THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DOING SELF-CRITICISM LIKE A WOMAN: WRITING LIFE IN SOCIALIST CHINA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EAST ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2018

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how life was narrated in socialist China. The popularization of the Communist practice of self-criticism (*jiantao*) since the early 1940s as a tool to transform people into new socialist beings contributed to establishing normative models of life writing. This dissertation asks what it meant to inhabit the norm and challenges the idea that self-criticism was solely a tool of indoctrination and surveillance that politicized and standardized representations of human life experience. I argue that self-criticism offered a space of self-fashioning where experiences of pain—bodily and otherwise—are differently grappled with and channeled. By examining how revolutionary women writers creatively re-purposed self-criticism in their personal writings—diaries, memoirs, and self-critical essays—this project shows the limits as well as the autobiographical possibilities of this widely maligned practice.

This study seeks a more nuanced approach to the coercive practice of self-criticism and its relation to life writings through the lens of gender and the lived body. The surfacing of the female body in the personal writings of Ding Ling (Chapter One), Yang Mo (Chapter Two), and Wei Junyi (Chapter Three) defies the hierarchical relation between mind and body that self-criticism seems to purport, and complicates the vision that national concerns pertaining to the construction of a communist society suppressed a feminist discourse. The presence of the lived female body exposes the tension between these women's personal politics and the Party's revolutionary agenda, underscoring the fluid boundary between the political and the personal in socialist China. In their writings, these women—all committed to a political project—variously articulate their material experience as women living in the years of campaigns and reforms, as well as their desires and ambitions to assert the value of their labor as writers. Literature occupies an important space in their self-critical instantiations. Self-criticism offers these women

an opportunity to voice the enduring gender inequalities dominating the social structures and the arena of literary production in socialist China. The possibilities self-criticism provided these women to express their gendered concerns and life experience urge us to treat self-criticism as a genre of life writing in and of itself and a mode of self-analysis that engenders a dialogue among these women's various writings—non-fictional and otherwise.

Pain is one of the themes that keep coming back in the texts this dissertation examines. These texts show how pain is not a homogenous experience, but is plural and contingent to the social positioning of the body and its materiality. Self-criticism, in these texts, turns into a strategy to cope with pain at the same time as it inflicts it. By attending to the lived body in practices of self-criticism, this dissertation brings to the fore multifarious experiences of, and responses to, pain that complicate the relation between self-criticism and suffering: suffering emerges from the conflicting encounter between the female self and collective male expectations (Chapter One); from the painful interaction between physical disability and mind (Chapter Two); and from the unresolved question of individual and collective responsibility articulated in post-Mao testimony (Chapter Three).

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

I started my studies at the University of Chicago with a very different research project in mind. The re-orientation of the focus of my research from Fei Ming, a modernist writer of the Republican period, to women's life writings in socialist China is reflective of a long process of personal and intellectual transformation. A set of experiences and encounters reshaped my way of thinking and redirected me toward questions that mattered to me and became increasingly more urgent. There is no need to sugarcoat the fact that writing is a lonely and frustrating enterprise. But in and through writing I found the opportunity to rediscover myself and establish a never-ending dialogue with other people, lives, and ideas. Here I want to acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to all those who have participated in this dialogue and have contributed to this process of personal and intellectual growth.

My greatest debt goes to the members of the Dissertation Committee. You guided me through the research and writing of this project, raised valuable questions that at different stages helped me find direction when I felt I had lost it, and provided exemplary models of teaching and scholarship. Professor Paola Iovene, I have been very lucky to have you as my adviser. I learned a lot from you during these years of graduate school. Thanks for reading and offering generous comments on every page I wrote, for inspiring my thinking, and for reminding me that there is not one single way of doing scholarship or being a scholar, and that curiosity and instinct are valuable resources when one does research. Professor Jacob Eyferth, thanks so much for sharing with me your knowledge and sensibility as a historian. Your advice made me think harder about how we represent historical subjects and phenomena, while striving for historical accuracy. Thanks also for the enthusiasm you showed from the beginning about writing on self-criticism in Communist China. It helped me believe that this study is important. Professor Judith Zeitlin,

