Brushing History Against the Grain

Reading the Chinese New Historical Fiction (1986–1999)

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Introduction

This book concentrates on the *new historical fiction* (新歷史小說) (hereinafter abbreviated as NHF), a term used loosely to label a corpus of narrative works emerging in mainland China since the mid-1980s,[1] which recite histories in various new ways, marking epistemological and ontological differences from previous models of the historical fiction in China. Being a constituent part of Chinese avant-gardism, the NHF, like other Chinese avant-garde fictions of the same period of time, had manifested both influences from foreign literature and the anxieties over Chinese reality. In this book, I attempt to explore the significance of the rise of the NHF in the context of China's drastic social, cultural and political changes in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

Zhang Qinghua (張清華),[2] in his *A Study of Contemporary Chinese Avant-garde Literature* (中國當代先鋒文學思潮論), depicts the Chinese NHF as a return to the traditional historical narrative. "The 'newest,' " he writes, "may well be the 'oldest' " (1997: 205; all translations from Chinese to English in this book are mine unless indicated otherwise). Zhang premises his judgment on two common characteristics which, he believes, both the traditional and the new historical fictions share, i.e. the conceptualization of history from a *minjian* (民間, roughly "local" and "unofficial") point of view and the tendency of fictionalizing history. Having made out these "startling similarities" between the old and the new historical fictions, he draws the conclusion that "contemporary new historicism is only a small step away from the tradition of historiography" (ibid., 206).[3] However, in what sense and to what extent does this literary wave mark a return to tradition? Unfortunately, he has not elaborated on this view, which wants yet further clarification and verification; nevertheless, it will serve as the point of departure for my present study of the topic. Zhang further divides fictions which have been lumbered into the rubric of the NHF into two categories: "the new historical fiction" (新歷史小說), "a title for numerous contemporary historical fictions which take a *minjian*

vision (of history)," and "the new historicist fiction" (新歷史主義小說), "works which are directly or indirectly inspired by Western theories: existentialism, structuralism, postmodernism, and deconstruction." These new historicist fictions "reflect the historical view of new historicism" (ibid., 190).

This classification is problematic. It creates for him the double burden of verifying, on the one hand, the *minjian* status of Chinese traditional historical fiction, and its resemblance to the aforementioned Western theories, on the other. However, Zhang simply takes these two prerequisites for granted, without bothering to prove them. In addition, the label "new historicist fiction" is misleading, because these works, as Zhang himself believes, were inspired by very different, even mutually incompatible Western theories (e.g. Zhang mentions existentialism, structuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction). In making his hasty conclusion, Zhang simply ignores the complexities involved in his argument.

First, since the term *minjian*, as is used by Zhang, is antithetical to "official,"[4] the question arises as to whether the storyteller's (說書人) moral commentaries in the form of authorial intrusions (which was common in the traditional vernacular fiction) are made by the official Confucian standard or by the *minjian* standard. This seems to be a question unsolvable by any black and white answer; the answer could be "neither" or "both." I do not intend to argue that traditional historical fiction did not take any *minjian* perspective of history at all. Indeed, the stories often connote a *minjian* vision. The storyteller's mask that the vernacular fiction had worn for centuries from its very inception to late Qing (the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century) had given rise to some internal thematic and structural contradictions,[5] which has complicated the question at hand.

Secondly, even at a superficial look, the features Zhang identifies for "the new historicist fictions," i.e. the replacement of historical fragments for historical totality, of contingency for certainty, of allegorical writing for realistic writing, and above all, the "fictionalization of history" (ibid., 192–201), are hardly applicable to either traditional historical fiction or traditional historiography. On the contrary, conventional historical fiction, which was subjugated to the historiography's principle of "factual recording" (實錄), stressed historicity only too heavily, even at the expense of fictionality.[6] It is indeed too far-fetched to link it up with the poststructuralist conception of history as having no ontological foundation other than that of a linguistic construct.[7] In fact, traditional Chinese historical narrative was different from its Western counterpart in that the former tended not to work up the historical sources while the latter did.[8] The idea of giving "authentic" representation of reality for didactic purpose was at the root of traditional fiction as well as historiography.

There is no doubt that the historical view as shown in the NHF may coincide in part with that of new historicism. Underlying the NHF's attempt

to rewrite Chinese history (especially modern Chinese history) is a new conceptualization of history and of text. For many NHF writers, history is no longer an objective record of historical events as they were, but is rather a text imbued with personal idiosyncrasies and ideology; historical events that really took place are inaccessible to us except through texts that describe them, not without partiality. Their competition with historians for the right to the historical discourse attests to their acute observation of the distinction between the historical materialist's and the new historicist's conceptions of history and text. Louis A. Montrose uses "the historicity of texts" and "the textuality of history" (1989: 20) to illustrate the reciprocity and mutual constitution of text and history (or the specific context in which texts or history are written). Indeed, the rise of the NHF itself reflected both the advent of this new understanding of textuality, historicity and their relationship, and the specific sociocultural conditions on which these works were composed. However, I doubt that any NHF writer had been directly influenced by new historicism, or "a poetics of culture" (Greenblatt 1989), which is a particular approach to literary study rather than to literary creation.

The NHF, however, does represent a new approach to historical narrative that breaks away from the older forms of the historical fiction. When viewed from the vantage point of the history of this literary genre, its rise was groundbreaking. My main argument in this book is that the NHF constitutes an oppositional discourse that challenges both the outdated discourse of revolution and the now dominant discourse of "Chinese modernity" (a term I define in Chapter 2). The NHF has risen first of all as a critical reaction to the politicized and monologic discourse of revolution. It reverses almost all aspects, from narrative skills to thematic structures, of the revolutionary discourse. In this book I concentrate mainly on the spatio-temporal aspect, for it is in this aspect that the NHF has shaken the foundation of both the discourse of revolution and the discourse of Chinese modernity. It negates a temporal logic, i.e. linear irreversible time and the progressive view of history that this logic entails, which characterizes both the project of modernity and the discourse of revolution. Indeed, it was not until the mid-1980s, with the emergence of the NHF and other avant-garde writings, that the first legible discontent with modernity was voiced.

In the genealogy of Chinese historical fiction, the NHF emerges as a discourse that rebels against official History, manifesting a cyclical return to the traditional mode of the historical narrative characterized by a circular conception of temporality and the historical process.[9] Fully aware of the differences in some other aspects among these three stages of the historical fiction's development in conceptualizing history, I limit my discussion and conclusion to the sphere of time and space, and in relation to the issue of modernity with which the Chinese men of letters have been obsessed since the mid-nineteenth century. This sub-genre has not only initiated an

unprecedented interrogation of the legitimacy of the discourses of Chinese modernity, but also represents, in terms of the power relation between historiography and fiction, the first genuine challenge, if not a deadly blow, to the authoritativeness of the historiographical discourse, which has been bestowed too much respect throughout the history of China, in fact so much so that the historical *yanyi* (歷史演義) as a literary sub-genre was basically modeled on it. Before we discuss the significance of the rise of the NHF, it is necessary for us to take a retrospective look at the earlier forms of this literary sub-genre.

The Subordination of *Yanyi*

One of the most manifest facts about Chinese traditional fiction, as far as its relationship with historiography is concerned, was that the former was subjugated to the latter, which was most explicitly shown in the former's emulation, in both narrative mode and subject matter, of the latter. The brands historiography had stamped on the historical fiction as well as on the vernacular fiction in general bore testimony to a kind of discursive repression, a common means for the formation and consolidation of a monologic discourse. The fiction proper, let alone the historical fiction which was a hybrid form conflating fiction and history, was a lesser genre relegated to its subsidiary function of supplementing standard history.

The Chinese historical *yanyi*, which evolved from its primeval forms of storytellers' scripts — i.e. the historical category of the Tang *bianwen* (唐變文) and of the Song and Yuan *huaben* (宋元話本) or *pinghua* (平話), to its coming-of-age in the chapter-divided *yanyi*, had retained some oral features of the vernacular fiction. That is, the story was invariably told from an omniscient perspective, with occasional authorial intrusions for moral commentaries, which is known as "the storyteller's tone." This narrative mode had lasted seven centuries since the very inception of the vernacular fiction.

Patrick Hanan makes two observations about the Chinese vernacular fiction: first, "there is no vernacular work told in the first person (that is, by one of its characters) before the very end of the Qing dynasty, although such works do exist in Classical fiction"; second, "nor is there a work that makes exclusive use of the historian's narrative method, the method of the chronicler or biographer, although it is the norm in Classical fiction" (1981: 20). John C.Y. Wang thinks that "for an overview of the entire Chinese narrative tradition, the notion of point-of-view enables us to distinguish two different kinds of narrators, and helps to explain the extreme rarity of the narrator as a personal *I* in traditional Chinese narrative works, and the gradual shift from a *he* as a mere recorder to a *he* with unlimited omniscience" (1977: 11).[10] Chen Pingyuan (陳平原) observes in the traditional chapter-divided novels (章回小說) a

general narrative pattern, i.e. "the plot-centered story is told coherently from an omniscient point of view" (1993: 134). Zhao Yiheng (趙毅衡), too, has made a similar observation (1994).

One obvious weakness of this narrative pattern, as pointed out by John C.Y. Wang (1977: 11), is that direct psychological penetration into the characters' mind is hardly possible. The narrator, except for some rare and brief occasions (e.g. when comments on the moral aspect of a narrated event were elicited), achieved a sense of "objectivity" by letting the story unfold itself "naturally" without making his voice noticed. On the one hand, the omniscient narrator had control over the narrating process; on the other, he reserved the right to make judgment as to the good and evil of the story or to show his love and hate.

This style of authorial intrusion in narration was common in traditional historiography as well as in the vernacular fiction. It conformed to the authenticity principle on the one hand and the didactic tradition of narrative writing on the other. In Sima Qian's (司馬遷) *Shi ji* (史記), for example, the historian's voice was often heard commenting on some historical personages' conducts or historical events, even on his own method of writing. Although in theory authorial intrusion in the historical narrative might affect its authenticity (by violating the historian's tenet of recording nothing but historical "facts"), this did not seem to bother the historian, probably because his comments were viewed as a separate part of history. The fact that this pattern had been so consistently adopted in the vernacular fiction clearly indicates the impact of historiography on fiction.

Jaroslav Prusek, when explaining the unchanging storyteller's narrative style in the vernacular fiction, or "the form of a performance by an anonymous professional narrator who begins a story, as a convention, with the phrase *huashuo* (話説), 'There is a story ...' " (1980: 113), writes:

> The fact that no such change in conception occurred in Chinese fiction proves on the one hand the strongly conservative character of Chinese literature and probably of Chinese society altogether, and on the other hand it shows the unusual strength of the creative genius of the Chinese professional storytellers, who had impressed the form of their tales on Chinese fiction so effectively that it lived on without any basic changes for seven centuries and that it took the literary revolution of 1919 to break away from it, and not even then completely. (ibid., 113)

To attribute the "conservative character of the Chinese literature" to "the unusual strength of the creative genius" remains rather superficial, for, however brilliant a narrative form may be, it is subject to changes over time. Persistent resistance to change over a span of seven centuries can hardly be explained away in terms of its own internal strength. Shi Changyu (石昌渝) believes this pattern originated from the necessity of adding comments and

explanations here and there while a story was being told. Unlike book readers, who had unlimited access to a narrative text, storytellers' audience was denied such a privilege, hence the necessity of extra comments and explanations from the storyteller, for clarification's sake. The *huaben* stories (話本小說, "storytellers' scripts") inherited this narrative pattern.[11]

Nevertheless, Zhao Yiheng (1994) discovers a contradiction in this explanation: if it is true that this narrative pattern of the vernacular fiction was the residue of storytelling, then it is reasonable to predict that earlier vernacular fictions should retain more oral features than later ones, for later *huaben* stories were mostly texts written for readers by men of letters rather than storytellers' scripts. However, as Zhao observes, the opposite seems to be the case: later vernacular stories retained more oral features than earlier ones. This led to Zhao's new exegesis of the question. As the *huaben* and *pinghua* stories were subject to frequent reprinting, and rewriting preceded almost every reprinting, a fixed pattern was necessary for guiding the rewritings, so as to maintain some uniformity in the various versions of the story. Zhao thus concludes that a fixed narrative pattern in the vernacular story was kept as a constant for the narration of the vernacular story. In this pattern the narrator assumed the utmost authority. Authorial intrusion, which could fully display the narrator's authority, was therefore frequent.[12] Although Zhao Yiheng's explication makes up for what Shi Changyu has left out (Shi Changyu has in fact explained only the formation of such a narrative mode, but not the cause of its longevity), to attribute a long-lasting pattern merely to the frequency of revision is by far insufficient. Zhao has in fact offered a more convincing explanation in the same book: this unchanging narrative mode had to do with fiction writers' emulations of the chronicler's and the biographer's writing.[13]

The prioritization of historiography and the paralleled belittlement of literature in the Confucian tradition were what caused a widespread imitation among fiction writers of the historian's way of writing and the popular use of pen-names among fiction writers to avoid courting disgrace. Etymologically, the term *xiaoshuo* (小說), or roughly "short story," was by nature a *petit récit* vis-à-vis the *grand récit* of history. In its first occurrence in the *Wai wu* section of *Zhuangzi* (莊子 · 外物), it refers to short, fragmentary, and trivial writings. According to one interpretation, what Zhuangzi meant by *xiaoshuo* was nothing more than anecdotes that convey metaphorically some trivial truths of not much importance.[14] Chen Qianyu (陳謙豫) thinks that at its primeval inception during the Spring and Warring States (770–221 BC) the term *xiaoshuo* referred to historical anecdotes, stories, myths, and allegories used as supporting evidences for theory formulation.[15] The earliest Confucian evaluation of *xiaoshuo,* in the *Zi zhang* section of *Lunyu* (論語 · 子張), was that it was "trivial truth" (小道) that "gentlemen wouldn't care to undertake" (君子不為). Ban Gu (班固, AD 32–92) regarded *xiaoshuo* as "street gossips" and

"folklores" collected by *baiguan* (稗官, "low-ranking officials") for the Emperor's reference. They functioned as a supplementation to *zhengshi* (正史), "standard history," and therefore remained a peripheral form of writing marked by short, fragmentary and episodic descriptions.

Lu Xun (魯迅) postulates that "these passages were most probably either descriptions of the ancients or of past events; the former was close to philosophical writings, but shallower than them, and the latter was close to annals, but less reliable."[16] Although traditional bibliographers, following Ban Gu, had listed *xiaoshuo* (classical stories only, excluding vernacular stories) in their selections of works, hence giving it a legitimate position in Chinese bibliography, Ban's treating *xiaoshuo* as mere supplementation of history was so influential that biographers were very selective when it came to the recordation of fictions in official selections. Only those fictions which abide by the historiographical principle of writing, i.e. "factual recording," had the luck of being included. The consequent fussy boundary between history and fiction had, to a great extent, impeded the development of the fiction genre.

