience catches glimpses of cosmopolitan Beijing in the 1940s. The scenes depict the female protagonist and the writer, each with different groups of friends, enjoying noteworthy Beijing attractions such as the Summer Palace and Peking Opera performances, attending movie theatres showing American films, and frequenting Western imports such as dance halls and bowling alleys.

Although the camera makes it clear that the two characters now inhabit similar social circles and even appear in certain locations at the same time, Xu's character maintains a cool distance from the writer during their chance encounters. This can be seen in a scene at the Summer Palace. Out for a stroll, Xu and her small group of friends are formally introduced by their mutual acquaintance, Mr. Ma, to the writer and his cohort. After shaking his hand, Xu's character and one of the other women immediately turn away and continue on their way while the rest of the introductions are still being made. She makes no effort to interact with the writer beyond the handshake. Her decision not to engage the writer in this scene can be understood as a deliberate choice. She demonstrates a complete disregard for being recognized, to say nothing of being loved, by the writer.

In a voiceover that immediately follows this scene, the unknown woman reflects on her attitude towards the writer during this time period. She notes that she has grown accustomed to his inability to recognize her, and she feels that her emotions towards him are trivial and not worth mentioning, not even to herself. This voiceover gives the audience a different impression of the unknown woman. Taken together with her actions and self-assured demeanor at the Summer Palace, the voiceover

seems to indicate that the female protagonist is no longer the obsessed teenager from the first section, nor the love-struck university student from the second portion of the film. Instead, the female protagonist in the third section portrays herself as a confident, independent modern woman who appears outwardly unconcerned with traditional, patriarchal ideas of love and commitment. The unknown woman's denial of her emotions can be accepted at face value; alternatively, her statement may also be understood as a form of self-deception. The voiceover, which creates space for ambiguity in interpretation, gives the viewer a glimpse into the female protagonist's complicated and at times contradictory inner psyche.

This depiction of the female protagonist, while perhaps at odds with Xu's previously stated interpretation of the unknown woman as a figure who is complete in her love, offers an alternative understanding of what it means to be a strong and independent female in urban, pre-revolutionary Chinese society. In her life as a socialite, Xu's character lives as a single mother in a well-kept home with her young son. Neither she nor her son suffers from socioeconomic stigma or repercussions. On the contrary, both mother and son belong to the privileged class and enjoy luxuries of the time, including Western fashions and other imports.

Fully aware of her status as a desirable woman, the female protagonist chooses to remain single, as evidenced by her interactions with the young Chinese military captain Huang. In one scene, Huang appears to be on the verge of asking Xu's character to marry him. However, when he broaches the subject, he receives no encouragement from her. Changing his mind, he abruptly ends the conversation altogether. In the next scene, a female friend asks the unknown woman about what is

upsetting Huang. The unknown woman replies, “Men. They all think that being this way means I love them. It’s very extraordinary. Don’t worry about him.” Her response seems to indicate that Huang is not the first man with intentions to marry her, nor is he the first one to be rebuffed by her. Instead, her cool and detached manner demonstrates an equal indifference and disregard towards all men.

However, the female protagonist’s nonchalant manner towards the writer continues to fluctuate. Encountering him once again in the dance hall, she steers their conversation away from innocent small talk and towards sexual innuendo. She makes it clear that she is available to him whenever he wishes, and they leave together soon afterwards. Such behavior provides fuel for those who decry the film as retrogressive for feminism, on the basis of the argument that the woman’s actions demonstrate that she is always willing to drop everything at the man’s behest.[50] Alternatively, though, her behavior in the dance hall can be understood as a self-confident display of female desire. It functions as a step towards gender equality through the acknowledgment and assertion of female sexuality.

A conclusive assessment of the female protagonist’s behavior in this scene is complicated by the following scene, however, which depicts the unknown woman and the writer in a pedicab on the way to the writer’s residence. In the pedicab, the unknown woman’s suddenly pensive attitude highlights another set of strong internal emotions. Through the voiceover that accompanies this scene, the female protagonist confesses to the writer that she would follow him anywhere, and at any time—even from the grave. Verbalizing the unknown woman’s inner desires, the voiceover expresses what appears to be her true feelings towards the writer, challenging her

assured, external poise and behavior. This also disputes the previous statements expressed in her letter to the writer.

Xu's voiceovers, told from the perspective of the unknown woman, complicate the character's outward attitude towards love, desire and relationships. The voiceovers, which occur throughout the film, often mimic interior monologue. According to Mary Ann Doane, '[t]he voice displays what is inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible: the 'inner life' of the character. The voice here is the privileged mark of interiority, turning the body 'inside-out.''"[51] Cui calls the voiceover technique "a perfect cinematic motif for engendering personal and psychological expression."[52] In *Letter*, revealing the female protagonist's thoughts through voiceover adds complexity to her character. The voiceover method, which verbalizes the contents of her letter to the writer, enables the unknown woman to convey the thoughts and desires that she is unable—or unwilling—to express out loud. It also allows the film to remain faithful to the introspective tone of the original novella. The use of voiceover in *Letter* supports the idea of an emerging female perspective in Chinese cinema that is less constrained by conventions in Chinese cinema, especially as they pertain to dominant ideologies.