your comments and suggestions have been crucial to draw the chapters together into a more coherent project. The final round of revisions would have not been possible without your precious help. Professor Michael Bourdaghs, it has been incredibly important to have you among the readers of this dissertation. Thanks so much for helping me articulate the stakes of my project with more clarity and identify its leading thematic threads. As a scholar of modern Japan, you brought a different perspective and mode of reading, which helped me reflect on how to make this work more accessible to people outside of the China field in the future.

Special thanks go to Professor Maghiel van Crevel, for believing in me from the beginning. Working with you at Leiden University, when I was doing a Master in Chinese Studies, was a major breakthrough for me. You taught me all you could teach me about academic writing and research. You showed me that I had the potential to become a scholar, and motivated me to pursue further academic studies. Without you I would have never made it this far. I deeply value our correspondence, your unwavering support, and your encouragement to remain creative in life and work. I also want to thank Professor Sandra Marina Carletti, who introduced me to modern Chinese literature when I was a BA student at "L'Orientale" in Naples. You helped me see prospects of future career development that, at that stage, were simply unthinkable for me. Thanks also to Professor Reginald Jackson for reading and commenting on the first chapter I wrote (Chapter Two), and for the helpful tips on how to make writing more manageable and pleasant.

I would have not been able to sustain years of graduate school without the generous fellowships of the University of Chicago. In the winter of 2015, my research trip to China was supported by the University of Chicago Center for East Asian Studies. Two years of writing were generously founded by the CEAS Toyota Fellowship (2015-2016) and the Franke Institute for

the Humanities Doctoral Fellowship (2016-2017), respectively. The year of residence at the Franke Institute was especially productive. I wrote one of the chapters and was able to obtain valuable feedback from faculty and dissertation fellows. I also want to thank the people and scholars I met while I was doing research in China in 2015. I am deeply grateful to Professor Shang Changbao, a scholar of self-criticism, who was eager to meet with me in Tianjin and generously shared with me materials that became crucial sources I drew on to develop the chapters. I will never forget your kind help. Thanks also to Professor He Guimei for drawing my attention to Liu Shaoqi's *How to Be a Good Communist*, which helped me rethink the relation between self-criticism and diaries; and for offering me her own perspective on the practice of self-criticism. I am also grateful to Professor Ge Fei. Our chat at a little coffee shop close to Qinghua University reinforced my desire to bring out the relevance of self-criticism in the study of modern Chinese literature. A special thank to Ma Qingke, who was very happy to learn that I wanted to write about his mother and was willing to share with me copies of some pages of Yang Mo's unpublished diaries and other relevant material that enriched my understanding of Yang Mo's experience.

Now, the friends, without whom I would have not survived the hard years of graduate school. I am especially grateful to Tom Kelly and Junko Yamazaki. You helped me believe in myself and this project every time I lost faith in myself and what I was doing. Tom, I cannot imagine the past years in Chicago without you. You inspired me with your scholarly discipline and amazing work. Much of my own work was generated in the conversations I had with you over countless cups of tea and coffee. Thanks for reading my chapters, offering suggestions, and pushing me forward. Junko, words are not sufficient to thank you for all you did for me over the years. I especially thank you for helping me turn my weaknesses into strengths. Chapter Two has

grown out of our correspondence while I was in Italy in 2016 to take care of my body. You became my interlocutor. It is to you that I dedicate that chapter. Thanks also to Eric Powell. Our intense relationship overlapped with the years of writing. You are an incredibly sophisticated writer and a passionate editor. Interacting with you pushed me to do better to not let you down. Among other friends who have variously engaged with my work and offered support, I want to thank Beppi Chiuppani, Michaela Appeltova, Miriam Tripaldi, Abhishek Battacharyya, Sohye Kim, Yuqian Yan, Nick Wong, Adhira Mandalagiri, and Claudio Sansone. Thanks also to the friends I made through Graduate Students United. The decision of focusing on socialist China has a lot to do with my participation in the students' movement and the battles we fought together to improve the life and work of graduate students/workers. I also wish to thank Dawn Brennan, the secretary of the East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department, who was always available to respond to any questions I had and helped me sort all kinds of things out.