The subjugation of fiction to historiography was then the result of generic hierarchization, which constituted part of a society's "régime of truth," a process in which "the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" (Foucault 1980: 132). Historiography's supreme status rests upon its claim to "truth" and "factuality," which legitimizes its superiority to other "lower" genres such as poetry and fiction that fall into the fantastical and emotive categories. The effects of power produced by historiography's "true" and "factual" attributes were maintained by constant reiteration of its distinction from fiction, i.e. by demarcating the boundary between what was "historical" and what was "fictional." So while the historian tried the best he could to avoid fictionality, the fiction writer tried to simulate historicity. The criteria by which official biographers included and excluded certain works in their bibliographies had also decided the popular tendency among fiction writers to mimicry the historical narrative, so much so that all traditional Chinese fictions were the outcome of a conflation of the "chronicle and biography tradition" (史傳傳統) on the one hand and the "lyrical tradition" (詩騷傳統) on the other.[17] In this sense, we might as well say that most traditional fictions, classical and vernacular alike, were historical fictions, due to their manifest historiographical features both in terms of narrative style and subject matter.

The proliferation of historical stories or pseudo-historical stories in the fiction genre was also symptomatic of the effects of historiography's supreme power. The evolution of the historical fiction from its inception in the *jiangshi* (講史, "historical tales") category of the Tang *bianwen* through its coming-of-age in Song Yuan *huaben* to its maturation in the chapter-divided historical *yanyi* was greatly influenced by historiography and storytelling. While the influence from the practice of storytelling was found mainly in the storyteller's

tone marked by frequent authorial intrusions, as discussed above, influences from historiography were evidenced by such structural features as loose links between chapters and between characters. As Jaroslav Prusek points out, European historians have the "tendency of describing a specific period of time or a specific sequence of events as a homogeneous stream" so that "in many cases European historiography has resembled epic works, or even novels" (1970: 23). Rather than fictionalizing history as his European counterpart does, "the Chinese historian," Prusek tells us (drawing on Charles S. Gardner's *Chinese Traditional Historiography*), "does not work up his historical sources, he does not combine the facts he has found in successive chains, he does not fictionalize them, but he arranges them into certain categories" (ibid., 24). Gardner's impression that Chinese history "consists exclusively of primary sources" (1961: 105) corresponds with the "factual recording" principle of Chinese traditional historiography, which gives rise, for lack of a skin holding the flesh and bones together, to the looseness and lack of unity in narrative structure (I shall come back to this point shortly). This way of organizing historical material, according to Prusek's study, has to do with the purpose of Chinese traditional historiography which was to serve for general political and moral discussions. "[T]he subject of their description is not an event or act but a reflection" (ibid., 25). Indeed, in the chronicle and biography tradition of Chinese historiography, the historian's commentaries constitute an important part of history writing.

Moral edification, which is subjective by nature, seems incongruous with the realistic principle of historiography. But it should be noted that in the realistic poetics of traditional historiography the insistence on "faithful history" (信史), which was believed to be achievable by "straightforward writing" (直筆) in contrast with "circuitous writing" (曲筆), was not necessarily weakened by didacticism, for the historians' *zan* (贊, "making commentaries and evaluations"), as had been practiced by Confucian historiographers since *The Spring and Autumn* (春秋), was seen as a separate part of history based on historical facts. Hence the coexistence of historical material and the historians' judgment and evaluation. In other words, the historian kept to a "dispassionate" arrangement of historical material, following a narrative style of brevity and unadornment; at the same time, he gave subjective evaluation to the historical events and personages he described. The conflict between "factual recording" and subjective evaluation was solved by presenting what the historiographers believed to be "facts" as evidences or examples for pedagogical purposes.

Chinese traditional fiction had inherited this structural feature of historiography, which is shown most explicitly in the occasional authorial presence to make moral commentaries in the narrative, as discussed above. These two seemingly "incompatible" principles (incompatible from the positivist point of view, but not poststructuralist point of view), i.e. the principle of veracity

and that of didacticism, are found in fiction in a renovated way. John L. Bishop takes this structural feature as one of the "limitations of Chinese fiction" because of the contradiction between "the effect of reality" created by the plot and the intrusions of the narrator into the story. On the one hand, there was the emphasis on "authenticity" which is partially achieved by the objective "factual recording" of historical events; on the other, there are found many subjective intrusions of the author into the narrative story which cancel out the veracity effects created in objective recording. Moreover, there is also the contradiction between the alleged moral pedagogy and the actual erotic contents of the stories. As Bishop has pointed out, the traditional colloquial fiction, as "a source of delight for the Chinese," also lacks clear moral purpose, for the narrative material is "pornographic or immoral in nature" (1965: 243).[18] David Der-wei Wang (王德威) deems authorial commentaries in the colloquial fiction as a moral pretext for narrating the sensational stories that would not be otherwise told.[19] Whatever the reason for this structural feature, it obviously disrupts the narrative unity and adds to the structural looseness.

I hope the above discussions will arrive at the following two conclusions. First, due to its close affinity with and subjugation to historiography, traditional Chinese fiction had, for seven centuries since its inception, been colonized by "standard history" as a lesser or imperfect form of history, which in turn ossified it into a mimicry of historical writing. The fictional narratives, and more so for the historical fiction, were therefore deprived of their generic independence and became subjugated to historiography, a phenomenon that well accounts for the super-stable structure of traditional narratives.

Secondly, following historiographical principle of "factual recording," the vernacular fiction, like traditional historical writings, had manifested an episodic quality resulting from its tendency to assemble primary sources rather than weave them into a unified sequence of events showing clear causality. While both conclusions are ideas generally agreed upon, their cultural implications in relation to Chinese traditional spatio-temporal configuration and to the development of the historical fiction in the twentieth century are yet to be explored.

Premodern Chinese narratives, fictional or historical, can then be described, in terms of its structural feature, as having a "spatial form," a term I borrow from Joseph Frank but used in a different sense and context.[20] By using the term I have no intention of suggesting the resemblance between Chinese traditional narrative writing and Western literary modernism. I use the term as a contrast to "temporal narration," which, as both a formal and epistemological structure, was not introduced to China until the mid-nineteenth century. More specifically, in the spatial form, spaces, in all their idiosyncratic, discrete and self-sufficient physiognomies, are given precedence over time, whose fluidity and continuity alludes to a continuous flow of events in successive chains. The emphasis on spaces (in its plural form) in the

structuring of narrative details entails a respect for the discrete and equal status of the individual events and characters not hierarchized in the totem pole of narrative "emplotment"[21] and characterization. Chinese traditional narratives are more like "chronicles," in which the narrative materials are relatively unworked, than "stories" whose materials are worked up and given a conjectured logical or causal frame.[22]

Back in the 1930s, Charles S. Gardner thus summarized the different ways Western and Chinese historians perceive history:

> We in the West demand that an historian analyze and classify his facts for presentation in that logical sequence which shall seem to his individual brain best calculated to expose, not merely their order in time, but also the concatenation of cause and effect. We demand, moreover, that he create a faithful and lifelike reflection of past times, strange places, and unfamiliar personalities. The Chinese, on the contrary, conceive of the past as a series of concrete events and overt acts; and of history as a registration of them which should be exact and dispassionate, without any projection across the scene of the personality of the registrar, who must punctiliously refrain from garbling his presentation by his own perhaps imperfect appreciation of the true sequence of causation. (1961: 69)

Jaroslav Prusek's study of the "History and Epics in China and in the West" has yielded a similar conclusion, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, Prusek, associating this structural method in the historical writing as a manifestation of a people's special way of perceiving reality, goes further to point out that Chinese literature, too, had followed the same narrative pattern. "As literature is, so is history; the same perception of reality is in the background of both and determines their form," he writes (Prusek 1970: 17). He uses B. Sklovskij's term "spatial narration" (as against "temporal narration") to delineate the characteristic of Chinese fictional narratives (ibid., 26).

Andrew Plaks also points out, "in the more extended examples of Chinese narrative we must come to terms with an apparent lack of concern with creating the impression of overall structural coherence" (1976: 430). Plaks further associates this lack of structural unity in Chinese narrative works with certain Chinese cultural forms he calls "ceaseless alternation," or "complementary bipolarity," and "cyclical recurrence," or "multiple periodicity" (ibid., 434–5). As these terms themselves have implied, the cyclical structures, for both narrative works and the Chinese culture per se, are not unilinear, but are rather characterized by "multiple periodicity."

> What we observe in the structural patterning of Chinese narrative is an interminable *overlapping* – a dense web of intermingled events and non-events which obviates any sense of unilinear plot development and hence clouds the perception of artistic unity... It is not a lack of movement (or

> development), but the *totalization* of temporal flux which dispenses with a clear sense of direction and hence creates the impression of motionlessness. (italics original) (Plaks 1976: 437)

David Der-wei Wang interprets this "motionlessness" as the effects of "the simulated context" of storytelling. The processing of temporal sequence had manifested a tendency to "synchronize the continuous diachronic sequence" (1998: 90). On the one hand, the progression of the narration of events in chronological order was continually disrupted by the storyteller's intermissions, so that another recurrent temporal order based on "the present" was developed side by side with the temporal sequence of the story events. On the other, the conventional storyteller and author was well aware that the effect of immediacy of a story was achievable by intermittent insertions of secondary "non-events" to the kernel events, which in turn caused a sense of temporal motionlessness, for these non-events served to break the flow of the story time.[23] Thus, the narrator/storyteller often led the narratee away from the linear sequentiality of the story and created an effect of "continuous present." Here, the narrator represented the "collective social consciousness" rather than a concrete personality (ibid., 85), playing a twofold role in the story: on the one hand he was the "voyeur" whose "reportage" greatly satisfied the narratee's curiosity; on the other, moral commentaries by the storyteller, as the spokesman of social criterion, had in effect guaranteed that those morally problematic stories, often erotic by nature, got told anyway (ibid., 89).

In sum, both the historical and fictional branches of traditional narratives prioritized a "spatial narration" rather than a "temporal narration," which was rooted in the traditional conceptualization of time and space and history. This "episodic" character in narrative structure had lasted for hundreds of years. It took the importation of a foreign (Western) culture and literature (in the twentieth century) to bring any genuine change to this narrative pattern.

Canonizing Revolution

The modern (historical) fiction in China appeared more as a rupture with tradition than as its continuation. If Chinese traditional narrative structure was characterized by a lack of unified perspective (i.e. third person omniscient narration plus occasional authorial intrusions) and linear plot development, then modern Chinese narratives, owing to influences from Western fictions, started to adopt a narrative pattern showing structural unity and coherence. A unified narrative structure requires certain perception of causality that helps link up the narrative details to show a coherent plot development having a beginning, a middle and an end. This can be achieved by a unified perspective

that has the function of filtering out whatever narrative details that are outside such a perspective. The wide adoption of the first person limited perspective in modern Chinese fictions since the early twentieth century was the first sign of fictional modernity.[24] Whereas the traditional novel revealed multiple perspectives, blending third person omniscient narration with the storyteller's authorial intrusions, the prevalence of a first person limited narration signaled, as Chen Pingyuan (1990: 15) points out, the change from the mode of simulated storytelling (the writer imitated a storyteller's tone in narrating stories) to the written mode.

Among the many possible causes for the change from the mode of "simulated storytelling" to the mode of fiction writing in the early twentieth century, the adoption of Western temporal perception was essential. The abandonment of traditional narrative pattern actually went hand in hand with a re-examination of the validity of traditional Chinese culture. There existed a trend among the Chinese intelligentsia to deny the value of traditional culture held to be the scapegoat of China's backwardness. Hence the importation of a more advanced culture (Western) was viewed as the prerequisite condition to China's modernization. Under such circumstances, wholesale Westernization became a matter of course. The fiction, which was traditionally regarded as a lesser genre both within literature and without, had come at this time to the center stage, thanks to a "fictional revolution" (小說界革命) initiated by Liang Qichao (梁啟超), who took fiction to be the best means for the propagation of a new culture.

During the May Fourth period, Chinese Enlighteners had made full use of the fictional genre to show their anti-tradition stance and to instill new thoughts (mainly Western Enlightenment thoughts) into the Chinese mind, for they viewed the West as the representative of a more advanced civilization, as a higher stage of development that China should pursue. This type of evolutionism in the conception of civilization and history, which differed from the traditional circular conception of history and social change, was in tune with the Enlightenment linear perception of time and progressive history, so much so that Leo Ou-fan Lee (李歐梵) demarcates Chinese literature from the late Qing to 1927 as "the quest for modernity."[25] But Chinese literary "modernity" during this period, as Lee points out, resembled to a great extent the nineteenth-century European literature rather than twentieth-century modernism. And by "the quest for modernity," he refers to the pursuit of "bourgeois modernity" rather than "aesthetic modernity" (Calinescu 1987). He writes:

> "Modernity" in China thus connotes not only a preoccupation with the present but a forward-looking search for "newness", for the "novelties" from the West. Accordingly, this new concept of modernity in China seems to have inherited, in varying degrees, several familiar notions of Western "bourgeois" modernity: the idea of evolutionism and progress, the positivist belief in the

> forward movement of history, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, and the ideal of freedom and democracy defined within the framework of a broad humanism. (Lee 1983: 500–1)

He adds: "Nowhere in the May Fourth literature can we find any evidence of modernism mocking and turning against itself (as in "decadence" and "kitsch") ... To be 'modern' in the May Fourth period means, on the superficial level, to be 'chic' (*mo-teng*), *à la mode,* to be abreast with the latest fashions from the West — from styles of clothing and hair to trends in literature" (ibid., 502). As a matter of fact, throughout the twentieth century China had been obsessed with the issue of modernity.

From the late 1920s onward, the "new culture movement" (新文化運動) which aimed at disseminating the Enlightenment ideas gradually gave way to the concurrent "political salvation movement" (政治救亡運動), due to national crises caused by a multitude of social disturbances and wars, e.g. the "May 30th movement" (1925), the "Northern Expedition" (1926–1927), and the Sino-Japanese war (1937–1945). The Enlightenment ideas of democracy, freedom, human rights and individualism appeared less important when compared with the more urgent plea for national salvation, revolution, patriotism and altruism.[26] Under such circumstances, socialism had grown to be the most influential thought in China. From the late 1920s to the 1940s, Chinese literature, which became increasingly politicized, had stepped on "the road to revolution."

The canonization of "revolutionary history" in the literary circle was in fact concomitant with a more general shift to Marxist ideology during the 1930s and 1940s, after a decade (1920s) of enthusiastic propagation of such Enlightenment ideas as democracy, freedom and human rights. In either case, a perception of linear progressive history, which differs from the traditional circular conception of history, had become dominant. But the turn to the Left since the 1930s signaled the successful formulation of a new monolithic, unified and systematic knowledge that would tolerate no heterogeneous thoughts. Mao Zedong's 1942 "Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Arts" marked the establishment of the Maoist line of literary and artistic praxis which predominated for the ensuing three decades and more.