**Xu and the Chinese Modern Girl**

Kaplan suggests that Xu sets her film in pre-revolutionary China because "the 1930s was a period when women had more choices, even within a still patriarchal and male-dominated culture…Xu possibly sees Jiang's cultural freedom as a model for

women in the China of 2004 who sought more artistic, sexual, and aesthetic possibilities."[53] Xu's portrayal of the unknown woman can also be viewed as homage to the "modern girl" phenomenon, which emerged in the 1930s in cities around the world. Modern girls, who were comfortable with expressing their sensuality through feminine expression, destabilized traditional ideas of marriage and motherhood and created a new mode of what was considered acceptable female behavior.[54]

By modeling her character on the modern girl, Xu may be suggesting that pre-revolutionary Beijing held a more tolerant attitude towards female sexuality than Beijing in the contemporary era. Her decision to move the film narrative into the pre-revolutionary period supports this reading. The film's recognition of the unknown woman and her unconventional lifestyle indirectly questions patriarchal and matrimonial social expectations in Chinese society today. This can be seen less as a refutation of present-day state ideology, and more as a reflection on Chinese cultural values, which continue to draw on Confucianism in spite of the socialist regime.[55] Xu's film may propose that present-day Chinese society should look to the past for a fresh perspective on women's issues such as female emancipation and sexual liberation. Furthermore, *Letter* voices the possibility that a feminine perspective in cinema exists in twenty-first century China without having to stand in the shadows of socialist ideological discourse.

**“A man’s single night, a woman’s entire lifetime”**

Xu opposed the official tagline for the film, which was printed on movie posters as “one man’s night, one woman’s lifetime.”[56] Instead, Xu wanted the tagline to read “one man’s night, one woman’s night, a lifetime for each of them.”[57] In an interview, she maintains that the encounter between the two characters has far-reaching effects on both the writer and the female protagonist. Xu understands the woman’s life as the result of her active choices to live as she does. Conversely, Xu sees the man participating much more passively through his life. His past experiences—of which he has no recollection—must be recounted to him in epistolary form. Xu’s interpretation of the narrative, and her desire to edit the tagline, advocates seeing the two characters upon equal footing. Xu’s modified tagline promotes a sense of gender equality, and refutes a depiction of the woman as a victim of unrequited love.[58]

Ultimately, however, the more conventional tagline was used to promote the film. Although Xu intended for the film to make a strong statement regarding love, desire and strength through the lens of female subjectivity, the film was still advertised in a way that portrayed the female protagonist as dependent on the man. This encourages a reading of the film in terms of a Hollywood melodrama, understood in film studies as “all but synonymous with a set of sub-genres that remain close to the hearth and emphasize a register of heightened emotionalism and sentimentality: the family melodrama, the maternal melodrama, the woman’s film, the weepie, the soap opera, etc.”[59] Indeed, in her assessment of Xu’s *Letter*, Jingyuan Zhang goes so far as

to say that “[m]any feminists, including myself, find Xu Jinglei’s rendition of Zweig’s story painful to watch, as she reproduces without any irony the logical extreme of the traditional value that a woman must live through her man as his selfless slave and still call it love.”[60] This reading of the film oversimplifies Xu’s *Letter*, both in terms of directorial intent and cinematic execution.[61] As has been shown above, Xu’s character in the film lives a much more complicated existence as a single woman. Even in light of her conflicting notions of love and desire, the unknown woman regularly takes initiative and chooses her own path in life, regardless of the consequences. She is by no means depicted as subservient to the writer.

Xu’s interpretation of the narrative, her portrayal of the female lead, and the marketing of the film all express different degrees of emphasis on female subjectivity. The shifting ways in which the female voice is represented in the film demonstrate an ongoing negotiation of gender issues in contemporary China. The struggle that the female protagonist undergoes in maintaining a consistent attitude towards the writer seems to correspond to her difficulties in keeping a constant attitude towards love, desire and agency in the film. The fluctuating representation of the female protagonist’s thoughts and actions shows how the film continues to explore and define its female aesthetic. The contradictory behavior that the unknown woman exhibits towards the writer suggests that Xu’s character and the film as a whole are still struggling to resolve questions about female desire and sexuality.

**Parallelism in Authorial Claims**

Both Zweig and Xu state that their works are non-political. However, their attempts to avoid politics result in highlighting the unintentionally political nature of their pieces. Zweig's emphasis on interiority in *Brief* can be seen as a means of political protest through an exaggeratedly pointed method of non-action. Written primarily from the perspective of the unknown woman, Zweig's novella avoids almost all contact with the outside world. On the other hand, Xu's adaptation of the narrative, told primarily in flashback form, embraces the outside world. The film necessarily takes up the mantle of exteriority lacking in the novella through its realization in a visual medium. However, Xu's personal reasons for setting her film in pre-revolutionary Beijing echo Zweig's stance of non-political involvement in the writing of the original work. According to Xu,

> "I once wanted to use contemporary Beijing as the background [for the film], but while writing the second section of the film, I found it difficult to continue. [This is] because the female character gives birth out of wedlock and raises an illegitimate child. Her identity as a socialite would have raised many sensitive societal issues, and I didn't want to stray from the original because of these problems. I wanted to address a pure, unadulterated love story, one that paid attention to emotion itself, and not to societal questions."[62]

Xu's interpretation of the text concentrates on Zweig's novella as a "pure love story."[63] Similar to Zweig, who situated *Brief* in the past and shunned the realities of the First Republic of Austria, Xu locates her version of *Letter* in the past to avoid addressing problematic sociopolitical issues that would have surfaced by setting the film in the present. She chooses to preclude confrontation and censorship by changing

the film's time frame altogether. Both Xu and Zweig shift the emphasis away from the politics inherent in their respective national contexts in favor of the personal politics of desire.

Situated in fin-de-siècle Vienna, Zweig's narrative does not seem to contain the same degree of calculated political awareness that appears in Xu's adaptation. In contrast, Xu's decision to modify the temporal setting of the production acknowledges the importance of politics upon her film in multiple ways. Her revision of the film's time frame indicates her awareness of sensitive social issues in contemporary China. Preemptively adjusting the location of the narrative anticipates the reaction of Chinese film censors to the implications of raising an illegitimate child in present-day China. Setting the film in an earlier, pre-revolutionary timeframe permits Xu to avoid confronting such issues, and to deny claims of implicit sociopolitical commentary on contemporary China. It also allows the film to conform to official state doctrine regarding the "decadence" of non-liberated China, while avoiding the suggestion that a similar atmosphere exists in China today. Moving the narrative into the past also predicts the reaction of a culturally conservative Chinese audience to the decisions made by the film's female protagonist, and takes preventative measures against their potentially negative responses to the film. Diffusing the problematic issue of illegitimate childbirth by placing it in a bygone era makes the film more innocuous and appealing, not only to state censors but to the Chinese audience as well. By placing her film in pre-revolutionary Beijing, Xu demonstrates her understanding of Chinese politics in film, as well as her business acumen.