Finally I want to thank my family: Vito, Rosa Maria, Chiara, Francesca, and Rodrigo. I know how much I made you suffer these past years. Today I can only acknowledge your patience, your infinite love, care, and support. To you I dedicate this work.

Introduction

Jiantao and the Socialist Genres of Life Writing

How to Write (*Zenyang xie* 怎样写) is a little book that was published in 1951 by Masses Bookshop to provide Chinese people with practical guidelines on how to write an autobiography, a diary, letters, work summaries, study notes, and other common writings such as advertisements or announcements.[1] The genres are treated in separate chapters, each including a section that explains the function, the content, and the form of the examined genre, and another section that offers a variety of exemplary models. The manual features the autobiographies of a worker, a soldier and a woman peasant, the diary of a salesclerk, and a peasant's self-critical summary of his conservative thought, among other illustrative examples. By displaying a variety of genres written by people of different class, gender, and educational background, the handbook aimed at targeting a wide audience. But what do these disparate genres have in common? What connects autobiography to study notes, or diary to self-critical summaries in socialist China? Life is the answer. I call the texts collected in *How to Write* "genres of life writing."[2] In adopting the term "genre," I don't intend to constraint these texts to a set of imposed formal features, nor do I want recuperate conventional, generic definitions of the autobiographical.[3] The texts comprised in

[1] Qian Danian 钱大年 ed., *Zenyang xie: zizhuan, riji, shuxin, zongjie, tongxun, changyong wenjian, dushu biji* 怎样写：自传、日记、书信、总结、通讯、常用文件、读书笔记 [How to Write: Autobiography, Diary, Letter, Summary, Report, Common Writings, Study Notes] (Shanghai: Qunzhong shudian, 1951). The text I have examined is the revised edition from 1952.

[2] I subscribe to Julia Watson's and Sidonie Smith's definition of life writing. Life writing denotes a large category of written texts that take a life, one's own or another's, as their subject. Life narrative is instead used as a more general term to indicate autobiographical acts "of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer's as their subject, whether written, performative, visual, filmic, or digital." Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 4.

[3] The notion of life narrative as a literary genre characterizes earlier theorizations of the autobiographical. Illustrative of this approach is Georges Gusdorf's "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (1956). Gusdorf locates the origins of autobiography in male elite's practices of self-narration and emphasizes the mechanism through which the self attaches coherence and meaning to the account of his personal life. For Gusdorf, "autobiography […] requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time." See Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography"

How to Write—and the other texts this dissertation examines—invite us to re-think genre as a generative model that legitimized and led to a variety of practices of life-inscription. This dissertation emphasizes the resilience of each genre beyond the boundaries established by specific sets of narrative features, and seeks to attend to the intersection, cross-contamination, and dialogue between different genres (self-critical essays and diaries; or autobiographies and work reports) and their relation to life.[4]

The different genres clustered in the manual are presented as forms of writing that stem from human life experience. How personal life experience should be understood, talked and written about is what the handbook addresses as part of a larger program of educating the masses. This is how the preface to *How to Write* introduces the collection:

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in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 35. The concept of autobiography as a truth-telling genre and the notion of subject as a center of meaning and authority have been challenged in various ways. Post-structuralists have asserted the impossibility of finding a unified self behind autobiography and have conceptualized the subject as the effect of textual construction. See Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," in Paul de Man, *The Rethoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 67-81. Post-colonialists and feminists have objected to the white male origins of autobiography and have drawn attention to autobiographical texts written by women and underprivileged or oppressed groups. Feminists in particular have highlighted the importance of "lived experience" to differentiate women's autobiographical acts from their male counterparts'. These efforts have defied the definition of autobiography as a genre that establishes a referential relation between writing and life, to emphasize autobiography as a discourse and a transformative practice. A vehement critique of autobiography as a genre has been developed by Leigh Gilmore. For her, "autobiography is positioned within discourses that construct truth, identity, and power, and these discourses produce a gendered subject" (XIV). Gilmore emphasizes the ways in which female autobiographers contest rather than enact their gendered identity. She notices how genre, like gender, works as a technology that produces truthfulness by determining which texts can be read as autobiography. Rather than looking for a self, a gender, a truth, or a genre in autobiography, Gilmore suggests focus on the contradictory mechanisms of identity formation that highlight self-representation as a problem in writing. Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). More recent studies have further expanded generic definitions of autobiography and located the autobiographical across a wide range of disciplines and media. These studies have developed new approaches to questions pertaining to the value of representations of life experience (and to whom), subjectivity, memory, agency, the intersection of fact and fiction, the personal and the political, and the complex relation between inner urge and external requirement in practices of self-representation. See for instance the essays collected in Carolyn Steedman et al., *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

[4] In these "genres of life writing," life experience is not just a common theme. As I will explain later in this introduction, life experience is at once the object of analysis and what can steer the writers to creatively respond to generic and normative constraints. I hope that this dissertation, by examining Chinese women writers' creative re-tooling of self-critical autobiography through the lens of the "lived body," will enrich studies of women's autobiographical practices in and beyond the field of modern China, and provide material for transnational comparative approaches.

> After Liberation [1949], a large number of people have been exposed to culture, have been learning culture. Those who before [Liberation] were not able to write or didn't write well are now learning how to write. This is a felicitous phenomenon. To cater to the needs of the wide masses, we intentionally explain to the readers how to write an autobiography, a diary, letters, reports, notifications, and other common writings. Every chapter offers many examples. In this way, not only will the readers read the theory, but they will also learn from concrete reference material. Those who try to write for the first time or find it hard to start writing might think that writing is a very difficult thing. In fact it is not that difficult. Nowadays, writing does not mean to be pedantic or show off classical knowledge. It suffices to use your own words, your own feelings, and write sincerely. At the same time, of course, it is necessary that, in standing on the side of the working class, you adopt the point of view of historical materialism, the Maoist dialectical method and Mao Zedong's Thought. Writing is like speaking: a text never exceeds life or what happens in life. It comes from life; it is intimately connected to it. Therefore, apart from reading more, thinking more, and practicing more, let you your life experience (*shenghuo jingyan* 生活经验) assist you. "Write! Try it!" Even eminent writer Gorky began to write like this.[5]

Indeed, as observed in the preface, after 1949 the number of people who could read and write in China grew significantly. Raising the literacy levels of the population had been an integral part of the Chinese Communist Party's project of building a modern socialist state already before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In Yan'an, the CCP's headquarters after the Long March (1936), and the "liberated areas," the Party had carried out a systematic reorganization of the educational system that involved the establishment of new schools and curricula to mobilize the masses and consolidate the principles of the revolution.[6] Teaching people how to read and write was a benchmark of socialist progress, but, in the era of collectivization, the emphasis that little manuals like *How to Write*—many more similar texts

[5] Qian Danian, *Zenyang xie*, 5.

[6] See Suzanne Pepper's *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-century China: The Search for an Ideal Development Model* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 127-154. See also Glen Peterson's *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-95* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997). In his analysis of the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to raise literacy levels in Guangdong, Peterson shows the difficulties the Party encountered in implementing a unified program of education. In fact, the resistances the Party faced in local, rural areas to establish a centralized educational system led to the founding of "people-run" (*minban* 民办) schools, which drew on the pre-revolutionary, local tradition of lineage endowed schools. Interestingly, the differences between people-run schools in rural areas and state-run (*gongban* 公办) schools in cities perpetrated the divide between countryside and cities as well as the very social, economic, and class differences that the Party sought to overcome via education (37-39).

were published in the early 1950s—placed on writing about individual life experience and the ensuing bourgeoning of personal narratives seem paradoxical.[7] The socialist period witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of autobiographical narratives. As the preface above shows, people were called to write about themselves at the same time as they had to embrace a new vision of the world and new language. As a text that encouraged people not only to learn to write, but also, and more importantly, to write about individual life experience through the new idiom of class struggle, Marxist-Leninist historical materialism, and Maoist Thought, *How to Write* constitutes an interesting entry point to this dissertation's inquiry into how life was narrated and what counted as "life experience" in socialist China.