Liu Zaifu (劉再復) and Lin Gang (林崗) (1993), drawing on Roland Barthes's differentiation between two modes of political writing, i.e. revolutionary writing (or Stalinist writing) and Marxist writing,[27] postulate that the Chinese mode of political writing was in the beginning purely Marxist and later, since 1942, characterized by a coalescence of the Stalinist mode and the revolutionary mode (Liu and Lin 1993: 92). Mao Dun's (茅盾) *The Spring Silkworms* (春蚕) (1932) was the precursor of the former and Ding Ling's (丁玲) *The Sun over the Sanggan River* (太陽照在桑干河上) (1948) was exemplary of the latter. Marxist writing gained much ground in the 1930s and early 1940s,

but gradually gave way to the more radical Stalinist writing which culminated in "fictions of revolutionary history" during the period between the 1950s and 1970s (Huang Ziping 1996: 2). It is not difficult to observe in this line of development a process gravitating towards the politicization of literature. As a "totalitarian" and "universal" system of thought, Marxism had come to dominate literary praxis since the 1930s. It gradually monopolized the power and the right to "reinterpret and reconstruct Chinese social reality and Chinese history" (Liu and Lin 1993: 93). If Marxist writing in China such as Mao Dun's remained in general explanatory, Stalinist writings, rapidly gaining ground after 1942, tended to present reality in a prejudged form. Literature had, as a result, become not much more than political propaganda. This line of literary creation, in its drive for a fixed and stable representation of history or reality, resorted to rationalized geometrics of narrative space and the freezing of narrative time.

"Fictions of revolutionary history" were structured within a linear progressive temporal frame that treated time as forever moving forward, for the entire goal of revolution was to eradicate the old and to welcome in the new. Writers took the construction of bipolarity, i.e. the revolutionary and the reactionary, as the central task of any literary work. And the class conflict between revolutionaries (representing the working class) and reactionaries (representing the exploiting class) was a recurrent theme of the narrative, to go by the Marxist conceptualization of the motor of historical development. This configuration was reinforced by a set pattern followed by these fictions: at the outset the good guys are faced with difficulties, even serious setbacks, but they are not to be daunted and are eventually able to, due to their unremitting efforts, accumulate enough strength to defeat the bad guys. The internal logic governing such a revolutionary discourse was the assumption of a predestined course of revolution routed along a fixed path of progression, i.e. going "from failure to victory" and "from victories to greater victories." And its temporal dimension was always future-oriented since the narrated historical process always moves towards a predestined telos. Trying to fit history into a simplified configuration that conformed to the revolutionary's teleological and progressive history was a narrative technique shared by most fictions of revolutionary history.

The shift from the traditional to the modern brought about the emancipation of the fictional genre from the yoke of traditional historiography. Nevertheless, the prestigious status it began to enjoy was due mainly to its utilitarian rather than aesthetic aim. Its popularity, especially among the common people, could well explain why it was singled out as the best tool for the dissemination of new ideas. The May Fourth writers used it to "enlighten" the "benighted minds" of the populace and the Leftist writers for the dissemination of revolutionary thoughts. Obviously the legacy of traditional

fiction, i.e. its didacticism, was creatively transformed into a new form of ideological infiltration aimed at reinforcing the status of some systematic knowledge or certain social or political preference. The politicization of fiction culminated in the successful formulation of a hegemonic narrative discourse that was "the fiction of revolutionary history." Together with prison houses, labor camps, and schools, this pattern of fictional narrative completed a set of political apparatuses for the control of thought that helped build the edifice of the socialist discourse, under the "guidance" of which the people "leapt forward" along one single unilinear path to a predestined Utopian telos. It goes without saying that this discourse was repressive in nature, for its formation and consolidation were founded on smothering differences.

The extolment of humanitarianism and the trend of depoliticization in "literature of the new period" (新時期文學) were the manifestation of a widely felt impulse to rectify the Stalinist mode of writing which had become a rigid, authoritarian form of political propaganda. It was also, so to speak, a revival of the May Fourth intellectuals' radical cultural stance, i.e. a resolute rejection of tradition and an embrace of the Western Enlightenment ideas and the project of modernity.[28] Indeed, the preliminary success of economic reforms gave rise to strong anticipations of the strengthening of the emaciated nation through a new modernization project which had replaced the old socialist modernization program, the latter having been proved a failure. However different these two approaches to modernization were, their pursuit of modernity remained the same. As Matei Calinescu has suggested (1987: 13), the idea of modernity could be conceived only within the framework of some specific time awareness, "that of *historical time,* linear and irreversible, flowing irresistibly onwards." With respect to their time awareness and sense of history, both approaches had revealed the tendency to prioritize temporality in the space-time relationship, so much so that spatiality had lost its efficacy in the tyranny of time, leading to what David Harvey calls the "annihilation of space through time." "The reduction of space to a contingent category is implied in the notion of progress itself. Since modernity is about the experience of progress through modernization, writing on that theme have tended to emphasize temporality, the process of *becoming,* rather than *being* in space and place" (Harvey 1989: 205).

To conclude, the quest for modernity, which had been the chief preoccupation of both the Chinese Enlightenment elitists and the socialists throughout the twentieth century, had been the keynote of China's pursuit of prosperity. Both groups had aspired to an ideal and ultimate goal of human history and society, albeit their different models of development, the former described as "Faustian" and the latter "pseudo-Faustian" by Marshal Berman (1983).[29] The project of modernity and the notion of linear irreversible time that goes with it had not been suspected until the mid-1980s when some major

contemporary writers, the NHF writers in particular, began to question evolutionism of both the bourgeois and the Marxist brands.

The New Historical Fiction

That the Chinese in the 1990s were as much obsessed by their anxieties over modernity as they were overjoyed with the betterment of material welfare brought about by reforms contrasted sharply with their unanimous advocacy of the Enlightenment ideas and goals in the 1980s.[30] While this unanimity in the 1980s represented a collective gesture of looking to a universal and teleological goal of the future, the 1990s was a decade marked by clashes of thoughts and controversies, especially those between the "postists" and the "Enlightenment elitists,"[31] between the "new Leftists" and the "liberalists,"[32] which signaled the splitting of the Chinese intelligentsia and documented the diverse feelings and attitudes towards the sociocultural transformations in China. The Enlightenment project of modernity as the only solution to the modernization problem, though still firmly believed in by many, had become dubious to others. Chinese intellectuals were confronted once again with the age-old question: In what way should China be modernized? A plethora of cultural and political events since the late 1980s, e.g. the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the East European socialist block, the 1989 June Fourth event, the emergence of consumerism, the discussion on the "crisis of humanistic spirit" (人文精神危機)[33] and so on, made the answer to this question seem more equivocal than ever.

What lay behind these discussions, debates and controversies among Chinese scholars holding different views, was in fact deep concerns with modernity, its good and weaknesses, however different their political and academic stances might be. In their mutual accusations (of being the accomplices of the government, on the one hand, and of Western imperialism, on the other), each of them had in fact constructed an arbitrary binary opposition wherein they posited their opponents on the side of evil and themselves on the side of social conscience and justice. Despite the complexities and incommensurability of Western theories involved in the debates, I believe these controversies, when boiled down to their essence, amounted to no more than similar anxieties over Chinese modernity, over its socialist and bourgeois aspects respectively. On the one hand, the "liberalists," believing that modernity was still an incomplete project in China, accused the "postists" and the "new leftists" of adhering to nationalism and socialism. On the other, the "postists" and "new leftists," in their counterattacks, warned against the problems of bourgeois modernity and accused their opponents of defending eurocentrism and logocentrism.[34]

Behind their mutual accusations — themselves being tactics for argument only[35] — was, I believe, the suggestion of different models of development, though they did not necessarily form the opposition between the "Faustian" and the "pseudo-Faustian" models. Whereas the Enlightenment elitists and the liberalists seemed bent on the mission of completing the Enlightenment project of modernity in China, the new leftists critiqued such a modernity and searched for "a third road."[36] All this seems to lend support to Wang Hui's (汪暉) argument that the so-called Chinese problem is foremost the problem of modernity.[37]

Prior to this trend of conscious re-examining of the roads to modernization and the problem of modernity, there emerged in the second half of the 1980s some "new literary waves," e.g. *avant-garde literature* (先鋒文學), *roots-seeking literature* (尋根文學), *neo-realism* (新寫實) and the *new historical fiction* (新歷史小說), which, I hold, were symptomatic of contemporary reactions to the problem of modernity. The fact that contemporary writers often draw on foreign literature (particularly Western literature) for inspiration[38] could lead to the misconception that their writings were mere experiments on writing techniques imported from abroad. However, it should be noticed that their works are more than mere experiments on narrative forms; they "reflect and refract" sociocultural conditions of contemporary life.

I choose the NHF as the topic of the present study, not so much because of its own uniqueness of character than because of what its name evokes.[39] By this, I mean all these new literary waves were symptoms of an essential change in the perception of history and of time, which went against the mainstream temporal perception, i.e. that of modernity. What indicated the interconnections between these literary waves was a shared time consciousness and conception of history or reality that differed from that of earlier literature. This could perhaps account for the fact that quite a number of the NHFs can be properly categorized into all other literary trends as well. My main argument is: the NHF constitutes an oppositional discourse that negates "Chinese modernity." As far as its content is concerned, the NHF is engaged in the rewriting of histories that deviate from the official "revolutionary history;" in terms of its narrative strategy, it is characterized by a return to traditional narrative mode, i.e. a "spatial narration" which suits the representation of fragmentary or circular history rather than teleological or unilinear history. However, it is more than just a formal simulation of traditional narrative form. For instance, the appropriation of some Western narrative skills, such as metafictionality, is intended for the transcendence of the traditional bipolarity of fact and fiction, so that both fictional narrative and the historical narrative would both be deemed writings in equal terms.

The Chinese NHF emerged in the mid-1980s and thrived well into the 1990s. Despite its tremendous impact on contemporary Chinese literature, which was partly evidenced by the number of writers engaged in it,[40] its unprecedented role in the development of the historical fiction has been, on the whole, downplayed. The role it plays in restructuring the relationship between fiction and history, for instance, has not yet been shown to the full. Also, the connection between the emergence of the NHF and the problem of modernity is generally neglected. There is still no book-length study of the topic; there are only sporadic review articles or book sections on it.[41] All in all, the amount of attention it has hitherto received from the critical circle and the repercussions it sends to the literary sphere are not at all proportional. There are not yet in-depth studies that explore its connection with a characteristic Chinese phenomenon marked, on the one hand, by prevalent anxieties over "the crisis of humanistic spirit," over the demise of idealism, the loss of certainty about "historical course" and "historical teleology" which were once so "real" and "indispensable," and, on the other, by a willing embrace of consumerism. It is true that many critics have resorted to Western theories, including the Derridean conception of history as *writing* rather than *representation* [42] and the new historicist's suspicion of the truth-telling capacity of the *grand récit* and its preference for the *petit récit*, to explicate the proliferation of the NHF. However, such studies often failed to view the rise of the NHF in the context of a general suspicion of the grand narrative of modernity and the perceptions of temporality and history that go with it. Moreover, they fail to see the connection of this literary trend to the issue of modernity.[43]

If we view socialism as an alternative project within modernity *vis-à-vis* Western bourgeois modernity, then the dominant ideology now is embodied in the concept of Chinese modernity which is by nature an attempt to synthesize socialist and bourgeois modernities into "socialist market economy."[44] Both modernities denote a time awareness that sees human society and history as progressing from lower to higher stages, with the eventual realization of an ultimate telos as the end of history. Growth and development, pointing to such a telos, become the major social objective which subjugates all other objectives, public and private. As social, cultural and economic activities are restructured to adapt to such a temporal configuration, the historical narrative, while carrying out its duty to reinforce this configuration at a discursive level, becomes also a form of power that represses heterogeneous discourses. Both the Marxist view of history and the Hegelian "world" history share a similar totalitarian character and a similar impulse to obliterate "differences."[45] While the Hegelian "world" history envisages the realization of some "universal" idea as the telos of humanity, the Marxists view human history or society as evolving from barbarity to civilization and finally to an ideal society of

communism. The NHF, I hold, negates this dominant discourse of Chinese modernity. I discuss this in relation to the change in spatio-temporal perception in the seven chapters that follow.

Chapter 1 discusses what I view as the two basic types of the NHF, i.e. "alternative histories" and "historiographic metafictions," which, in my understanding, demarcate its *raison d'être* as a sub-genre of the Chinese historical fiction.

The NHFs emerged first of all as "alternative histories" (which I discuss in Chapter 1) that challenge the official Revolutionary History. They attempt to deconstruct the myth of revolution by taking to task the origin of revolution and by subverting the concept of class struggle deemed by orthodox Marxists as the prime mover of history. In the "alternative histories" offered by such contemporary writers as Qiao Liang (喬良), Zhang Wei (張煒), Mo Yan (莫言), Li Rui (李銳), Liu Zhenyun (劉震雲), Liu Heng (劉恒), Chen Zhongshi (陳忠實), Ge Fei (格非), Ye Zhaoyan (葉兆言) and so on, the narration of the revolutionary "heroes" and their activities becomes more a process of demystifying revolution than its deification (as in Revolutionary History). Revolutionary "heroes" are often represented as poverty-stricken and raucous peasants with moral limitations. They are also depicted as revengeful and egotistic people who fight for power and personal interest, which recalls Nietzsche's delineation of slave ethics in *The Genealogy of Morals*. When the revolutionaries do appear altruistic and heroic, they, ironically, are mostly descendents of the exploiting class who rebel against their own class. In either case, the history of revolution is presented as an irony: the revengeful and raucous people turn themselves into wicked and avaricious souls in the exaltation of their egotistic desires, whereas those rebelling against their own class, much like Don Quixote, have fought for an imaginary cause that eventually leads to their own destruction as well as their class's. The stereotyped way of fashioning typical characters as immaculate revolutionary heroes devoted to the noble course of revolution (as in Revolutionary History) is reversed in alternative histories, in such a way that the former is parodied for ironical effects.[46] To fit them into Hayden White's "tropics of discourse," the kind of historical imagination of the former could be described as "Metonymic" and the latter "Ironic."[47] In an ironical manner, alternative histories, by presenting versions of histories that differ from that of official History, deconstruct some of the cardinal concepts of Revolutionary History, such as "class struggle," "typical characters under typical circumstances," and the linear progression of history as "going from victories to victories." In a sense, this depoliticizing and deconstructive trend in the NHF constitutes a challenge to the road of socialist revolution and an exposition of the repressive and violent nature of its discursive formation.