## Summation

Xu's approach to *Letter* illuminates a new attitude towards filmmaking with respect to its sociopolitical, cultural and aesthetic functions. *Letter* succeeds in contributing to the emergence of gender awareness in Chinese women's cinema. However, its feminine aesthetic comes across in conflicting ways. Unlike in Chinese women's cinema of the past, the film's struggle to express a female perspective lucidly is not due to the subjugation of the female voice to the ideological constraints of the time. Instead, the decreasing significance of state discourse on the everyday lives of the Chinese people, combined with the decoupling of the state from the film industry, have enabled a plurality of voices to flourish in Chinese cinema, including in films directed by women. *Letter* provides a sampling of the different attitudes and approaches towards gender issues in present-day Chinese film, and reflects the still-changing nature and status of feminism in Chinese society today.

In Xu's film, female subjectivity becomes more prominent as state ideology recedes into the background. Her transformation of the film's historical context into background material for the more important love story is a bold decision that demonstrates a new stance towards filmmaking and feminism in China today. It indicates that gender differences in film are no longer suppressed under the name of gender equality, nor are they erased in the establishment of a collective, socialist identity. Unlike the Orientalized or exoticized presentation of female sexuality in Chinese New Wave cinema, *Letter*'s depiction of the unknown woman also refutes a reading of Xu's character as an allegorical symbol for the Chinese nation-state.

Instead, the focus on the female protagonist emphasizes the importance of individual experience over grand, sweeping narratives, and connects the modernism of the original text to the development and progression of modernity in contemporary China. These changes towards the perspective on and presentation of gender in contemporary Chinese cinema may be due to the privatization of the Chinese film industry, the increasingly small role of the state in the everyday lives of the people, and the country's growing presence and participation in the global marketplace.

The political discourse found in *Letter* draws primarily from popular nationalism, and avoids direct confrontation with the Chinese Party-state through its pre-revolutionary historical setting. Xu's depiction of wartime China is filtered through a stylized, nostalgic lens, and the nationalistic fervor of the times is depicted only insofar as it has a direct effect on the female protagonist's interactions with the writer. The de-politicized treatment of Sino-Japanese history in the film reflects a shift in contemporary Chinese attitudes towards Japan and the Century of Humiliation, and also implies changes to the perception of Chinese national identity and self-worth in the early twenty-first century.

Zweig's *Brief* and its Chinese adaptation complement one another in their approaches to politics, identity, culture, and their intersection with gender issues and women's rights. Xu's adaptation shows how a seemingly innocuous story of love and desire, told from a first-person female perspective, can be used to promote gender awareness and add complexity to issues of national concern as they are portrayed through Chinese cinema. Xu's *Letter* reflects feminism and politics back into Zweig's story, despite—or perhaps because of—the original narrative's refusal to engage with

historical context.  Xu's film version, much like its 1948 cinematic predecessor directed by Ophuls, continues to give Zweig's narrative new depth and global relevance in the present day.

## Notes to Chapter Four

[1] Zweig's *Brief einer Unbekannten* was originally published in manuscript form as *Der Brief einer Unbekannten* in Dresden by the Lehmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung (Lehmann & Schulze) in 1922. The edition, which contains the author's second written copy, is dated September 18-27, 1921.
[2] Prater, Donald A., *European of Yesterday. Stefan Zweig* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1972), 135-6.
[3] Other novellas written during this time include *Der Amokläufer*, *Die Frau und die Landschaft, Phantastische Nacht* and *Die Mondscheingasse.* These stories, along with *Brief einer Unbekannten*, were all collected in one volume and published as *Amok: Novellen einer Leidenschaft* in 1922 by Insel Verlag in Leipzig.
[4] Prater, *European of Yesterday,* 103.
[5] Zweig, Stefan. *Die Welt von Gestern* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag, 1942, 1944), 346.
[6] Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern*, 342.
[7] Steiman, Lionel B., "Stefan Zweig: The Legacy of World War I and the Tasks of Exile." *Stefan Zweig. Exil und Suche nach dem Weltfrieden*, ed. Mark H. Gelber and Klaus Zelewitz (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1995), 73-87. 76.
[8] Steiman, Lionel B., "The Worm in the Rose: Historical Destiny and Individual Action in Stefan Zweig's Vision of History." *The World of Yesterday's Humanist Today,* ed. Marion Sonnenfeld (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1983), 128-156. 147.
[9] Steiman, "Stefan Zweig: The Legacy of World War I and the Tasks of Exile, " 76.
[10] Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern,* 16.
[11] Botstein, Leon, "Stefan Zweig and the Illusion of the Jewish European." *The World of Yesterday's Humanist Today,* ed. Marion Sonnenfeld (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1983), 82-110. 90.
[12] Ibid., 91.
[13] Zweig, *Die Welt von* Gestern, 322.
[14] Zweig's popularity during his lifetime extended to China as well. *Brief einer Unbekannten* first appeared in China in the Shanghai literary journal *World Literature* in 1935, published by the Shanghai Liming Press. It was released in three installments and translated by Han Bin from English into Chinese. The version of *Brief* used by Xu Jinglei for her Chinese film adaptation was taken from a 1980 translation of the narrative from the German by Yu Shu.
[15] Cui, Shuqin, *Women through the Lens* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003).
[16] The connection between feminism and nationalism in the Chinese cinematic context has also been commented upon by researchers including Lingzhen Wang and E. Ann Kaplan.
[17] Wang, Lingzhen, "Introduction. Transnational Feminist Reconfiguration of Film Discourse and Women's Cinema." *Chinese Women's Cinema*, ed. Lingzhen Wang (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1-43. 23-5.
[18] Cui, *Women through the Lens,* 184.
[19] "Introducing Xu Jinglei."
[20] Li, Jinhua, "Chinese Feminisms and Adaptation-as-Translation Readings of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*. Volume 9 Issue 4 (December 2004). 3.
[21] Zhang, Zhen, "Introduction. Bearing Witness: Chinese Urban Cinema in the Era of 'Transformation' (*Zhuanxing*)." *The Urban Generation. Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century,* ed Zhen Zhang (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-45. 10.
[22] He, Dong, "From a young girl to a mature woman: Xu Jinglei: Stranger and Stranger." *Ganlong xinwen wang*. 9 November 2004.
[23] Famous Fifth Generation Chinese filmmakers included Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang.
[24] See footnote 37 in Chapter 2.
[25]Wang, Jiangyue and Liu, Guiyan, "Xu Jinglei: Everlasting Love in Spain." *Beijing Qingnian Zhoukan*. October 19, 2004. Liu, Jiaqi. "Xu Jinglei: To Succeed, You Must be Bold!" *Dongfang Zaobao*. October 8, 2004.
[26] He, Baogang and Yingjie Guo, *Nationalism, National Identity and Democratization in China* (Hants,

UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2000), 26.
[27] He and Guo, *Nationalism, National Identity and Democratization in China*, 25-30.
[28] Guo, Yingjie, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China* (London: Routledge, 2004), 17.
[29] Ibid., 4.
[30] Ibid., Introduction.
[31] Gries, Peter Hays, *China's New Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 43-53.
[32] Ibid., 43-53.
[33] Ibid., 46.
[34] Li, Xiaobing, *History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 64. Wu, Xinbo, "Memory and Perception. The Chinese Thinking of Japan." *Memory and History in East and Southeast Asia. Issues of Identity in International Relations,* ed. Gerrit W. Gong (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2001), 65-85.
[35] The official website URL of the Memorial Museum for the War of Resistance Against Japan is http://www.1937china.com, accessed 30 May 2013.
[36] Wu, "Memory and Perception. The Chinese Thinking of Japan," 66.
[37] The Double Tenth Agreement, also known as the Chongqing Agreement, was signed on October 10, 1945. It was a written document in which the KMT, established as the national ruling party of China, recognized the CCP as an equal political party in China. Both parties agreed to work towards the avoidance of civil war and for the construction of a new, free and prosperous China. However, the negotiations between the CCP and the KMT ultimately failed. See Li, X., *History of the Modern Chinese Army,* 71 and Yang, Benjamin, *Deng: A Political Biography* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 98-99.
[38] Known as the "northern gate to the capital" (Lovell, *The Great Wall,* 220), Zhangjiakou has been historically important in Sino-Japanese, Chinese Communist-Nationalist and Sino-Soviet military maneuvers. See Wortzel, Larry M. and Higham, Robin D. S., *Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese Military History* (Westport, CT: Greenport Press, 1999), 27-30.
[39] Kaplan, E. Ann, "Affect, Memory, and Trauma Past Tense. Hu Mei's *Army Nurse* (1985) and Xu Jinglei's *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (2004)." *Chinese Women's Cinema,* 154-70. 165.
[40] He, "From a Young Girl to a Mature Woman: Xu Jinglei: Stranger and Stranger."
[41] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Sämtliche Werke. Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre,* Band 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), 4. Buch, 9. Kapitel, 9: 597.
[42] Yi, Lijing, "Xu Jinglei: Directing This Character Makes Me Appear as a Successful Career Woman." *Nanfang renwu zhoukan*. 18 April 2006.
[43] Hunt, Lester H., "The Paradox of the Unknown Lover: A Reading of 'Letter from an Unknown Woman'." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter 2006): 55-66.
[44] Ibid., 64, all italics in the original.
[45] Ibid., 64.
[46] He, "From a Young Girl to a Mature Woman: Xu Jinglei: Stranger and Stranger."
[47] Zhang Huijun and Ma Yufeng, "All of the Progress is From the Process of Undertaking Responsibility. Speaking to the Director of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* About the Creative Process." *Journal of the Beijing Film Academy*. Issue 3, No. 64 (2005/2006): 52-60.
[48] Cui, *Women through the Lens*, xxiii.
[49] Kaplan gives further examples in *Letter* where the writer is visually depicted as the object of the female gaze in her 2011 essay, "Affect, Memory, and Trauma Past Tense."
[50] See for example Zhang Jingyuan's criticism of the film. Zhang, Jingyuan, "The Cinematic Maneuverings of Xu Jinglei." *Chinese Women's Cinema*, 293-310.
[51] Doane, Mary Ann, "The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space." *Yale French Studies*, No. 60, Cinema/Sound (1980): 33-50. 41.
[52] Cui, *Women through the Lens,* 185.
[53] Kaplan, "Affect, Memory, and Trauma Past Tense," 166-7.
[54] Modern Girl Around the World Research Group. "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device: Collaboration, Connective Composition, Multidirectional Citation." *The Modern Girl Around the*

*World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, ed. Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, Madeleine Y. Dong, and Tani E. Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1-24.

[55] Similarly, the modern girl phenomenon in China of the 1930s can be seen as a reaction to criticism against Confucianism and Chinese traditionalism during the Chinese Enlightenment and New Culture era.

[56] In Chinese, the promotional tagline reads *nanren yi ye, nüren yi sheng*.

[57] The tagline preferred by Xu Jinglei is *nanren de yi ye, nüren de yi ye, nanren he nüren de yi sheng.* See Zhang and Ma, "All of the Progress is From the Process of Undertaking Responsibility," 52-3.