The genres comprised in *How to Write* are various. What connects them is their relation to life. This point is made clear in the preface. What the preface conceals, but which becomes apparent upon reading the manual closely, is that life is not simply a source of inspiration for writing but the object that needs to be meticulously scrutinized in and through writing. Writing about oneself, especially when it came to autobiography, diary, or work and thought summaries, was not an exercise of self-expression or a means to celebrate one's achievements, but a practice of self-discovery and learning that was deemed necessary for the individual to transcend him/herself and become a socialist subject. If life connects these genres thematically, self-

[7] For other similar handbooks on how to write life see for instance Hong Yanlin 洪彦林, *Zenyang zuo gongzuo zongjie* 怎样作工作总结 [How to Do a Work Summary] (Xianggang: Xin minzhu chubanshe, 1949). Published in Hong Kong, Hong Yanlin's manual shows how these teachings spread beyond national borders. See also Mao Xiangzuo 毛向作, *Zenyang xie riji* 怎样写日记 [How to Write a Diary] (Shanghai: Puwen chubanshe, 1951); Sha Lin 沙霖, *Zenyang xie zizhuan* 怎样写自传 [How to Write Autobiography] (Shanghai: Puwen chubanshe, 1951); Zhang Zhushi 张铸时, *Zenyang xie: zizhuan, tongxun, zongjie, shuxin, dushu biji* 怎样写：自传、通讯、总结、书信、读书笔记 [How to Write: Autobiography, Report, Summary, Letter, Reading Notes] (Beijing: Xuexi shudian, 1951); and Yang Jianqing 杨剑青 ed., *Zenyang xie zizhuan* 怎样写自传 [How to Write Autobiography] (Shanghai: Dahua chubanshe, 1952). These texts were published and re-published within a couple of months or a few years in hundreds of thousands of copies. This publishing effort reached the apex in the first half of the 1950s. But these or similar manuals continued to be available after 1955 and new ones came out in the 1960s. See for instance Yu Lushao 余鲁苕 ed., *Zenyang xie riji* 怎样写日记 [How to Write a Diary] (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1964). The latter is part of a larger collection of little manuals, each devoted to a specific genre: letters, summaries, announcements, etc.

criticism (*jiantao* 检讨, also known as criticism and self-criticism) is the conceptual and methodological unifying framework. This is how, for instance, the genre of autobiography (*zizhuan* 自传) is theorized in the manual:

> In new China […] everyone has to hand in an autobiography […] Why? The governance of new China belongs to the people [*renmin* 人民]. We work and join the revolution to serve the people. As we step into a new [historical] stage, we have to give account of our past history; we have to do a general self-criticism (*jiantao*). Only then can we start the new life.
> […]
> Everyone knows the importance of criticism (*piping* 批评) and self-criticism (*ziwo piping* 自我批评). Autobiography is one of the most appropriate occasions to use the weapon of criticism and self-criticism.[8]

If autobiography offered a space where the past could be put under review, the diary was the space where the individual could carry out the work of self-analysis on a daily basis:

> Above we said that autobiography is a monument recording people's historical trajectory; it reflects our inner and outer life. Since it criticizes the historical path of every individual, it marks the end of a stage and the beginning of a new stage. The diary has a similar meaning, except for the fact that while autobiography includes the entire past history of the individual, the diary focuses on the every day's historical path.
> […]
> Reasonably and honestly, we have to write what we think every day, how we concretely operate, and then do a deep work of self-criticism (*ziwo jiantao*) to critically evaluate what's right and what's wrong, the merits and the flaws.[9]

The characterization of work and thought summaries is comparable. Jotting down episodes of one's work experience or reflecting on one's thought and behavior was driven by a similar concern to identify shortcomings that needed to be corrected. Self-criticism emerges as the overrunning principle in the handbook.