Secondly, the NHF has, for the first time in the Chinese literary history, interrogated the truth-telling capacity and the "scientific" status that

historiography claims (which I discuss in the section, "Historiographic Metafictions", Chapter 1). Throughout the history of Chinese literature, the relationship and the distinction between "fact" and "fiction" is essential in literary criticism as well as literary creation. In the light of the post-structuralist's and the new historicist's dissolution of the distinction between history and fiction (treating both equally as *writings* or *texts*), this relationship can now be viewed from a brand-new angle. I borrow Linda Hutcheon's term "historiographic metafiction" (1988) to categorize those NHFs which adopt metafictional, or metahistorical, techniques to cancel out the truth-revealing effects created by the realistic mode of writing.[48] The sociocultural significance of these "historiographic metafictions" can be foremost perceived from their provocation of a changed conceptualization of fiction's troubled relationship with historiography, a relationship that has been full of tensions for as long as the fiction genre has existed. The NHF has for the first time presented itself as a competitive rival discourse that constitutes a challenge, and perhaps a threat, to the hegemonic position of official historiography, by dissolving the difference between fiction and history and by giving alternative accounts of history.

In so doing the NHF has interrogated the authoritativeness of historiography whose authority is based on such a distinction. Not only its "unique" capacity to recuperate historical "truth," but also its ontological status as a discipline engaged in the recording of historical "truth" or "facts" have been seriously questioned. Ge Fei's "The Lunar New Year" (大年), for example, exposes how power is attached to the right to history deemed as a discourse of "truth." By showing a huge gap between what really happens and what is recorded in history (in this case in the New Fourth Army's official document; see my discussion in Chapter 3, pp. 89–91), Ge Fei has attempted to explore the nature of "truth," which is, according to Michel Foucault (1980: 132), no more than "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true." Wang Xiaobo, in *The Age of Gold* (黃金時代), avails himself to bitter sarcasm and a sense of black humor when demonstrating the gap between the "truth" that the revolutionary discourse demands and the "truth" that the village cadres have desired for from the hero and the heroine of the story (see my discussion in "Sexing Chinese History", Chapter 7). As a matter of fact, all of the NHFs have, in one way or another (e.g. by offering alternative histories or by the metafictional or metahistorical technique which reveals the textual nature of any historical "truth"), interrogated the "truth" that the grand narrative, fictive or historical, has told. In each of these texts, the reader cannot but feel the pleasure and impacts of its deconstruction.

The deconstructive force that the NHF has carried with it plays a significant role in restructuring the age-old relationship between fiction and history. Indeed, the interrogation of the legitimacy of historical truth itself is

a heavy blow the NHF has dealt to historiography. The NHF has challenged the historiographic discourse to the effect that this relationship has virtually been reversed, a task that was unimaginable for the *historical yanyi,* and unattainable in modern Chinese historical fiction, although the latter did succeed in gaining an autonomous status. It was not until the rise of the NHF that historiography's textual nature was unmasked and its sanctity doubted.

At the very heart of this deconstruction of "truth" is the NHF's problematization of the legitimation of historiography's supreme status which has been enjoyed for thousands of years since the very inception of Chinese civilization.[49] Under the suppression of historiography which has disguised as the surrogate of "truth," the fiction genre, including the historical fiction, had been rendered subservient. By exposing the internal exercise of power in the manufacturing of "truth" and by canceling out the presumed difference in the truth-revealing capacity between fiction and historiography, the NHF presents itself as an equal media for the recitation of history. This is a remarkable breakthrough on the part of the historical fiction, especially when the whole issue is situated against the cultural background of the historiography's suppression of fiction. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that much of the NHF's attraction has derived from its deconstruction of what were once taken as "truths" and "the course" or "laws" of history.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the shift from the "temporal narration" of the grand narrative of revolutionary history to the "spatial narration" of the NHF, which I discuss in relation to the issue of modernity. I regard the NHF as basically a type of writing characterized by a "spatial narration," which tends to "spatialize time," as against a "temporal narration," which prioritizes time over space. If, as David Harvey says, "progress entails the conquest of space, the tearing down of all spatial barriers, and the ultimate 'annihilation of space through time' " (1989: 205), the NHF writer's "spatial narration" represents an attempt to redress the tendency in social theory to focus on temporality, change, and evolution. In narrative mode as well as the conceptualization of the historical process, the NHF has shown a tendency to synchronize the narrative events, to show the simultaneity, contingency and discontinuity of things, which goes against the notions of progressive, linear, and irreversible time entailed by the Enlightenment project of modernity.

Michel Foucault writes: "For all those who confuse history with the old schemas of evolution, living continuity, organic development, the progress of consciousness or the project of existence, the use of spatial terms seems to have the air of an anti-history" (1980: 70). What lies behind the NHF's spatial narration is perhaps not so much an attempt to deny temporality than an attempt to reassert the value of space, which "was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" while "[t]ime, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" (ibid., 70). By focusing on the particularistic attributes

of spaces, the mechanisms of their production and the effects of power they create, these writings mark a deviation from the previous mode of writing that revolved around the concept of growth and development deemed unattainable except by revolution or class struggle. The special attention that the NHF writers have given to what Foucault has referred to elsewhere as "heterotopias" (Foucault 1986) and what Edward Soja calls "postmodern geographies" (1989) signals a fundamental shift from the earlier temporality-oriented narration focusing on teleology and universal, absolute laws to a narration that emphasizes differences, idiosyncrasies and discrete physiognomies in relative spaces. By juxtaposing heterogeneous places and disrupting the unity and continuity of the flow of events organized around an unbroken causal chain, the NHF highlights the uniqueness, the difference and the simultaneity of things as against the totalitarian quality of the teleological Revolutionary History. It also suggests an advocacy of pluralities and differences and a rejection of the globalized uniform space and time. The stresses on both heterogeneous spaces and fragmentary, contingent histories may as well reflect the writers' negation of "the old schemas of evolution, living continuity, organic development" that are associated with the project of modernity.

Chapter 4 discusses the *fin de siècle* sense of decadence discernible in the recurrent images of sickness, ruin and death in its fictive familial or village histories. These fictive histories, I argue, would be more aptly read as allegories that project pessimistic sentiments into a sort of historical decadence, as an allegorical negation of any naïve optimism in Chinese modernity. Retrogression and degeneration is the most apparent historical process expressed by many decadent past stories delineating the decline and fall of patriarchal families, such as Ge Fei's *The Enemy* (敵人), Su Tong's "The Family of the Opium Poppy" (罌粟之家) and "Fleeing in 1934" (1934年的逃亡), Li Rui's *The Old Site* (舊址), and Liu Heng's *The Daydreams of the Cang River* (蒼河白日夢), which contrast sharply with progressive history and linear temporality as implied by the notion of modernity. Moreover, in what disguises as memories of the obscure past actually lies contemporary writers' conceptualization of the present, their concern with modernity and consumerism. An allegorical reading of their historical imaginations would therefore yield a better understanding of the context in which these fictive histories appeared and were received. History in these works, like Walter Benjamin's exegesis of "the allegorical physiognomy of nature-history" in the German tragic drama (Benjamin 1985: 177–8), appears "in the form of ruin and decay." The aura of decadence emanating from such rhetoric of sickness, which permeates the "allegorical physiognomy" of these fictive histories, is indicative of a rejection of the conjectured historical process predestined by the project of modernity.

The next three chapters are more detailed studies of some contemporary

texts, i.e. Zhang Chengzhi's *A History of the Soul,* Han Shaogong's *Dictionary of Maqiao,* and Wang Xiaobo's *Modern Times Trilogy,* which serve to further elucidate the salient thematic and formal features of the NHF. I choose them not because I like them better than other works, nor do I regard them as more typical examples of the NHF than other texts categorized as such. In fact, none of their authors has been called a NHF writer, and none of these works has been labeled a NHF by critics. I choose them for two reasons: first, they have not yet been discussed as NHFs, hence the need to illustrate their significance and contribution to the literary sub-genre; second, they have generated tremendous impacts within the literary circles and without, both in terms of literary studies and social influences.[50]

Both Zhang Chengzhi and Han Shaogong's novels represent endeavors to write the silenced and the subaltern[51] into history and to uphold *Jahrinya* (哲合忍耶, a Muslim cultural Other), in the former, and, the Maqiao vernacular (a linguistic Other) in the latter, as resistance against the hegemony of Confucianism and of *putonghua* (普通話, "the standard language"). While Zhang adopts a Muslim way of writing history (which blends memories, intuitions, and personal emotions), Han Shaogong gives his (historical) narrative the outfit of a dictionary, which aims at deconstructing what is at the center, be it linguistic, cultural, or narratological.

Wang Xiaobo's trilogy delineates a regressive history viewed as deteriorating from *The Age of Gold* through *The Age of Silver* to *The Age of Bronze.* The three novels included in *The Age of Bronze* are of particular interest and significance owing to their arbitrary fusion (and confusion) of the boundaries between history and fiction, past and present, reality and dream.

I hope my eclectic use of Western concepts and theories in this book would not be taken as an orientalist testimony to their universal validity or unexceptional truisms. I employ them to elucidate some of my arguments, and to look at the NHF from the vantage point of global literary modernism and postmodernism. As a matter of fact, the NHF as well as modern Chinese literature was heavily influenced by Western literary and critical praxis, which somehow makes these concepts and theories useful critical tools. Nevertheless, since they are applied in the Chinese context, I shall try to, where necessary, limit the senses in which I use them or add my own modifications to adjust them to new circumstances. On the whole, I try to take whatever is useful in them for exegetical convenience rather than credulously embrace them as systems of knowledge that have to be totally believed in. Every concept or theory, I believe, is only partly true rather than universally applicable.

My discussion of the NHF in this book is by no means exhaustive. In a sense, the NHF writers' attitudes towards culture and history vary and defy strict generalizing. In their multifarious articulations of history, they have shown differences in their political and cultural views and attitudes, which I

cannot dwell on in this book. Moreover, these writers themselves may sometimes manifest contradictory attitudes, such as Han Shaogong ("Dilemma," Chapter 6) and Wang Xiaobo (Chapter 7). Indeed there is also a heavy dose of idealist and essentialist expressions in the essays by Zhang Chengzhi, Han Shaogong, Wang Xiaobo, and Zhang Wei, but perhaps not so much in their narrative works, from the latter of which I have read different cultural implications from what these writers have alleged in their essays. I can also find the expression of cultural nationalism in their writings, which is positive as a strategy for creating, preserving or strengthening cultural identity at an age marked by globalization, but, when carried to the extreme, becomes biased and leads to an ethnocentric view of other cultures. In abandoning one monadic discourse, they might, as in the case of Zhang Chengzhi (which I discuss in Chapter 5), put an alternative monadic discourse in its place. But different as their views are, they do share, as I shall argue, a critical attitude to Revolutionary History and Chinese modernity, the latter of which has in fact become the dominant ideology since the "new period." The formal renovations as well as the thematic breakthroughs in the NHF justify it as a new sub-genre of the historical fiction worthy of a close cultural and ideological exegesis.

There are several distinctive features of the NHF that I admire and that have actually triggered my initial interest in it. First is the courage and confidence with which it challenges the discourse of historiography, which has a history of repressing the *xiaoshuo* (literally "small talk") and has produced large quantities of what Nietzsche calls "antiquarian history" that "mummifies life," that "knows only how to *preserve* life, not how to gender it" (1983: 75). The NHF writers' *petits récits* have started a trend to battle against the monadic grand narrative of historiography, of its status as the surrogate of "truth." I am more than happy to see that what has hitherto been the historian's privilege, i.e. the right to the narration of history, has now been usurped to some substantial extent by the NHF writers, whose *critical*, rather than *antiquarian*, mode of writing history (or story of the past) has, in turn, yielded profound insights into the past and the present and their relationship.

Secondly, quite a lot of NHF writers, notably Ge Fei, Mo Yan, Wang Anyi, Li Xiao, Ye Zhaoyan and Wang Xiaobo, have taken a deconstructionist stance in their narration of (hi)story.[52] It has been interesting reading their works, not only because of their subversion of the grand narratives of "truth," "justice," "progress," and of history as such, but also because of the dexterous narrative skills with which they have constructed and deconstructed their own (hi)stories. These works might be blamed by conservative critics for their "nihilistic" attitude towards history and literature; however, I believe they are among the best contemporary Chinese fictions produced in the last fifteen years or so of the twentieth century, not only because of the impacts their deconstruction has brought, but also because of their irony and self-reflexivity.

I also appreciate their vigilance against consumerism incurred by the

ongoing project of Chinese modernity and their awareness of the mythical and political nature of some of its propositions, such as the notion of progress, happiness and freedom viewed as the automatic result of the advancement of instrumental rationality and science. If my conclusion about their "anti-modernity" tendency is right, then they are among the first writers in the history of Chinese literature, and perhaps in the history of China, to have negated modernity, by deconstructing its temporal logic and by embracing decadentism, as I shall discuss in the following chapters.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Wang Biao (王彪), in *Selections from the New Historical Fiction* (新歷史小說選), designates Qiao Liang's (喬良) *The Funeral Flags* (靈旗) (1986) as the precursor of the NHF (Wang Biao 1993: 47).
2. Zhang Qinghua teaches Chinese literature at Shandong Normal University.
3. "The tradition of historiography" obviously refers to "Chinese traditional historiography." Zhang tries to establish the connection between Western "new historicism" and Chinese traditional historiography, between the Chinese traditional historical fiction and the "new historical fiction." However, what Zhang perceives to be a "small step" is to me a huge gap. For these superficial similarities between the two sides, i.e. traditional historiography/traditional historical fiction on the one hand and the new historicism/the new historical fiction on the other, do not cover up their different conceptualizations of history and fiction.
4. By *minjian* discourse, Zhang means the pluralistic, neutral and primordial discourse as against the politicized monolithic official discourse, especially official History. It has shown "similar features" with traditional historical fiction held to be *yeshi* (野史) or *baishi* (稗史), i.e. "unofficial histories" (Zhang Qinghua 1997: 189–90).
5. John L. Bishop observes the contradiction between didacticism and erotic descriptions in Chinese traditional fiction. See John L. Bishop, "Some Limitations of Chinese Fiction," in J. L. Bishop (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 237–45. David Der-wei Wang (王德威) makes a similar observation in *The Ways to Imagine China* (Beijing: Sanlian chubanshe, 1998), p. 89.
6. Jiang Daqi (蔣大器), in his preface to *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國志通俗演義), writes that the novel "records facts as they were and is almost like history" (事紀其實，亦庶幾乎史). Hu Shi (胡適), in his preface to the same novel, criticizes that the novel has followed history too strictly, lacking imagination and creativity. Zhang Xuecheng (章學誠), in *Binchen zhaji* (丙辰札記), accuses the novel of being 70 percent factual and 30 percent fictitious, which causes confusions as to its historical truth.
7. Roland Barthes, for instance, points out, "historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration, or to put it more precisely, an *imaginary*

elaboration, if we can take the imaginary to be the language through which the utterer of a discourse (a purely linguistic entity) 'fill out' the place of subject of the utterance (a psychological or ideological entity)" (Jenkins [ed.], *The Postmodern History Reader,* p. 121). Patricia Waugh, in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction,* writes: "Metafiction suggests that not only writing history is a fictional act, ranging events conceptually through language, to form a world-model, but that history itself is invested, like fiction, with interrelating plots which appear to interact independently of human design" (48–9).