[58] Xu's modified tagline also proposes that the encounter has long-ranging effects on the man. In the same interview with Zhang and Ma, Xu suggests that the receipt of such a letter would throw the man into a crisis of self-doubt, and increase his existential inability to comprehend and recognize oneself. She considers this outcome far worse than the outcome of the unknown woman.

[59] Singer, Ben, "Female Power in the Serial-Queen Melodrama: The Etiology of an Anomaly." *Camera Obscura* 22 (1990): 91-129. 94.

[60] Zhang, J., "The Cinematic Maneuverings of Xu Jinglei," 302.

[61] Zhang's reaction towards Xu's *Letter* is reminiscent of critics' initial reactions to Max Ophuls' 1948 production of *Letter*. In the April 29, 1948 *New York Times* review of *Letter*, for instance, Bosley Crowther cals Ophuls' film as an "obvious…onslaught on the heart-strings […] Indeed, it has all the accessories of that brand of moist-handkerchief romance, including sad music played on violins and the death of an illegitimate child." Crowther, Bosley, "Review: Letter From an Unknown Woman." *New York Times*. *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, ed. Virginia Wright Wexman and Karen Hollinger (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 213-214. 213.

[62] Unknown, "Xu Jinglei: Emotion as a Main Theme is Without Boundaries. Love is Mankind's Eternal Topic." *Xinwen Chenbao*.

[63] Although this project contends that Zweig's original narrative does create a space to consider the sociocultural implications that result from the female protagonist's decisions regarding the writer and their child, a full exploration of this claim lies outside the scope of this study.

# Chapter Five

## Conclusion

As this project has gradually moved its way temporally and spatially from West to East, it seems appropriate here to briefly retrace those steps in a rear-facing manner; namely, to start with the Chinese interpretations and move backwards towards their German-language originals once again. Each Chinese adaptation exhibits a different degree of engagement with the original German material, and uses German literary modernism as a basis for exploring issues of Chinese identity and representation in the contemporary era. Their treatments of the German-language texts reflect different post-Mao Chinese attitudes towards the West on various sociocultural, economic and political levels. The reliance on the West as a model for modernization and reform, which is clearly present in *Sichuan Haoren*, contrasts with the unacknowledged Western influence in "Building in Sections." Both of these approaches conflict with *Letter*'s straightforward depiction of Western elements in early twentieth-century Chinese society. Seen on a continuum, Chinese perspectives towards the West in the post-Mao era have shifted from being primarily Europhilic to becoming increasingly more Europhobic, and recently have settled somewhere in between.

Looking at the significance of the West in each Chinese adaptation gives the reader a better understanding of how Chinese national consciousness has evolved alongside issues of Westernization and modernization. *Sichuan Haoren* struggles to

retain its traditional Chinese roots while championing Western theatre reform. The *chuanju* looks to Brecht's model of epic theatre as a means of modernizing Chinese theatre. In the process, the sinicization of Brecht's drama announces China's active participation in the global community of international theatre and performing arts. The production and reception of the opera also demonstrate a high level of regard for Western culture in China at the time, while simultaneously revealing the renewed efforts of Chinese artists and intellectuals to promote traditional Chinese heritage and culture in the post-Mao period.

Can Xue's "Building in Sections" takes a more assertive and insular "pro-Chinese" stance. A brief mention in the narrative's title is the only direct reference to the original modernist source material. Instead of acknowledging its debt to Kafka, the text attempts to create something new out of its obscured Western roots, which include its essayistic, short story form and the contradictory logic of Kafka's narrative itself. This denial of Western influence upon Can Xue's essay signifies a change in China's appraisal and evaluation of Western culture. During the 1990s, China experienced accelerated economic growth and development, which helped the state realize its growing political and economic power. No longer relying on the West as a model for success in the contemporary era, China displayed a newfound self-confidence that is evident in "Building in Sections" through its handling of Kafka's original text.

Both of these approaches differ from how the West figures in *Letter*. Xu's film, which updates and sinicizes Zweig's *Brief*, depicts the prevalence of Western consumer culture in early modern Beijing, and reinforces the connection between

Republican-era China and China of the new millennium: the images of Western automobiles, technology, dress and entertainment in cosmopolitan Beijing of the Republican era all have their equivalents in twenty-first century China. The reception of the film at home and abroad shows the extent to which global consumerism has become an accepted, everyday part of life in urban China and in the rest of the world.

German modernist literature provides Chinese artists and intellectuals with a creative means to engage with the dominant state discourse of their day. Expressing their views towards the official rhetoric, they develop interpretations that provide glimpses of particular moments in Chinese history. Xu's film attempts to avoid political entanglement altogether. Focusing on the dynamics of personal desire in an effort to remain apolitical, the film nevertheless acknowledges the importance of state censorship upon the creation, production and reception of the finished creation; its ostentatious refusal of politics is itself a political statement. Can Xue's essay addresses the dominant discourse more directly. Her portrayal of the Great Wall of China satirizes the propagandistic and nationalistic images of the Wall depicted in official Chinese rhetoric at the time. Alternatively, *Sichuan Haoren* treats socialist ideology in a cautious and ambiguous manner that indicates the uncertainty with which politics were regarded in cultural and intellectual circles during the early post-Mao era. In each case, the Chinese artists and intellectuals display their awareness of state influence upon their creations. Their responses towards official discourse reveal how the relationship between the Chinese people and the regime is constantly evolving in the contemporary period.

The Chinese artists often offer viewpoints in their adaptations that appear at odds with official state doctrine. This mirrors the stance that the German modernist authors took towards Orientalist discourse at the turn of the twentieth century; namely, both challenge the dominant discourse of their day. Similarly speaking out against ideological objectives propagated by the state, the mirroring effect is particularly striking when one considers how the original German texts and their present-day Chinese adaptations ostensibly represent the opposing perspectives of the potential colonizer and the potentially colonized. This unexpected convergence in vantage points further contributes to the processes of reflection, refraction and reciprocity that occur between the originals and their interpretations.