[8]Qian Danian, *Zenyang xie*, 6, 8.
[9] Ibid., 19, 20.

The call for people to write about their lives is intimately related to the call to practice self-criticism. Jiantao was a form of self-examination that the Party introduced in the early 1940s to reform cadres and intellectuals. Self-criticism was required to all those who joined the Party. Self-criticism could eliminate residues of subjectivism and ideological dogmatism among the people, but it was also a means to scan people's background and past affiliations, and protect the Party from espionage and counter-revolutionary activities. The practice, which was combined with criticism of other people, soon entered the routine of the life of Chinese people. A great amount of criticism appeared in various journals, and specific columns were devoted to this kind of writings and exposures.[10] According to figures calculated by Shang Changbao 商昌宝 on the basis of a 1950 survey, about 600.000 people engaged in the field of education wrote criticism or self-criticism in those years.[11] Conducting criticism and self-criticism on a daily basis—in small groups within one's work units—allowed the individuals to monitor their ideas and single out faults or elements of contradiction in their thoughts or behavior that demanded to be corrected.[12] The examination of mistakes in self-criticism unfolded in a four-step sequence that included the acknowledgement of the mistakes, the analysis of the causes of the mistakes, the labeling of the faults, and the envisioning of strategies to reform oneself.[13]

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[10] Discussions on jiantao and self-critical essays appeared in great number in *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 人民日报), *Guangming Daily* (*Guangming Ribao* 光明日报), *Arts and Literature Journal* (*Wenyi bao* 文艺报), and *People's Education* (*Renmin jiaoyu* 人民教育). According to an estimate by the *Guangming Daily*, between September 1951 and October 1952, 82 pieces related to self-criticism appeared in its pages. For more detailed figures, see Shang Changbao's *Zuojia jiantao yu wenxue zhuanxing* 作家检讨与文学转型 [The Self-Criticism of Writers and the Literary Turn] (Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2011), 17-18.

[11] Ibid.

[12] See Martin Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

[13] In fact, how many sections and what they are is a matter of contention. Scholars of jiantao have come up with different patterns to illustrate the internal organization of self-critical pieces. In "The Culture of Jiantao," for instance, playwright Sha Yexin 沙叶新 (1939-2018) compares jiantao to the eight-legged essay (*ba gu wen* 八股文), the formulaic essay that was required at the civil service examination in imperial China. For Sha Yexin, the eight parts that constitute jiantao are: 1) the recognition of the mistake(s) (*cuowu shishi* 错误事实), 2) the analysis of the nature of the mistake (*xingzhi fenxi* 性质分析), 3) the historical origins [of the mistake(s)] (*lishi genyuan* 历史根源), 4) social origins (*shehui genyuan* 社会根源), 5) thought origins (*sixiang genyuan* 思想根源), 6) class origins (*jieji*

Indeed, many terms circulated in the socialist period to denote practices of (self-)criticism. These include self-criticism (*ziwo piping*), "thought summary" (*sixiang zongjie* 思想总结), "thought reflection" (*sixiang fanxing* 反省), and "self-examination" (*ziwo jiancha* 自我检查). The terms were various, but they all pointed to the same exercise of analysis of one's and other people's faults. Jiantao, used both as a verb and a noun, developed as the most inclusive designation, as the entry for "jiantao" in the 1953 *People's Dictionary for Study* suggests:

> Jiantao: to examine thought or work mistakes and deeply search the causes of those mistakes is called "jiantao." Jiantao is a deep form of criticism (*piping*) and self-criticism (*ziwo piping*).[14]