8. For studies of this topic, see Charles Gardner, *Chinese Traditional Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961); Jaroslave Prusek, "History and Epic in China and the West," in *Chinese History and Literature* (Prague: Academia Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1970), pp. 17–34; Earl H. Pritchard, "Traditional Chinese Historiography and Local Histories," in Hayden White (ed.), *The Uses of History: Essays in Intellectual and Social History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), pp. 187–220; Andrew Plaks, "The Problem of Structure in Chinese Narrative" in *Tamkang Review,* 6.2 and 7.1, 1976, pp. 429–40.
9. For discussions on cyclical view of time and circular history, see Gu Xiegang (顧頡剛) (ed.), *Gu shi bian,* vol. V (古史辨 · 卷五) (Beiping: Jinshan shushe, 1935), pp. 343–753; Li Zehou (李澤厚), "秦漢思想簡議" in Li Zehou, *Writings on Chinese Intellectual History,* Vol. 1 (中國思想史論 · 上卷) (Anhui: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 139–80; Wu Huaiqi (吳懷棋), *A History of Chinese Historical Thinking* (中國史學思想史) (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1996), pp. 51–5; Chen Tongsheng (陳桐生), *Zhongguo de shiguan wenhua yu* Shiji (中國的史官文化與《史記》) (Shangtou: Shangtou daxue chubanshe, 1993), pp. 18–34; Chun-chieh Hung and Erik Zurcher (ed.), *Time and Space in Chinese Culture* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995). For an opposite argument, see Joseph Needham, *Science in Traditional China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1981), pp. 107–31.
10. John C.Y. Wang, "Early Chinese Narrative: the Tso-Chuan as Example," in Andrew H. Plaks (ed.), *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 3–20.
11. Shi Changyu, *The Sources of Chinese Fiction* (Beijing, Sanliang chubanshe, 1994), pp. 259–68.
12. Zhao Yiheng (1994: 19–23).
13. Ibid., pp. 223–38.
14. Lu Lin (陸林), "A Tentative Discussion of the Conceptions of Xiaoshuo in the Pre-Qin Era" (試論先秦小說觀念), in *Zhongguo gudai jindai wenxue yanjiu* (中國古代近代文學研究) 3, 1997, pp. 44–50.
15. Chen Qianyu, *A History of Chinese Fiction Criticism* (Shanghai: Huadong shida chubanshe, 1989).
16. Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (中國小說史略), Chapter 1.
17. Chen Pingyuan, commenting on the influences of these two traditions on the fictional genre, points out that the influence of the former ("the chronicle and biography tradition") was manifested in three aspects: its role of supplementing history, its deploy of the *chunqiu* method of writing (春秋筆法; i.e. "factual recordation of historical facts") and its borrowing of the biographical way of writing, and that the influence from the latter ("the lyrical tradition") was shown in its imagination, the blending of emotive elements in narration and the insertion

of numerous poems in fictions. See Chen Pingyuan, *Literary History: Theory and Practice* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993), pp. 181–5. See also Ma Zhenjun (馬振軍), *Traditional Fiction and Chinese Culture* (傳統小說與中國文化) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996), pp. 3–36.

18. Bishop, commenting on authorial intrusions in the colloquial fiction, writes, "Their cumulative effect is to destroy the illusion of veracity which naturalistic plot details attempt to create; and the retention of such conventions has impeded the development of a realistic narrative technique toward its ultimate goal of producing an effect of actuality" (1965: 239). He also observes that while moral edification was always imposed on the colloquial fiction, the bulk of the narrative details are pornographic or immoral. See John L. Bishop, "Some Limitations of Chinese Fiction," in John L. Bishop (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 237–45.
19. David Der-wei Wang (王德威), *The Ways to Imagine China* (Beijing: Sanlian chubanshe, 1998), p. 89.
20. Joseph Frank uses the term to describe Western modernist writing (1935). See also my discussion on "the spatial turn" in Chapter 3.
21. "Emplotment" is a term used by Hayden White to refer to "the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures" (1978a: 83).
22. For a discussion of the difference between a "chronicle" and a "story," see Hayden White, *Metahistory*, pp. 5–7.
23. David Der-wei Wang, "The Relationship between 'Shuohua' and the Narrative Pattern of Chinese Vernacular Fiction," in *The Ways to Imagine China: History, Fiction and Narration* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1998), pp. 80–101.
24. For a study of this transformation, see Chen Pingyuan "The Shift of Narrative Perspective in Chinese Fiction," in *The Change of Narrative Mode in Chinese Fiction* (中國小說敘事模式的轉變) (Taipei: Jiuda wenhua gufen youxian gongsi, 1990), pp. 63–104.
25. Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Literary Trends I: The Quest for Modernity, 1895–1927," in John Fairbank (ed.), *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 452–526.
26. Li Zehou 李澤厚, "The Double Variations of Enlightenment and Salvation" (啟蒙與救亡的雙重變奏), in *Writings on Chinese Intellectual History*, vol. 3 (中國思想史論 · 下卷) (Anhui: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 823–66.
27. For Roland Barthes, Marxist writing is presented as "the language of knowledge." "Here, writing is univocal, because it is meant to maintain the cohesion of a Nature; it is the lexical stability of this writing which allows it to impose a stability in its explanations and permanence in its method" (*Writing Degree Zero*, 23). "Revolutionary writing," writes Barthes, "was so to speak the entelechy of the revolutionary legend: it struck fear into men's hearts and imposed upon them a citizen's sacrament of Bloodshed" (ibid., 22). "In the Stalinist world, in which *definition*, that is to say the separation between Good and Evil, becomes the sole content of all language, there are no words without values attached to them ... [Stalinist writing] no longer aims at founding a Marxist version of the facts, or a revolutionary rationale of actions, but at presenting reality in a prejudged form ..." (ibid., 24).
28. Li Zehou, in his article "The Double Variations of Enlightenment and Salvation," views the reiteration of "humanitarianism" (人道主義) and the "liberation of

thoughts" (思想解放) in "literature of the new period" as a familiar note of anti-tradition the May Fourth writers often drove home to their audience (1999: 859). Chen Lai (陳來), in "Radicalism in the Cultural Movements of the Twentieth Century" (20世紀文化運動中的激進主義) (see Li Shitao [李世濤] 2000c: 293–308), sees a radical, anti-traditional thought dominating the Chinese intellectual circles throughout the twentieth-century China, from May Fourth through the Cultural Revolution to the "cultural fever" in the 1980s. Zhang Yiwu (張頤武), in *From Modernity to Postmodernity* (從現代性到後現代性) (Nanning: Guangxi Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), views the 1980s as basically an era obsessed with modernity.

29. Berman describes the "Faustian model" as having "gigantic energy and transportation projects on an international scale" and "long-range development," and the latter as having "all Faust's gigantism and ruthlessness without his scientific and technical ability, organizational genius or political sensitivity to people's real desires and needs" (1983: 71–86).
30. Zhang Yiwu (張頤武), *From Modernity to Postmodernity.*
31. For a collection of essays for the debate, see Wang Hui (汪暉) and Yu Guoliang (余國良) (ed.), *The Controversies over 'Postism' in the 90s* (90年代的"後學"之爭) (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998).
32. For a collection of essays related to the debates, see Li Shitao (ed.), *Positions of the Intellectuals: The Controversy over Liberalism and the Splitting up of the Chinese Ideological Front* (知識分子立場：自由主義之爭與中國思想界的分化) (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 2000b).
33. For a collection of discussions and interviews on the topic, see Wang Xiaoming (王曉明) (ed.), *Meditations on Humanistic Spirit* (人文精神尋思錄) (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1996).
34. See Wang Hui (汪暉) and Yu Guoliang (余國良) (ed.), *The Controversies over 'Postism' in the 90s*; Li Shitao (ed.), *Positions of the Intellectuals: The Controversy over Liberalism and the Splitting up of the Chinese Ideological Front.*
35. It is interesting to observe that both sides presumed their "marginal" positions and accused the other of siding with the "dominant" ideology. This somehow had to do with the hybrid nature of the dominant ideology, i.e. "socialist market economy" and "socialism with Chinese characteristics," both of which are conceptions conflating the socialist and capitalist elements of economic praxis and social structures.
36. See Xu Jilin (許紀霖) et al., "Searching for a 'Third Road,' " in Li Shitao (2000b: 309–33); Zhang Rulun (張汝倫), "The Third Road," in Li Shitao (2000b: 334–43).
37. Wang Hui (汪暉) takes "the Chinese problem" as the problem of modernity in the Chinese context. See his "The Status of Thoughts in Contemporary China and the Question of Modernity" (當代中國的思想狀況和現代性問題), in Li Shitao (2000b: 83–123). For a review of Wang Hui's notion, see Wang Dingding (汪丁丁), "The Enlightenment Is Dead, Long Live the Enlightenment! — A Review of Wang Hui's Narration of 'the Chinese Problem' " (啟蒙死了，啟蒙萬歲! — 評汪暉關於'中國問題'的敘說), in Li Shitao (2000b: 239–71).
38. Yu Hua mentions that his early works were influenced by Calvino (*Can I Believe Myself,* p. 233) and Kafka (ibid., 252). Su Tong mentions the influences of Faulkner, Joyce, Flaubert, Márquez, Tolstoy, and Proust on him (*Beauties on Paper,* 190). Mo Yan's stories of Gaomi were inspired by Faulkner's "Yoknapatawpha" stories (*The Wall that Can Sing,* pp. 200–3; 245). Ge Fei is indebted to Kafka's and Borges's influences.

39. In fact, the boundary lines between these literary waves are not at all clear. Many of the "new historical fictions" are at the same time categorized into roots-seeking literature, avant-garde literature, and neo-realism, and vice versa. However, the chief purpose of this book is not to rectify their boundaries, but rather to explore the changes in the conceptualizations of history, spatiality and temporality and their relations as manifested in contemporary writings.
40. Though the definition of the new historical fiction as a genre is still rather nebulous, a large corpus of works by such writers of national reputation as Mo Yan (莫言), Yu Hua (余華), Su Tong (蘇童), Ge Fei (格非), Ye Zhaoyan (葉兆言), Qiao Liang (喬良), Li Rui (李銳), Lian Sheng (廉聲), Li Xiao (李曉), etc. have been subsumed under its name. Though Wang Anyi (王安憶), Han Shaogong (韓少功), Wang Xiaobo (王小波) and Zhang Chengzhi (張承志) are rarely associated with the NHF, my study of this topic includes them (for reasons see my discussions in Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7). This list of names, which is of course incomplete, would make nearly all the major contemporary Chinese writers in one way or another connected to this literary trend. But I do not, of course, claim that they are the main NHF writers.
41. Critics Chen Sihe (陳思和), Wang Biao (王彪), Ouyan Ming (歐陽明), Hong Zhigang (洪治綱), Chen Xiaoming (陳曉明) etc. have written review articles which attempt to summarize the features of the NHF (see my discussion in Chapter 1). Zhang Qinghua (張清華) devotes a chapter, namely "The Literary Wave of New Historicism," to the study of the NHF, in *A Study of Chinese Contemporary Avant-garde Literature* (中國當代先鋒文學思潮論) (1997).
42. Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, has argued that literature, history, and even philosophy are linguistic constructs sharing their condition of *writing*.
43. Li Jie (李劼) is the only one who associates contemporary Chinese literature since the mid-1980s as a part of twentieth-century world literature. He sees 1985 as the watershed between modern and contemporary Chinese literature as well as the demarcation of its coalescence into world literature. He points out (1998, vol. 4: 41) that twentieth-century Chinese literature started out not with the May Fourth new literature in the beginning of the twentieth century, but with the emergence of what he calls "new literary waves" (文學新思潮) since 1985. Chinese literature between May Fourth and 1985 belonged to nineteenth-century literature, in terms of the general literary wave (realism, literature for life). For details see his *Essays on Chinese Literary History* (中國文學史論) (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1998), pp. 41; 152–5. Though this notion of his is insightful and brilliant, he, however, has not elaborated on it. Zhang Yiwu (張頤武) and Wang Ning (王寧) demarcate the 1990s as the dividing line between what they call "the new period" and "the post-new period," a division between modern and postmodern literature. For details see Zhang Yiwu, *From Modernity to Postmodernity* (從現代性到後現代性) (Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997) and Wang Ning, *Comparative Literature and Contemporary Cultural Critique* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2000), pp. 133–48. They see the transformation of planned economy to market economy and the consequent emergence of consumerism as the demarcation of a new era — an era of "postmodernity." Nevertheless, they fail to see, or explicate, the booming of literary waves since the mid-1980s (avant-garde literature, roots-seeking literature, the new historical fiction and neo-realism), which contrast sharply with earlier literature. Moreover, there has been

much controversy as to whether postmodernity is a proper term to describe Chinese literature and culture in the 1990s. For debates on this issue, see Wang Hui (汪暉) (ed.), *The Controversies over the Chinese "Postism" in the 90s.* What I want to add here is that they fail to see that a large number of works written in the second half of the 1980s, particularly the NHFs, actually reveal a negative response to modernity. I discuss this in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