Less wary of political repercussions or censure, the German-language narratives question the ideological motives behind Western discourse about China by exposing the conflicts and inadequacies that emerge through stereotypical representations of China, its people and its culture. In "Boxeraufstand," the conflicting manner in which the European lieutenant treats the Chinese novel-reading prisoner demonstrates an incomplete breakdown in preconceptions and the categorization of the Eastern Other. *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* only appears to satirize traditional Chinese culture and philosophy, while in reality juxtaposing traditionalism with Western modernism and messages of social reform. Kafka's "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer" employs Orientalist tropes in a manner that intentionally obfuscates the comprehension of China as either a geopolitical entity or a fictional construct.

Each German-language narrative depicts a deliberately ambivalent version of China that invites the reader to reassess his or her thoughts regarding the politics of identity and representation. Both the originals and their Chinese counterparts destabilize the discursive frameworks within which they operate, as they encourage the reader to explore issues of identity and representation in ways that are not predicated on binary distinctions. The ambiguity of the *Chinabilder* in the German texts enabled the Chinese artists to experiment with their own interpretations of China and the West. In other words, the contemporary Chinese reception of German modernist literature has helped shape China's new perception of itself in the global, post-Mao era.

**Broader Implications and Contributions**

This project has attempted to show how the original German-language modernist narratives and their post-Mao Chinese interpretations engage meaningfully with their respective cultural Other, challenging the reader to reconsider the politics of identity and representation while demonstrating the effects of intercultural exchange between China and the West across different eras of imperialism and globalization. The utilization of China in the German-language writings prefigures their use as source material in present-day Chinese theatre, literature and film. It also indicates the relevance of German modernist literature to the post-Mao Chinese context. The works take different approaches toward nationalistic sentiment, which are linked to their historical, politico-economic and cultural settings: the German-language narratives

diffuse and dispute European nationalist inclinations in the age of imperialism, while their present-day adaptations strengthen and reveal Chinese national consciousness in the age of global capitalism.

In addition, this study has tried to demonstrate the specific importance of China to each German-language work. Adopting different approaches towards their subject matter, each text addresses China on various cultural, national and historico-political levels. Through their exploration of Chinese themes and images, the German-language modernist writings ask the reader to rethink their own conceptions of China and the dynamics of cultural transfer. Moreover, these works explore the issue of cultural understanding and question the extent to which foreign cultures can be defined or made comprehensible in the first place. Aware of the implications of writing about China from a Western standpoint, the German modernist writings use the language of Orientalism in order to expose its shortcomings. However, each text also recognizes that this referential process may lead to a perception of the work as contributing to the very ideological discourse it seeks to problematize. The acknowledgement of this issue and its subsequent effects on both the production and reception of each German-language modernist work further destabilize the Orientalist moments within them.

The examination of German-language modernist literature about the East, and specifically about China, contributes to studies on Orientalism and postcolonialism by offering new viewpoints on colonialism, imperialism and nationalism in early twentieth century Europe. This is despite—or perhaps because of—the unusual German and Austro-Hungarian relationships to empire. Germany, which experienced

a relatively short period of colonization, and Austria-Hungary, which had no overseas colonies but was itself comprised of a staggeringly diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious population, both produced authors who engaged critically with the Chinese Other, and who resisted the assumption that categorization could be achieved through the use of Orientalist binaries or the Manichean aesthetic of good and evil. Instead, the German-language works challenge the reader to reassess the portrayal of China in the West, and to reorder their own experiences, fictional or otherwise, with the so-called Other.

The Chinese interpretations, which operate somewhat outside of postcolonialist studies, nevertheless contribute to the genre through their exploration of contemporary Chinese nationalism and identity from a previously marginalized non-Western perspective. Each contemporary production creates a new portrait of China based partly on its representation in the original German source material; that is, through a doubly refracted lens. An analysis of the Chinese adaptations reveals post-Mao Chinese attitudes towards the West, as well as towards the Chinese Self vis-à-vis the West. The adaptations encourage multiple readings that support, refute and otherwise problematize China's relationship to the West. At the same time, the productions enable Chinese artists and intellectuals to confront issues of modernity, modernization and Westernization as they have evolved—and continue to evolve—in different decades of the post-Mao era.

The Chinese adaptations, which also chronicle a shift from the politics of social and economic reform to the politics of personal desire, further emphasize the role that artistic and literary productions occupy as indicators and instigators of social,

political and historical change. This shift in focus is evident when placed in conjunction with China's growing influence upon the global marketplace and the re-establishment of China's position in the world. As China's global status becomes more dominant, the state's emphasis on topics of collective concern recedes, allowing issues of individual concern to come to the forefront. This marks a significant transition in the relationship between the socialist regime and its constituents.

**Further Lines of Inquiry**

This study utilizes Western ideas of modernity and modernization as part of its overarching framework. The implementation of these concepts enables the reader to better relate the German-language modernist texts to their Chinese counterparts in the post-Mao era. However, scholars such as Arif Dirlik in America and Wang Hui in China have questioned the applicability of Western concepts and theoretical constructs to Chinese history. Wang suggests that European definitions and models are insufficient to fully explain the progression of Chinese history. Instead, he proposes a system of "interpreting Chinese history from within."[1] For Wang, engaging with Chinese thought such as Confucianism in the present day enables the reader to better understand China's historical approach to modernity without relying on theories of development based on the Western nation-state system. Moreover, the consideration of alternative modernities decentralizes the importance of Western sociopolitical theories and paradigms to understanding China, Asia, and world history as a whole. Wang proposes that the reader must transcend the historical relationship between Asia

and the West, which led to the creation of such dichotomies in the first place. Only in this way can the reader advance his or her understanding of Chinese history and its relationship to world history.[2] Dirlik similarly questions the application of Western models to the Chinese experience. According to Dirlik, alternative modernities can only emerge after the historicization of capitalist modernity; that is, after the recognition and refutation of what Dirlik calls the "teleology of capitalism as the end of history."[3] In his essay, "Modernity as History," Dirlik discusses his concept of global modernity in the new millennium. Championing "the importance of everyday production of values against a preoccupation with reified notions of cultures and civilizations,"[4] Dirlik calls for the rethinking of modernity, culture, capitalism and world history.