The popularization of jiantao after 1949 was facilitated by the the publication of a great number of booklets explaining to people how to do and write jiantao.[15] The dissemination of

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genyuan 阶级根源), 7) the direction toward which to direct one's efforts [*nuli fangxiang* 努力方向], and 8) reforming the mistake (*gaizheng cuowu* 改正错误). Sha Yexin, "Jiantao wenhua" 检讨文化 ["The Culture of Jiantao"], in *Jiang Qing he tade zhangfumen: Sha Yexin jingpin xuan* 江青和她的丈夫们：沙叶新精品选 [Jiang Qing and her Husbands: Selected Works of Sha Yexin] (Xianggang: Tian yuan shu wu, 2008), 220. See also Shang Changbao 商昌宝, *Zuojia jiantao*. For Shang Changbao, the structure of jiantao is constituted by six sections: 1) the recognition of the mistake(s) (*suowu shishi*), 2) tying the mistake to an ideological problem (*shang gang shang xian* 上纲上线), 3) finding the origins of the mistake (*zhui gen su yuan* 追根溯源), 4) review of one's thought (*sixiang canzhao* 思想参照), 5) rectify the problem and identify a proper course of action (*zhengai jucuo* 整改举措), and 6) summary of future prospect (*zongjie zhanwang* 总结展望). Shang Changbao, *Zuojia jiantao yu wenxue zhuanxing*, 30-42. Regardless of the controversy, the four parts I have highlighted well represent the basic logic underlying jiantao writings and are widely recognized as major components of jiantao.

[14] *Renmin xuexi cidian* 人民学习词典 [People's Dictionary for Study] (Shanghai: Guangyi shuju, 1953), 507. The connection between jiantao and the revision of people's history was not an invention of the Communists. It was rooted in the term itself. In pre-modern China, jiantao was the name of the examining editor in charge of reviewing the imperial history. The examining editor became a prestigious position within the Hanlin Academy. Only people who had successfully passed the imperial examination and obtained the title of *jinshi* 进士 could become examining editors. See Di Yongjun 邸永君, *Qingdai hanlinyuan zhidu* 清代翰林院制度 [The System of the Hanlin Academy under the Qing dynasty] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2002), 89.

[15] See for instance, Nanfang Daxue, *Sixiang gaizao* 思想改造 [Thought Reform] (Guangzhou: Nanfang daxue jiaowuchu, 1950). This publication by Nanfang University is organized into distinct sections, each featuring various examples of self-criticism by specific categories of people. We find self-criticism by workers, young students, women comrades, local cadres, technicians, and people working in schools, universities or other educational institutions. See also Wu Lan 吴兰, *Ziwo piping shili* 自我批评实例 [Samples of Self-Criticism] (Xianggang: Yuanyuan shudian, 1950). It includes self-criticism by famous intellectuals such as Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (1895-1990), Zhu Guangqian 朱光潜 (1897-1986), Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 (1910-2005), and Xia Yan 夏衍 (1900-1995); Wu Jian 吴建, *Zenyang zhankai piping yu ziwo piping* 怎样展开批评与自我批评 [How to Launch Criticism and Self-Criticism] (Shanghai: Huadong renmin chubanshe, 1953).

these little books coincides with the proliferation of manuals like *How to Write*. The affinity in format and content of these manuals is striking. The norms regulating the practice of jiantao, as *How to Write* reveals, were extended to a variety of life narratives. Since both were aimed at examining people's inner and outer life, the line separating jiantao and autobiographical genres became thinner and thinner.