44. I discuss "Chinese modernity" in Chapter 2.
45. Susan Onega writes, "The totalitarian element in 'world' history tend to justify both Marxism and Imperialism, two absolutely opposed ideologies, which nevertheless share a similar totalitarian impulse towards the obliteration of 'differences,' whether of gender, race, or historical events" (1995: 10).
46. This way of rewriting, or deconstructing, Revolutionary History characterizes many NHFs such as Liu Zhenyun's *Hometown, World and Yellow Flowers* (故鄉天下黃花) (1993), Ge Fei's "The Lunar New Year" (大年) (1988), Su Tong's "The Family of the Opium Poppy" (罌粟之家) (1988), and Li Rui's *The Old Site* (舊址) (1993). By deliberately blurring the boundaries between the revolutionaries and the plebs, these writers dissolve the sanctity of revolution and equate it with the struggle for power and domination.
47. In Hayden White's exegesis of the four modes of historical imagination, "Metaphor is essentially *representational,* Metonymy is *reductionist,* Synecdoche is *integrative,* and Irony is *negational*" (1973: 34). Judging by its reductionist nature (it reduces the complexity of historical phenomena into one simple law of evolution), Revolutionary History can fit well into the Metonymic mode. Revolutionary History attempts to reflect "typical characters under typical circumstances" and in so doing evokes what Georg Lukàcs (1962: 138–52) calls the "totality" of social life. On the other hand, alternative histories, which parody Revolutionary History and dissolve some of its major tenets (e.g. class conflicts as the prime mover of social progress, the masses as the makers of history, and the concept of typicality itself, see my discussion in "Alternative Histories", Chapter 1), fall within the Ironic mode.
48. Writers who have notably and consciously adopted metafictional techniques include Mo Yan (*The Red Sorghum Family,* 1986), Su Tong's "Fleeing in 1934" (1987), Ye Zhaoyan ("Story of the Date Tree," 1988), Li Xiao ("The Rendezvous in K City, " 1991), Wang Anyi (*Fact and Fiction,* 1993), Wang Xiaobo (*The Age of Bronze,* 1997), Liu Zhenyun (*Hometown, Flour and Flowers,* 1998) and so on. I discuss Mo Yan, Ye Zhaoyan, and Li Xiao's works in "Historiographic Metafictions," Chapter 1; Wang Anyi and Liu Zhenyun's works in "The Spatialization of Time," Chapter 3; Wang Xiaobo's works in Chapter 7.
49. Official historians are recorded to have existed as early as the Xia dynasty (approximately from the late twenty-second century BC to the early seventeenth century BC). In the Zhou dynasty (approximately from the eleventh century BC to 771 BC), there were several ranks for official historians, i.e. *dashi* (大史, "a grand historian"), *xiaoshi* (小史, "a petite historian"), *neishi* (內史, "an interior historian"), and *waishi* (外史, "an exterior historian"). See Wang Shumin (王樹民), *An Outline History of Chinese Historiography* (中國史學史綱要) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1997), pp. 8–10.
50. Zhang Chengzhi's novel came out in 1991 and remained relatively obscure until 1993 when heated discussions on the "loss of humanistic spirit" among literary critics and scholars of humanities started (see Wang Xiaoming 1996). Zhang's work

was then lauded as a manifesto against consumerism and moral corruption. The sales volume of Han Shaogong's novel rose dramatically due to controversies among critics over the originality of his novel, which eventually led to the author's defamation suit against some critics and media. For detail, see Tian Dao (天島) and Nan Ba (南芭) (ed.), *The Broken Bridge of the Men of Letters: A Record of the Lawsuit Concerning* Dictionary of Maqiao (文人的斷橋—《馬橋詞典》訴訟紀實) (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1997). It should be noticed that behind the controversies over Han's novel was in fact the confrontation between the "postists" (e.g. Zhang Yiwu [張頤武] and Wang Gan [王干]), who were accused of applying too readily and inappropriately Western theories to the studies of Chinese literature and of their embrace of a dubious 'postmodern' era in China, and more conservative critics (e.g. Nan Fan [南帆] and Chen Sihe [陳思和]), who were defendants of "humanistic spirit" (人文精神). I must say that the selection of Zhang's and Han's novels as the topics of my study does not imply my taking side with the conservative critics (actually I prefer Ge Fei, Yu Hua, Su Tong and Ye Zhaoyan); my discussions rather concentrate on aspects that are either irrelevant to the focus of the debates, or not touched upon at all, such as Han Shaogong's vacillating cultural stance. Wang Xiaobo's works, though extremely popular, were not well received in the critical circle (e.g. almost no professional literary critics have reviewed his works), probably due to his megalomaniac self-praise and his status as an amateur writer (and an arrogant one at that). What interest me are his less popular novels collected in *The Age of Bronze* sub-trilogy which read like what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafictions" (1989).

51. I borrow the term "subaltern" from Ranajit Guha, who defines it as follows: "The word 'subaltern' ... stands for the meaning as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, that is, 'of inferior rank'. It will be used in these pages as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Guha 1982: vii).
52. In a postmodern understanding of the historical discourse, such as Roland Barthes's and Hayden White's, history and fiction (story) both have a textual nature; therefore *history* is synonymous with *story* and thus spelt as "(hi)story." The use of "(hi)story" in feminism studies has a gender meaning added to it: history is traditionally viewed as "his story" rather than "her story."

CHAPTER 1

1. For a discussion on modern historical fiction, See Li Chenghua (李程驊) (1996).
2. Li Chenghua, in his analysis of the modern Chinese historical fiction from the 1920s to the 1940s, highly evaluates it for its "epistemological value" and its role in "reflecting reality." He concludes: "realism had become the tradition of its creation" (1996: 36). Huang Ziping (黃子平), in his *Revolution, History and Fiction*, uses the term "fiction of revolutionary history" (革命歷史小說) to label the major works written from the 1950s to the 1970s which "reflect the history of struggles in the new democratic revolution period" (7). These works, obviously forming an important part of modern historical fiction, are characterized by the style of socialist realism. Obviously historical fictions since 1949 are, to a great extent, the product of the dominant creative principle of "portraying typical characters under typical circumstances."

3. For an exposition of his concept of *minjian* (民間), see his "民間的沉浮——從抗戰到文革文學史的一個嘗試性解釋" and "民間的還原——文革後文學史某種走向的解釋" in *The Restoration of Minjian* (還原民間) (Taipei: Dong da tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 1997), pp. 75–110; 111–32.
4. See my discussion on Wang Xiaobo in Chapter 7.
5. I discuss Wang Anyi's novel in Chapter 3, pp. 107–8.
6. Here the translations of Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Hayden White, Jacque Derrida, Michel Foucault, etc. in the 1980s have an important role to play.
7. Wesseling's concept of "alternate histories" derives from the notion that "any given historical situation implies a plethora of divergent possibilities that far exceed the possibilities which happened to have been realized" (1991: 100) and from an attempt to recuperate some of those possibilities. Alternate histories as depicted in the "uchronian fictions," according to Wesseling, have shown utopian anticipations of the future that have political bearings, thus refuting negative definitions of postmodernism as being "nonreferential, ahistorical, apolitical, self-reflexive, and devoid of any sort of commitment whatsoever except to its own autonomy" (ibid., 5). "Alternate histories" has been used by Wesseling interchangeably with "uchronian fantasy," a term derived from the French *uchronie* coined by a Frenchman named Charles Renouvier in 1876 (ibid., 101), which "locates utopia in history, by imagining an apocryphal course of events, which clearly did not really take place, but which might have taken place" (ibid., 102). Equating Linda Hutcheon's location of the political impact of postmodernism in its subversive potential with "an aborted politics" and accusing her of ruling out "the invention of alternatives" (12), Wesseling attributes the political impact of postmodernist historical novel mainly to its uchronian fantasy viewed as a strategy against the exclusion of the subordinate from the historical records and as some sort of political destiny to be anticipated.
8. Keith Jenkins defines "History in the upper case" as "a way of looking at the past in terms which assigned to contingent events and situations an objective significance by identifying their place and function within a general schema of historical development usually construed as appropriately progressive" (Jenkins 1997: 5). The term is also used interchangeably with Lyotard's "metanarrative."
9. See also my discussion on "historical decadence" in Chapter 4.
10. I discuss Zhang's novel in Chapter 5.
11. This is Xie Mian and Zhang Yiwu (1995), Wang Ning (2000) and Chen Xiaoming's (1994) division of the "new period" and the "post-new-period." But before 1990 (since the mid-1980s) Chinese avant-garde literature had already shown elements of postmodern conception of history in literary works. Personally, I prefer 1986 (the date of the first publication of Mo Yan's *The Red Sorghum Family*) as the dividing line.

CHAPTER 2

1. See Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, genealogy, history" in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 76–100, where he writes, "Traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. [...] History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces

discontinuity into our very being — as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (88).

2. Literary critics Liu Zaifu and Lin Gang (1993), Lin Gang (1998), Huang Ziping (1996), and Li Chenghua (1996) have come up with some generalizations about such a prototype. Li Chenghua provides an overview of modern Chinese historical fiction in which he emphasizes the shift from the historical *yanyi*'s obsession with historical "truth" and "facts" to fictionality, marking a "transformation from traditionality to modernity." Though the concepts Liu Zaifu, Lin Gang and Huang Ziping use, such as "political mode of writing," "revolutionary literature," and "fictions of revolutionary history," apply to what they perceive to be the general trend of twentieth-century Chinese literature, rather than to the narrower field of fiction or historical fiction, I think they can be applied to a wider sense of modern Chinese historical fiction which include, among other modern historical fictions, such "fictions of revolutionary history" as *Red Rock* (紅岩), *The Bright Sunny Days, The Bright Broadway,* etc.
3. Huang Ziping writes, " 'Fictions of revolutionary history' is a term of 'literary history' that I use to label a large corpus of works produced in Mainland China between the 50s and 70s" (1996: 2). For a list of these works, see Huang Ziping (1996: 6). See also Hong Zicheng (1999: 106–7).
4. For Barthes, "from the very start Marxist writing is presented as the language of knowledge;" it is "univocal," "given to understatement," always referring to "a precise historical process, and is like an algebraical sign representing a whole bracketed set of previous postulates" (Barthes 1968: 23). Revolutionary writing, on the other hand, always "proclaimed a right founded on bloodshed or moral justification;" it is given to "grandiloquence," to "theatrical amplification"; "revolutionary writing was so to speak the entelechy of the revolutionary legend: it struck fear into men's hearts and imposed upon them a citizen's sacrament of Bloodshed" (ibid., 22). When Marxist writing is linked to action, it becomes a language expressing value judgments, which is then close to being Stalinist writing. The latter "no longer aims at founding a Marxist version of the facts, or a revolutionary rationale of actions, but at presenting reality in a prejudged form, thus imposing a reading which involves immediate condemnation ..." (ibid., 24).
5. Here I am indebted to Huang Ziping, Chen Pingyuan and Qian Liqun's notion of "twentieth-century Chinese literature" which abandons the conventional division of modern and contemporary literature. See their article "On Twentieth Century Chinese Literature" in Wang Xiaoming (1997: 1–20). Lin Gang also rejects such a division, pointing out, "Literature after the founding of the People's Republic has inherited the new literary tradition since the literary revolution of 1917; its development in either form or content has not exceeded the scope of new literature" (1998: 242).
6. By "the evolution of phenomena," Liang Qichao does not mean the evolution of the natural phenomena. On the contrary, he opposes the natural sphere, which he believes to be unchanging and circular by nature, to the historical sphere, which is seen as evolving and growing steadily, not necessarily in linear development, but in the form of an ascending spiral (1985: 247).

7. Historians have observed the relation between the didactic tradition of classical Chinese historiography and the conception of circular history. Chang-tze Hu, for instance, writes, "In traditional Chinese historiography, the main reason for recording events was seen in the moral lesson that they were taken to convey. Historical events were regarded as concrete examples illustrating abstract ethic principles and social norms. This is the way history was written throughout Imperial China till the end of the 19th century ... The prevailing notion of history, then, was based on the expectation that events tended to repeat themselves. That is, the underlying time was a cyclical one rather than one based on linear development or progress" (2002: 243).
8. Lu Xun, for instance, mentions, in his "The Historical Evolution of the Chinese Fiction" (中國小說的歷史變遷), that "Story of the White Ape" (白猿傳) was intended to attack Ouyang Xun (歐陽洵, 557–641), a renowned Tang poet, who "looked like a monkey" (Lu Xun 2002: 243).
9. Here I am indebted to critic Wang Hui who has keenly observed the connection between modern Chinese literature and the issue of modernity. In an article entitled "How Did We Become 'Modern'?" he writes, "If we do not treat the issue of modernity in literature as mere narrative skills in literature, if we take such an issue of modernity rather as a constituent part of the vicissitudes of literature, then the issue of modernity in Chinese literature is a very promising research topic" (1996: 123). In the preface to his book *A Self-anthology of Wang Hui*, he admits that "the binary oppositions between tradition and modernity, China and the West are not only an enduring theme in modern Chinese history, but also the basic framework of modern Chinese historical narratives," though he at the same time stresses the existence of a tension, or a contradictory attitude in modern Chinese thinking toward modernity (1997: 5).
10. Chinese responses to this view are divided. While advocates of (wholesale) Westernization obviously applaud the view, others denounce it as Eurocentric bias and hold that there exists in traditional culture a similar ethos that coincides with the spirit of capitalism. Jin Yaoji (金耀基, also known as Ambrose Y. C. King) critiques Weber's explication of Confucianism's inadequacy for economic development. See "The Confucian Ethics and Economic Development: Weber's Theory Revisited" (儒家倫理與經濟發展：韋伯學說的重探) in *Chinese Society and Culture* (中國社會與文化) (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 128–51. For more radical views, see Shi Yuankang (石元康), *From Chinese Culture to Modernity, A Paradigm Shift?*; Huang Zongzhi (黃宗智), *The Standardization Crisis in Chinese Studies* (中國研究的規範認識危機). For more conservative views, see Yu Yingshi (余英時), *The Literati and the Chinese Culture* (士與中國文化); Yang Junbao (楊君寶) and Du Nianzhong (杜念中) (ed.), *The Confucian Ethics and Economic Development* (儒家倫理與經濟發展); Zhang Weian (張維安), *Culture and Economy: A Study of Weber's Sociology* (文化與經濟：韋伯社會學研究). Personally, I believe it is not important whether the Weberian "Occidental rationalism" is unique to Western (religious) culture. The important thing is that capitalism, both as a mode of production and as a cultural-political system, was first established in the West and from there diffused to other parts of the world. Hence, when we talk about capitalism in the rest of the world, it should first of all be viewed as an importation rather than a separate development, despite the existence of different forms of capitalism (thus modernities) in non-Western countries, which are the results of the influence of global capitalism and traditional cultures.

11. Simmel sees the cultural form as a product of the human subjects which, once created, belongs to a "different order of being" that "contradicts the essence of life" (1968: 25). Simmel views this as the tragedy of modern culture. He writes, "With the increase in culture these contents more and more stand under a paradox: they were originally created by subjects and for subjects, but in their intermediate form of objectivity, which they take on in addition to the two extreme instances, they follow an immanent logic of development. In so doing they estrange themselves from their origin as well as from their purpose" (ibid., 42).
12. This is reminiscent of Georg Simmel's theory of the conflict in modern culture, in which culture is viewed as having its own logic of development that may estrange its original purpose; however, there is no evidence of Simmel's influence on Weber.
13. Socialist modernization, as praxis, was best represented by the "Great Leap Forward" movement (1958–60), which proved to be disastrous to China, a truly "pseudo-Faustian" project (Berman 1983). As a term, it first appeared in Premier Zhou Enlai's speech in 1964, and was reiterated by him in 1974 as "the socialist four modernizations," i.e., the modernization of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defense. Wang Hui, in his article "The Status of Thoughts in Contemporary China and the Problem of Modernity (當代中國的思想狀況與現代性問題, published in *Tianya* [天涯], 5 [1997]), proposes that Mao's socialism was an ideology of modernization as well as a critique of bourgeois modernity. But the post-Mao modernization project, he suggests, is pro-bourgeois modernity, for its major concern is to incorporate Chinese economy and Chinese culture into contemporary capitalist economic system, and to incorporate Chinese society into a global market society. It must be pointed out that what Wang Hui does not mention here is the governmental effort to obstruct the infiltration of bourgeois ideology while absorbing the capitalist mode of production.
14. F. W. Riggs, in his book *The Ecology of Administration* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961), points out that in the transitional Siamese and Thai societies, there existed three general characteristics, i.e. *heterogeneity*, *formalism* and *overlapping*. By *heterogeneity*, he means "the simultaneous presence, side by side, of quite different kinds of systems, practices and viewpoints" (91). *Formalism* is a term he uses to "distinguish the extent to which a discrepancy exists between the prescriptive and the descriptive, between formal and effective power, between the impression given by constitution, laws and regulations, organization charts and statistics, and actual practices and facts of government and society. The greater the discrepancy between the formal and the effective, the more formalistic is a society" (91–2). *Overlapping* describes "the extent to which what is actually described as 'administrative' behaviour is actually determined by non-administrative criteria, i.e. by political, economic, social, religious or other factors" (92). Jin Yaoji (金耀基, also known as Ambrose Y.C. King) draws on Riggs's theory to describe the basic features of the transitional Taiwan society. For detail, see Jin Yaoji, *From Tradition to Modernity*, pp. 68–71. I think Riggs's theory is also applicable to China today.