Both Wang and Dirlik ask the reader to reassess how well Eurocentric concepts of modernity and modernization correspond to China's historical trajectory, especially in the contemporary era. This project, by way of contrast, examines the Chinese adaptations as they respond to the Western path of socioeconomic development, focusing on issues of capitalism and modernity, as well as what Theodore Huters refers to as "nation-state logic."[5] How might the reader's comprehension of the Chinese interpretations in this study change if read through the lens of an alternative modernity? What if the narrative tensions between China and the West were identified as a reflection of—and a reaction against—China's position towards global capitalism? Could one understand the juxtaposition of China with the West as a form of resistance against a system that relies on Western paradigms of progress? This study has attempted to show how the Chinese adaptations of German-

language modernist literature reflect the greater socioeconomic concerns of the Chinese state, especially the implications of China's modernization through Western theories of economic reform.[6] Yet how might the reader understand these adaptations in light of alternative theories of Chinese development as discussed by Wang and Dirlik—theories that do not presuppose a mentality of "catching up" to the West?

The destabilization of an overarching Eurocentric structure in the exploration of Chinese modernity is one path for further inquiry after this study. Additionally, an in-depth analysis of Chinese modernity, modernism and modernization in the Chinese Republican era could also enrich the findings of this project. During this time period, Chinese intellectuals searched for ways to bring literary modernism to China. This was made possible by the efforts to modernize China as a whole, which gained momentum with the May Fourth movement in 1919.[7] Members of the Chinese literary modernist movement attempted to combine their idealistic notions of art, beauty and truth with the realities of a country whose masses were, on the whole, still skeptical of the benefits of modernization via Western notions of science and reason. Analyzing translations, interpretations and the reception of Western modernist literature in China during this period can help the reader better contextualize China's relationship to the West during the latter portion of the twentieth century. What parallels exist between Republican-era Chinese scholars and writers, who had decidedly Eurocentric inclinations, and their post-Mao compatriots? How might the Eurocentric views of early twentieth-century Chinese society figure into how Chinese intellectuals and artists interact with the West in the present day?

Another line of inquiry concerns the thorough study of Chinese adaptations that utilize a broader selection of German modernist sources, including German-language texts that do not contain Chinese subject matter. As shown in the last chapter, the sinicization of Xu's film extends and builds upon the analysis conducted on the *chuanju* adaptation of Brecht's *Mensch* and Can Xue's essayistic interpretation of Kafka's "Mauer." Based on Zweig's *Brief*, Xu's film provides a glimpse into the changes occurring in contemporary Chinese society at the turn of the millennium. Partially due to current Chinese attitudes towards modernization, Westernization, globalization and the seemingly diminished role of the state in everyday affairs, Xu's *Letter* indicates a new direction for the adaptation and interpretation of German modernist literature in the present day. How might an expanded study of German modernist works without Chinese referents and their post-Mao Chinese cultural adaptations enrich or otherwise affect the results presented in this study?[8]

One more avenue for further exploration centers on the "Germanness" of the original texts from the Chinese perspective; that is, whether or not the Chinese artists and intellectuals read the original texts as specifically German, as opposed to more broadly European or Western. Although the Chinese reception of select, individual German writers has been researched, the reception of German literature, philosophy and culture in twentieth-century China often seems to be examined primarily from within the context of Western culture as a whole.[9] However, distinguishing Western literatures from one another is not without precedent in China.[10] Bonnie S. McDougall suggests that during the May Fourth era, Chinese writers viewed Western literature as "inter-national" as opposed to cosmopolitan in nature. They considered

each country's national literature to be equally weighted and valued for its contribution to world literature, thus creating "the spirit of 'a community of nations.'"[11] Viewing different national literatures in an internationalist light enabled Chinese writers to validate their own contributions to world literature at the time. In the post-Mao period, is it similarly possible to delineate China's reception of German culture from its approach towards other European and Western influences? How might the Chinese recognition and treatment of the original modernist source material as uniquely German color the production and reception of the contemporary Chinese adaptations examined in the previous chapters?

The German-language modernist literature participates in, and reflects upon, the construction of China and Chinese culture in Western discourse. The Chinese interpretations reciprocate by using the German modernist perceptions to create their own versions of China and Chinese identity. In their attempts to define China, both the originals and their adaptations call attention to the juxtaposition of elements commonly associated with either China or the West, and often deliberately blur the lines of distinction between them. Drawing on literary modernism, each German work and Chinese production contributes to the breakdown of categorical binaries such as East/West, tradition/modernity and Self/Other. Through multiple layers of refraction and diffraction, the German-language narratives and their corresponding Chinese interpretations suggest that it is possible to consider the politics of culture and identity through alternative, non-dichotomous systems of representation. Meaningful cultural transference, originally initiated by German-language modernist literature about China, finds its counterpart and respondent in the Chinese cultural adaptations of the

post-Mao period. Examples such as these suggest that additional lines of intercultural inquiry regarding Germany and China will result in similarly intriguing and perhaps unexpected connections.