CHAPTER 3

1. "The myth of time" is a term I borrow from Tang Xiaodu who defines it as "the arbitrary instillation of value into time, hence endowing it with some kind of sacredness, and the turning of this sacred time, in turn, into value itself" (2000:

323). Tang traces its origin to "the new perception of time of the May Fourth new culture (including new literature and new poetry)" which is marked by "continuous movement towards a predestined goal 'ahead' — continue to carry on revolution! revolution forever! brightness ahead!" (ibid., 324). This myth of time is obviously a legacy of the Enlightenment movement in the West. For details, see Tang Xiaodu, "The Termination of the Myth of Time," in Li Shitao (2000c: 321–35).

2. A term used derisively by Milan Kundera to describe a popular, and therefore "kitsch" conduct. See Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.
3. Here I am indebted to Chen Sihe's conception of *minjian* (民間). See Chapter 2, note 3.
4. By "relatively unpoliticized space," I mean a place where there is still no one political force that dominates, though different forces, political or otherwise, may be competing there for a dominant status.
5. Indeed this kind of panoptical surveillance over all spaces was extremely effective, for even family members might report each other's politically incorrect thoughts or conducts to the Party.
6. The character Xing (杏) means "apricot." It is homonymous with (性), or "sex." The association of the woman with sex seems apparent in a Freudian reading of the story. In this sense, Xiao's attachment to Xing, both emotional and sexual, is the cause of not only his destruction, but also the digressing of the story from its "normal course of events."
7. Ge Fei's two other full-length novels *The Enemy* (1990) and *Margins* (1992), which are regarded as new historical fictions by critics such as Zhang Qinghua (1997: 196–7) and Wang Biao (1993: 323), are also narratives depicting the helplessness of the heroes who are situated in the same sort of conflicting spaces and are unconsciously subjected to their influences. In *The Enemy*, the protagonist Zhao Shaozhong is torn between, on the one hand, a heavy psychological burden resulting from his incestuous relations with his daughter-in-law, and his secret love affair with Aunt Cui and memories of the past (of the conflagration that burned his ancestral house to ashes) on the other. While the superficial reason for the decline of his family is the "fire," or the shadow of a history that is replete with memories of (class) hatred, revenge, and killing, what actually lies beneath the decline is a disguised terror which would haunt him all his life, until, perhaps, after the rest of the family members have died. The hero of *Margins* Zhong Yuelou is, in a similar way, situated in such spatial conflict. All his eccentricities derive from his maladjustment to, or rather his rejection of, the established order, which is also the cause of his sufferance. The way he chooses to take his own life is both sad and appalling: he throws himself into a methane-generating pit, a symbolic act of identifying with the "filthy" and the "degraded."
8. It seems unfair to regard the writing of the desires of the body in contemporary texts as the mere result of commercialization, as crude pornography to meet the demand of the market. It is often neglected that depictions of bodily desires, as in Ge Fei and Lian Sheng's works, are more often than not of an ideological sort. Behind the portrayal of bodily desires and perhaps their role in making history, is the denial of official designation of history's telos.
9. For a discussions on the topic, see Xu Ben's *Where Is Cultural Critique Heading For? Discussions on Chinese Culture after 1989* (1998) and Zhang Yiwu's *From Modernity to Postmodernity* (1997). For recent controversies over the tradition/modernity and

China/West issue, see Li Shitao (ed.), *Positions of the Intellectuals*, 3 volumes (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 2000).

10. Roland Barthes, "Historical Discourse," in Michael Lane (ed.), *Structuralism: A Reader* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 149.
11. By this I do not mean that the aforementioned theorists have directly influenced contemporary Chinese writers. Literary works by Faulkner, Márquez, Borges, Proust, and Joyce, I believe, must have exerted much greater influences on their writings.
12. There has been much controversy in the 1990s over the issue of "postmodernism" or "post-theories" in China. Xu Ben, in his article "What Are the 'Post-New Period' and 'Postmodernism' in China?" points out that Chinese critics (e.g. Chen Xiaoming, Wang Ning, Zhang Yiwu) who attempt to identify some sporadic formal features and cultural traits in contemporary China as evidence for proving the emergence of a "post-new period" or "postmodernism" have failed to correlate them with the "inner truth of that newly emergent social order" (Jameson 1983: 113).
13. For a study of the perception of time in "revolutionary literature," see Lin Gang, "The Termination of China's Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Literature in the Broad Sense" (二十世紀中國廣義革命文學的終結), in *Reading on the Edge*, pp. 130–78. See also Huang Ziping, "Fiction of Revolutionary History: Time and Narration," in *Revolution, History and Fiction*, pp. 21–34.
14. The name literally means "tall," "big" and "perfect." The naming is obviously part of a process of sanctifying the revolutionary hero.
15. It should be noted that "fabrication" (虛構) is for Wang Anyi a kind of abstraction (抽象). See Wang Anyi (1996: 429–33).

CHAPTER 4

1. See Leo Ou-fan Lee (1997), Wu Ren (伍仁) (1996), Zhou Xiaoyi (周小儀) (2000).
2. For a study of the topic, see Xie Zhixi (解志熙), *The Extreme of Beauty* (1997). See also Leo Ou-fan Lee, "A Talk on Decadence in Modern Chinese Literature" (漫談中國現代文學中的頹廢), in Wang Xiaoming (王曉明) (ed.) (1997), pp. 59–89. Although Lu Xun was outspoken in his denunciation of the decadent, e.g. his addressing Ye Lingfeng (葉靈鳳) as "a new hoodlum painter" (see *The Complete Works of Lu Xun* [魯迅全集], Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, vol. 4, 1981, p. 338), his connections with decadent aestheticism can be traced to his editing of Aubrey Beardsley's drawings and his inclusion of Oscar Wilde's work in *Selected Foreign Fictions* (域外小說集), a volume he and his brother Zhou Zuoren (周作人) edited and published in 1909. Two of his stories, i.e. "In the Pub" (在酒樓上) and "A Lonely Soul" (孤獨者), are markedly decadent and are included in Wu Ren (ed.) (1996) *Modern Chinese Decadent Fictions* (中國現代頹廢小說).
3. For details see Wu Lichang (吳立昌), "Psychoanalysis" (精神分析學), in Wu Zhongjie (吳中傑) and Wu Lichang (吳立昌) (ed.), *1900–1949: Tracing Chinese Modernism* (1900–1949: 中國現代主義尋蹤) (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1995), pp. 66–184.
4. Lu Xun attributes the loss of aggressiveness in the Chinese character to a degeneration of instincts (sex instinct and the instinct of aggression, in particular); Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀) takes the effeminacy of Chinese men as a sign of the

degeneration of species; Zhang Jingsheng (張競生)regards Chinese men and women's "immature genitals" as indication of a retrogress in sexual desire, which he further associates with the decline of Chinese civilization. See Sun Longji, "*Fin de Siècle* Wave of Thought: The Dead-end Idealism" (世紀末思潮——前無去路的理想主義), in *Twenty-First Century* (二十一世紀), 27, 1995, pp. 31–42.

5. For a study of "the school of neo-sensualism," see Yan Jiayan (嚴家炎), "Introduction" to *Selected Fictions of Neosensualism* (新感覺派小說選); *Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo liupai shi* (中國現代小說流派史), Chapter 4, pp. 125–74.
6. Within the literary circles this trend is regarded as "love of kitsch" (媚俗) and writers associated with it were called "surrenderers" (to consumerism). A large number of articles on this issue are collected in a voluminous book entitled *The Pen as the Banner: A Critique of the Fin de Siècle Culture* (以筆為旗：世紀末文化批判) (Changsha: Hunan wenyi Chubanshe, 1997). "The Pen as Banner" is the title of an article by Zhang Chengzhi (張承志) in which the author expresses his indignation at consumerism.
7. See Introduction, note 9.
8. See Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, pp. 255–66, especially XI.
9. As for the question why the past, not the present, should be the chosen time for the depiction of such a decadent life, book censorship was one of the reasons. The past should be read, allegorically, as the present.
10. See Xie Mian and Zhang Yiwu (1995), Wang Ning (2000), and Chen Xiaoming (1994).
11. There have been heated debates on the validity and political implications of this periodization among scholars home and abroad. Xu Ben (徐賁), Zhao Yiheng (趙毅衡) and Zhang Longxi (張隆溪) (all of them are overseas Chinese scholars) accuse Chinese *postism's* exploitation of postcolonial theories to shift the target of cultural critique from the institutionized system inside China to Western cultural imperialism. For details, see Wang Hui and Yu Guoliang (ed.), *The Controversies over 'Postism' in the 90s*. The term "postism" (後學) is first used by Zhao Yiheng, see *The Controversies*, p. 138. In my opinion, the above-mentioned three critics' accusations of Chinese *postism*'s tendency to eschew domestic problems are justifiable, but, due to their neglect of the marked discrepancy between literature of the "new period" and literature of the 1990s and their unsympathetic understanding of censorship in China, their questioning the periodization and the political stance of Chinese *postists* is somewhat biased and much too hostile.

CHAPTER 5

1. Valerie J. Hoffman, in making the distinction between Fundamentalism and Sufism, writes, "Fundamentalists do not speak of visions, miracles, or other supernatural events precipitating their embrace of Islamic fundamentalism (although they may experience such things in times of trial), nor is there evidence of an abrupt moral change, but rather a slow awareness of the social meaning of Islam, an acceptance of its consequences, and a conscious grounding of personal identity on allegiance to Islam" (Marty 1995: 223).
2. Here I follow Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby's account of fundamentalism. They write, "The central substantive similarity among the various movements we

identify as fundamentalist is a process of selective retrieval, embellishment, and construction of 'essentials' or 'fundamentals' of a religious tradition for the purpose of halting the erosion of traditional society and fighting back against the encroachments of secular modernity" (Marty 1995: 6). However, "[the] broad use of the term," as Carl F. Hallencreutz and David Westerlund point out, "has become increasingly irrelevant. As a derogatory concept, tied to Western stereotypes and Christian presuppositions, it easily causes misunderstandings and prevents the understanding of the dynamics and characteristics of different religious groups with explicit political objectives" (Westerlund 1996: 4). Instead, they recommend the term "anti-secularism" for the depiction of the common trait of the fundamentalist movements. For details of their argument, see David Westerlund (ed.) *Questioning the Secular State: the Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics* (London: Hurst & Company, 1996), pp. 4–8.

3. Xihaigu is an abbreviation for three counties in southern Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, namely, Xiji (西吉), Haiyuan (海原) and Guyuan (固原).
4. In the preface to the novel, Zhang Chengzhi mentions that three or four books written in Arabic or Persian which the Jahrinya Muslims had kept confidential were translated into Chinese for him and that nearly 160 family histories and religious documents were sent to him for reference (1995a: 9). He also mentions: (1) that he spent five years "making himself a *duosidi* (Muslim brother) and religiously no different from the poor farmers in Xihaigu" (ibid., 137); (2) why he "gave up notes and bibliography for which [he had] devoted so much energy" (ibid., 175). Quotations (from more than twenty books and documents) abound in the nine chapters of the book.
5. Hui is a name for Sinophone Muslims.
6. For a discussion on the differences between Sufism and the orthodox Islam, see Yang Keli's (楊克禮) "A Tentative Inquiry into the Sufi Philosophical Thought of Islam" (伊斯蘭教蘇菲派哲學思想初探) in *Research Papers on Chinese Islam,* pp. 29–60. For an in-depth discussion of Sufism's perception of God and the external world, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts.*
7. Zhang Chengzhi identifies religion with a sort of idealism. Commenting on van Gogh, he writes, "The only goal of his career as a painter was to dash to religion (that is, idealism; that is, the spiritual world like the golden range that belongs to some people" (1994b: 73–4).
8. This sentence was written on the wall of Vincent van Gogh's room. See Nathalie Heinich, *The Glory of van Gogh: An Anthropology of Admiration,* p. 76. Zhang's translation reads: "我是精靈，我是健全的精神。" The French version is "Je sui de'Esprit/Je suis Saint-Esprit" (ibid., 192).
9. *Tsuprasen* is a transliteration of the German "zypressen" in Uigur language (Zhang 1994b: 10).
10. Zhang Chengzhi has made two trips to Tianshan, in 1980 and 1982 respectively, to investigate on the location of Huoyanshan, or Mt. Flames. The result of the trips is recorded in an article entitled "A Brief Inquiry into Huaoyanshan" (火焰山小考), which is included in his collection of essays *The Deserted Road of the Hero* (1994c), pp. 244–52. He has reached no conclusion as to where it is located and whether it really exists.
11. For a detailed comparative study of Sufism and Taoism, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism*

and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts. Yang Huaizhong (楊懷中) also mentions the similarity between Zhuangzi's thoughts and Sufism, though he has not gone into detail. See *Research Papers on Chinese Islam,* p. 74.

12. For a detailed discussion on the formation of the prerogatives of the Jahrinya *menhuan* system which led to corruption, see Ma Tong, *Zhongguo Yisilan jiaopai yu menhuan zhidu shilue* (中國伊斯蘭教派與門宦制度史略), pp. 437–47.

CHAPTER 6

1. This term derives from Han Shaogong's article "The 'Root' of Literature" (文學的"根") published in 1985, in which he calls for "a re-examination of the land under our feet and a recall of the yesterday of our people." It is reprinted in *A Presupposition of Perfection,* pp. 1–8.
2. The disputes over this novel center around whether it is an original creation or an imitation of Milorad Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars: A Lexicon Novel in 100,000 Words,* which was translated into Chinese and published in *Waiguo wenyi* (外國文藝), vol. 2, 1994, two years before Han Shaogong's *Dictionary of Maqiao* came out. Critics Zhang Yiwu (張頤武) and Wang Gan (王干), in their reviews of the novel, hold that the novel is a crude imitation of Pavic' lexicon novel, both in form and in content, while others, such as Nan Fan (南帆) and Chen Sihe (陳思和), highly praise it as a creative work. On March 16, 1997 Han Shaogong filed a defamation suit against Zhang Yiwu and Wang Gan. For details, see Tian Dao (天島) and Nan Ba (南芭) (ed.), *The Broken Bridge of the Men of Letters: A Record of the Lawsuit Concerning Dictionary of Maqiao* (文人的斷橋 ——《馬橋詞典》訴訟紀實) (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1997).
3. I borrow this term from Kenneth L. Pike. "Emic" perspective (insider's perspective) is both a contrast to and complementation to "etic" perspective (outsider's perspective). Pike writes, "I view the emic knowledge of a person's local culture somewhat as Polanyi views bicycling. A person knows how to act without necessarily knowing how to analyze his action. When I act, I act as an insider; but to know, in detail, how I act (e.g., the muscle movements), I must secure help from an outside disciplinary system. To use the emics of nonverbal (or verbal) behavior I must act like an insider; to analyze my own acts, I must look at (or listen to) material as an outsider. But just as the outsider can learn to act like an insider, so the insider can learn to analyze like an outsider." For details, see Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth L. Pike, Marvin Harris (ed.), *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* (Sage Publications, Inc. 1990), pp. 28–47.
4. In a conversation with Li Shaojun, Han Shaogong himself declared that "although the book title is *Dictionary of Maqiao,* it is only a pretext for my view of the world." See Han Shaogong and Li Shaojun, "Words and the World: A Conversation on *Dictionary of Maqiao* and Other Topics" (詞語與世界：關於《馬橋詞典》的談話及其他) in *Xiaoshuo xuankan* (小說選刊) 7, 1996, p. 120.
5. In fact, Hang Shaogong, together with some other writers such as Zhang Chengzhi, Zhang Wei (張煒) and Shi Tiesheng (史鐵生), are known for their defense of idealism and ultimate values and their castigation of consumerism. Indignant at the tendency among popular writers to cater to the low taste of readers, they started a "holy war" against what they perceived to be "the degeneration of the literary and artistic circles." Major targets of their critique include novelist Wang Shuo (王朔) and film director Zhang Yimou (張藝謀).

6. For Han Shagong's critique of postmodernism and Roland Barthes, see his articles "In the Background of Fiction" and "Somniloquy of the Sleepwalker," in *A Presupposition of Perfection,* pp. 76–81; 99–109.
7. It should be noted that Han Shaogong criticizes postmodernism for its deconstruction of truth and reality, and its lack of constructive fruit. Considering the adoption of some postmodernist features in *Dictionary of Maqiao,* such as metafictionality and the use of "pastiches" in the narrative, we find in him either a contradiction or a change in attitude towards postmodernism.
8. The critic Nan Fan (南帆), for instance, is uncertain as to whether it can be considered a novel in the strict sense. See his review article "*Dictionary of Maqiao:* Openness and Imprisonment" in *Dangdai zuojia pinglun* (當代作家評論) 5, 1996, p. 10.
9. Both Han's and Pavic's novel are entitled *Dictionary of ...,* which suggests possible relationship of borrowing. But Han Shaogong denies having read Pavic's novel before he finished writing his novel.
10. Han Shaogong admitted that writing fiction in the dictionary form is not his invention in an interview with newspaper correspondents, in which he cited Kundera's work as an example. See Tian Dao and Nan Ba (ed.), *The Broken Bridge of the Men of Letters: A Record of the Lawsuit Concerning Dictionary of Maqiao,* p. 116.
11. I borrow Seymour Chatman's term "kernel" to translate Han Shaogong's *zhuxian* (主線). For details of Chatman's concept, see his *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 53–6. Please notice that Chatman's conception of the kernel and the satellite is limited to narrative events, whereas Han Shaogong's *zhuxian* refers to wider areas of fiction writing: characterization, emplotment, and narrative mode.
12. Hayden White, "Historical Text as Literary Artifact," *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 91. This article has been translated into Chinese and collected in Zhang Jingyuan (張京媛) (ed.), *New Historicism and Literary Criticism* (新歷史主義與文學批評) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993).
13. See Introduction, note 3.
14. In an interview with Taiwanese writer Shi Shuqing (施叔青), Han Shaogong said, "It is difficult to clarify the theme of 'Pa Pa Pa.' To summarize the theme as a critique of national character only partly coincides with my intention, but not completely. I myself can't tell it exactly, but I think if we all feel something very heavy (melancholy) has been expressed, that is enough." See Shi Shuqing, "Descendants of the Bird — Dialogue with Hunan writer Han Shaogong," in Han Shaogong, *Murder* (謀殺), p. 21.
15. Han Shaogong said, "Relativism, intuition and holistic view in Zhuangzi's Chan philosophy is still a part of the wealth of human thoughts today. Unfortunately, there are not many who know it. What we should do is to study how its wisdom was turned into empty, useless spiritual opium in early modern China, and how Zhuangzi has become Ah Q in Lu Xun's depiction" (Shi Shuqing 1989: 28).
16. To Han Shaogong, the Chu culture differs from the Yellow River Valley Confucian culture in that the former is marked by irrationality, having the Bird as its totem (hence "Rooster Head Village") and the latter marked by rationality, having Dragon as its totem. See Shi Shuqing (1989: 16).
17. In "Somniloquy of the Sleepwalker" (夜行者甕語), Han Shaogong associates

(Chinese) postmodernism with the ruffian's sarcasm and the sleepwalker's fantasy and views it as the product of nihilism and pragmatism (1994: 99–109). In another essay, "The World" (世界), he laments the loss of national pride in face of outside influences, accusing "several films aiming at box-office value, several popular biographical novels and a bunch of flowery articles" of "fully displaying the perversion, cruelty, ridiculousness, darkness, unfriendliness, incurability so as to satisfy some Westerners' compassions and their pride in ethnocentrism" (ibid., 142).

18. For a useful exposition of cultural nationalism, see John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), especially Chapter 1. Cultural nationalism, understood in a positive sense, means a set of ideas and activities which regenerates the national community by creating, preserving or strengthening a people's cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking, inadequate or threatened. It, too, can assume negative connotations, in which case the nationalists, in emphasizing the uniqueness of their culture, hold biased view of other cultures. Han Shaogong's nationalism basically falls into the first type, though, as I have demonstrated, his attitude towards tradition and modernity vacillates.
19. In an interview with Li Shaojun, he says, "I want more to write about a completely new world, so that the role of literature in intervening with the world will be reinforced" (1996: 121).

CHAPTER 7

1. In his essay "The Art of Fiction" (小說的藝術), for instance, Wang Xiaobo suggests that essay (雜文) should be responsible for "moral edification" while fiction mainly entertains (Wang Xiaobo 1998a: 319–21). In another essay "The Silent Majority", Wang defines literature as interesting writing: "My view of the so-called literature is: first of all make your writing interesting. As for other things, don't give a shit" (ibid., 14).
2. The entitlement of the books in *Modern Times Trilogy*, i.e. *The Age of Gold, The Age of Silver,* and *The Age of Bronze,* was obviously inspired by Ovid's record of the classification of the ages of mankind. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Book I: "The Ages of Mankind" (Trans. A. D. Melville, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 3–5) from which I quote the following lines:

> Golden was that first age which unconstrained, / With heart and soul, obedient to no law, / Gave honour to good faith and righteousness. / No punishment they knew, no fear; they read/No penalties engraved on plates of bronze; / No suppliant throng with dread beheld their judge;/No judges had they then, but lived secure. /.../ No sword, no helmet then – no need of arms; / The world untroubled lived in leisured ease. /.../ Spring it was, always, for ever spring; / The gentle zephyrs with their breathing balm/Caressed the flowers that sprang without a seed; /.../ When Saturn fell to the dark Underworld / And Jove reigned upon earth, the silver race / Replaced the gold, inferior, yet in worth / Above the tawny bronze. Then Jupiter / Curtailed the pristine spring and led the year / Through winter, summer, autumn's varying days / And brief precarious spring in seasons four. / Then first the blazing sky with

> torrid heat / Sweltered, and ice hung frozen in the gale; / Then men sought shelter – shelter under caves / And thickets and rough hurdles bound with bark; / Then in long furrows first were set the seeds / Of grain and oxen groaned beneath the yoke. / Third in succession came the race of bronze, / Of fiercer temperament, more readily/Disposed to war, yet free from wickedness. /.../ Last came the race of iron. In that hard age / Of baser vein all evil straight broke out, / And honour fled and truth and loyalty, / Replaced by fraud, deceit and treachery / And violence and wicked greed for gain. / .../ Nor did earth's rich return of crops and food/Suffice; the bowels of the world were forced / And wealth deep hidden next the gates of Hell / Dug out, the spur of wickedness and sin. / Iron now was in men's hands to bring them bane, / And gold a greater bane, and war marched forth / That fights with both and shook its clashing arms / With hands of blood. Men lived by spoil and plunder; / Friend was not safe from friend, nor father safe / From son-in-law, and kindness rare between / Brother and brother; husbands plotted death / For wives and wives for husbands; stepmothers / With murderous hearts brewed devilish aconite, / And sons, importunate to glut their greed, / Studied the stars to time their fathers' death. / Honour and love lay vanquished, and from earth, / With slaughter soaked, Justice, virgin divine, / The last of the immortals, fled away.

Wang Xiaobo himself mentioned that he "had been mesmerized by Greek myths after reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" at the age of thirteen (1997c: 144), and that it was one of a few books he took with him while he was rusticated during the Cultural Revolution (ibid., 109). It should also be noted Wang Xiaobo had most probably planned to publish a sequel to the trilogy and would name it *The Age of Black Iron* (黑鐵時代). Some unfinished episodes of the planned novel, found in his computer files posthumously, were collected by Ai Xiaoming (艾小明) and Li Yinhe (李銀河) in a volume entitled *The Age of Black Iron* (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1998). For details, see Ai Xiaoming's introduction to *The Age of Black Iron*.

3. Wang Xiaobo had read Victorian pornographic fictions while he was studying in the USA. He mentions this in his essay "On Taste" (1997c: 159–60). For a study of Victorian pornographic fictions, see Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Books, 1966).
4. Wang Er has a myriad of positions: educated youth (*The Age of Gold*), engineer (*Love in an Age of Revolution*), lecturer (*Becoming Established at the Age of Thirty* [三十而立]), historian (*The Temple of Longevity* [萬壽寺]), and researcher (*Hongfu's Nightly Elopement* [紅拂夜奔]), but all of them share the same child-like innocence and talent for mischief.
5. Here I am indebted to critic Dai Jinhua's review article, "The Wise's Parody: Reading Wang Xiaobo" (智者的戲謔——閱讀王小波), in which she summarizes the typical relation in Wang's love scenes as a maso-sadistic one and views it as "a miniatured power relation" and "an effective power practice." Her article was published in *Dangdai Zuojia Pinglun* (當代作家評論) 2, 1998, pp. 21–34.
6. In his essay "The Silent Majority," Wang recalled his experience as a sixth grader reading a book entitled *Letters from the South*, which is filled with interrogation,

torture, mutilation, and prosecution during the Vietnam War. He comments: "After reading the book, my mind was full of odd ideas. I was reaching my puberty then, and had almost become a pervert" (1998a: 6). His early experience can be compared with his description of X Haiying as a sexual pervert: "When X Haiying was a kid, after she saw those films about revolutionaries being tied up, interrogated, and tortured by the enemies, she would ask the little boy in the neighborhood to tie her to a tree. For her, I looked more like an enemy than anybody else. So she liked me to clamp her nipples" (1997a: 309).

7. For studies on the authoritarian character, see also T. W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950).
8. The Temple of Longevity (萬壽寺) is an authentic place in Haidian District, Beijing.
9. Critic Wu Lisheng (吳勵生), for instance, regards *The Temple of Longevity* and *The Age of Silver* as "the least readable" of Wang's fictions because of his "myriad manipulations." For details, see "On Manipulation and Non-manipulatability (論操作與不可操作) in *Dangdai zuojia pinglun* (當代作家評論) 2, 1998, pp. 35–43. However, Wu Lisheng's criticism of *The Temple of Longevity* and *The Age of Silver* is not well-grounded. *The Age of Gold,* for instance, is not without manipulation as Wu Lisheng claims it to be. The structure, the emplotment, characterization and style are all meticulously planned and revised for dozens of times. Besides, Wang Xiaobo himself appreciated such manipulations. When talking about his favorite novel *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras, Wang refuted the idea that the novel is written with a "free narrative style," that it is "the result of impromptu writing." Instead, Wang wrote, "every paragraph (of the novel) is meticulously arranged," and "emotional changes are accurately controlled." He also mentioned that he once shuffled all the paragraphs of a novel in a computer, kept rearranging them until he was satisfied, spending five times more time on it than for writing its first draft. See "Devoting My Whole Life to Studying Arts" (用一生來學習藝術) in *Complete Essays by Wang Xiaobo* (王小波隨筆雜文全集), pp. 310–13.
10. I borrow this term from Robert Scholes to translate Wang Xiaobo's *xugou* (虛構), which literally means "fictive construction." Scholes believes that fabulation "reveals an extraordinary delight in design" and that "a sense of pleasure in form is one characteristic of fabulation" (1979: 2). Scholes's idea coincides with Wang's in that both emphasize that the function of narrative is to rejoice and refresh the reader.
11. Old Buddha is a title Empress Ci Xi (慈禧, 1835–1908) awarded herself. She held court behind the screen for forty-eight years since the demise of Emperor Xian Feng (咸豐), during which China lost various wars to foreign countries including France, Japan, and the Eight-Country Ally. Historian Liu Beisi (劉北巳) gives an account of why Empress Ci Xi wanted to be addressed as Old Buddha in an article entitled "Ci Xi Playing Guanyin" (慈禧扮觀音), in Liu Beisi (ed.), *The Western Empress* (西太后) (Zijingcheng chubanshe, 2nd edition, 1993), pp. 229–36.
12. Fusang (扶桑) is an archaic name for Japan. In Du Guangting's story Qiuran Gong eventually leaves for Fuyu, which is an ancient state located in the present Liaoning and Jilin areas. See Gao Guangqi (高光啟) (ed.), *A Biography of Qiuran Gong: Volume of the Tang Romance,* note 81, p. 171.

CONCLUSION

1. Borges, describing the narrator's feelings when he saw the Aleph, "the only place on earth where all places are seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending" in Carlos Argentino Daneri's words (Borges 1971: 23), writes: "In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them amazed me more than the fact that all of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was *simultaneous*, but what I shall now write down will be *successive*, because language is successive. Nonetheless, I'll try to recollect what I can" (ibid., 26).
2. Yu Hua, "The False Works," in *Can I Believe Myself*, pp. 158–72.

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