## Notes to Chapter Five

[1] Wang, Hui, "How to Explain 'China' and its 'Modernity.'" *The Politics of Imagining Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 63-94.
[2] Wang, Hui, "The Politics of Imagining Asia: A Genealogical Analysis," trans. Matthew A. Hale. I*nter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2007): 1-33.
[3] Dirlik, Arif, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism." *Edward Said*. Volume II, ed. Patrick Williams (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 233-270. 265.
[4] Dirlik, Arif, "Modernity as History." *Social History*. Vol. 27, No. 1 (January 2002): 16-39. 39.
[5] Huters, Theodore, "Introduction." *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, by Hui Wang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1-9. 3.
[6] Economic reform was listed as one of the Four Modernizations. The other areas of reform stressed in post-Mao China focused on the fields of science and technology, agriculture and education.
[7] For more on the Chinese Enlightenment, especially regarding its historico-political implications, please see Schwarcz, Vera, *The Chinese Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
[8] Examples of other Chinese adaptations of German modernist works without Chinese referents include the play *Who Loves, Who Cares?*, produced by Bian Wentong and adapted from Schnitzler's *Reigen*. The play, titled *Shei Ai Shei, Ai Shei Shei* in Chinese and translated into English as *Who Loves, Who Cares?*, premiered in 2009 at the Beijing Ren Yi Experimental Theatre. See "The Drama *Who Loves, Who Cares?* Staged in Beijing." *Xinhua News*, 5 April 2009. Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, or *Tuibian*, has also been adapted into an English and Chinese production, originally staged by the Hong Kong Theatre du Pif in 1997 and revived in 2000. See:"Theatre du Pif: Past Productions. Metamorphosis"; Ingham, Mike, "Hong Kong-based English-language Theatre." *City Stage: Hong Kong Playwriting in English*, ed. Mike Ingham and Xu Xi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 1-10; and "Press Release: A Revival on 'Metamorphosis' by theatre du pif." As mentioned earlier in this study, Brecht's *Mutter Courage* and *Das Leben des Galilei* were staged in China as early as 1959 and 1979, respectively. See Gong, Boan, "First Performance and Brecht's Dramatic Work in China," *Brecht and East Asian Theatre,* 65-71, and Chen, Y., "The Beijing Production of *Life of Galileo*," 88-95.
[9] In Adrian Hsia's essay, "Zur Lessing-Rezeption in China," he states, "[e]s existiert noch keine Geschichte der Rezeption der deutschen Literatur in China. Nur die Rezeption von Goethe und Schiller (vielleicht auch Bertolt Brecht) ist einigermaßen bearbeitet worden." *Lessing Yearbook 2000*, ed. John A. McCarthy and Richard E. Schade (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001), 233-244. 234. In addition to the German figures mentioned by Hsia, Friedrich Nietzsche and Franz Kafka have also received a fair amount of attention regarding their reception in China in recent years.
[10] For example, Yu Dafu highlights German expressionist literature as literature that demonstrates the revolutionary role of the writer in his 1923 essay "Class Struggle in Literature." See Yu, Dafu. "Class Struggle in Literature," trans. Haili Kong and Howard Goldblatt. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 263-268. Furthermore, the modern Chinese reception of Russian and Soviet literature has also been well documented by researchers including Chow Tse-tsung, Marian Galik and Bonnie S. McDougall.
[11] McDougall, Bonnie S., "The Impact of Western Literary Trends." *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 37-61. 60.

## Appendix

In referring to Chinese places, names, words and phrases, this study adopts the *pinyin* method of transliteration unless specified otherwise. Alternative Romanization systems, including the Wade-Giles system, are provided in parentheses for historical purposes. Chinese characters have also been provided for authors found only in Chinese.

*bu dao changcheng fei hao han* 不到长城非好汉
*changcheng chang* 长城长
*chou* 丑
*chuanju* 川剧
*dan* 旦
*Guomindang* (Kuomintang) 国民党 (國民黨)
*Hao Nüren, Huai Nüren* 好女人怀女人
*jing* 净
*jingju* 京剧
*lao chou* 老丑
*mo* 末
*mangyuan* 莽原
*nanren yi ye, nüren yi sheng* 男人一夜，女人一生
*nanren de yi ye, nüren de yi ye, nanren he nüren de yi sheng*
男人的一夜，女人的一夜，男人和女人的一生
*quanqiu zoushi, shehuizhuyi he Zhongguo chuantong wenhua*
全球走势，社会注意和中国传统文化
*shei ai shei, ai shei shei* 谁爱谁，爱谁谁
*sheng* 生
*Sichuan Haoren* 四川好人
*Sichuan* 四川
*tianxia xingwang, pifu youze* 天下兴亡，匹夫有责
*Tuibian* 蜕变 (蛻變)
*wanli changcheng* 万里长城
*wen chou* 文丑
*wo xinzhong de changcheng* 我心中的长城
*wu chou* 武丑
*xiju* 戏剧
*xiqu* 戏曲
*yanzi chou*, 烟子丑
*Yige Mosheng Nüren de Laixin* 一个陌生怒人的来信

| | |
|---|---|
| Bian Wentong | 边文彤 |
| Can Xue | 残雪 |
| Chao Shunbao | 巢顺宝 |
| Ding Yangzhong | 丁扬忠 |
| Dong Wenhua | 董文华 |
| He Dong | 何东 |
| Huang Tiejun | 黄铁军 |
| Hui Min | 慧敏 |
| Liu Guiyan | 刘桂艳 |
| Liu Jiaqi | 刘嘉琦 |
| Liu Shaocong | 刘少匆 |
| Lu Tao | 陆涛 |
| Meng Qingyun | 孟庆云 |
| Wang Jia | 王嘉 |
| Wang Jiayue | 王嘉月 |
| Wang Xiaoying | 王晓鹰 |
| Wei Minglun | 魏明伦 |
| Wu Xiaofei | 吴晓飞 |
| Xu Jinglei | 徐静蕾 |
| Yan Su | 阎肃 |
| Yi Kai | 易凯 |
| Yi Lijing | 易立静 |
| Yu Shu | 于书 |

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