The history of self-criticism cannot be separated from the Party's efforts to shape ideologically correct citizens through the thought reform movement. *How to Write* registers a similar effort and concern: to instill in the people a critical sensibility that enabled them to control and transform their thoughts and conduct. The manipulation of language and narrative structures, as testified by *How to Write*, bespeaks the concern with aligning, if not subordinating to, the life of the individuals with the life of the nation. The inherent mechanism of subject formation as the result of ideological interpellation and disciplinary structures is obvious. This dissertation however contends that a reading that reduces the proliferation of life narratives in socialist China to the repetitive reproduction of a normative model is inadequate to understand the tension that oftentimes aroused as the individual tried to work out his/her life experience within the prescribed models of self-narration. I am not interested in how people intentionally or unintentionally deviated from the norms—even though the tension could result in instances of resistance. Instead, this project asks what it meant to inhabit the norm in socialist China. How did people negotiate their individualized experience with pre-determined interpretive patterns? How did they write "in their own words" while parroting repetitive formulae? What kind of "weapon" was jiantao? What was its relation to autobiographical narratives beyond contexts of surveillance and indoctrination? What is "autobiographical" in these narratives?

Contradiction among the People

The CCP promoted criticism and self-criticism as a means to overcome contradictions among the people. The ideological foundation of jiantao can be found in Mao Zedong's 毛泽东 "On Contradiction" (*Maodun lun* 矛盾论, 1937). Drawing on Marxist and Leninist theories, in this essay, Mao elaborates a vision of dialectical materialism centered on the notion of "contradiction" as the essence of all things. New, progressive forces, on the one hand, and conservative, regressive forces, on the other, are at work in all things (natural phenomena, society, and people), at every stage. Mao emphasizes that it is the contradiction between these opposite forces that generates motion and development. External factors or the interaction with other things are secondary causes. Changes in society, for instance, stem from the internal contradiction between "the productive forces and the relations of production, the contradiction between the classes, and the contradiction between the old and the new; it is the development of these contradictions that impels society forward and starts the process of the supersession of the old society by a new one."[16]

The theory of contradiction nailed down the value and the necessity of practicing self-criticism. As Ying Lin 应麟 explains in *Criticism and Self-Criticism Are Our Weapon* (1956), contradiction is not unique to societies divided into classes. It exists even in classless societies and within the Communist Party, and manifests itself in the lingering conflict between the advanced and the backward, the old and the new, correct thoughts and incorrect thoughts, individual interests and collective interests.[17] If contradictions are not properly handled, they become antagonistic and can undermine the construction of the communist society. In order to

[16] Mao Zedong, "On Contradiction," in Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers), 2: 16.
[17] Ying Lin, *Piping he ziwo piping shi women de wuqi* 批评和自我批评是我们的武器 [Criticism and Self-Criticism Are Our Weapon] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1956), 11.

overcome contradiction, however, it is crucial to discern the particular contradiction inherent in each specific object, and adopt the most appropriate method to resolve it. If the contradiction between the proletariat and the exploitative classes, for example, is overcome by means of the socialist revolution, "contradiction within the Communist Party is solved by the method of criticism and self-criticism."[18]

Self-criticism came to be imagined as a healing tool by which incorrect ideas and attitudes could be rectified and prevented from leading astray the socialist project. In "Rectify the Party's Style of Work" (*Zhengdun xuefeng dangfeng wenfeng* 整顿学风党风文风)—one the speeches that was incorporated in *Rectification Documents*, the key textbook that Party members had to study during the 1942-1944 Rectification Campaign (*zhengfeng yundong* 整风运动)—Mao compares the purpose and process of exposing mistakes (one's own and others) to the work of a doctor who treats the illness in order to save the man (*zhi bing jiu ren* 治病救人).[19] The healing metaphor became popular in discussions of self-criticism and returns, mixed with images of cleansing and purification, in Mao's "On Coalition Government" (*Lun lianhe zhengfu* 论联合政府, 1945). This passage captures the language that came to dominate descriptions of jiantao in newspapers, handbooks, and the myriad of explanatory material that circulated in the 1950s:

> A conscientious practice of self-criticism is another hallmark outstanding feature that distinguishes us from other political parties. We have said that a room must be regularly cleaned or dust will accumulate in it, and that our faces must regularly be

[18] Mao Zedong, "On Contradiction," 25.

[19] Mao Zedong, "Zhengdun xuefeng dangfeng wenfeng" 整顿学风党风文风 [Rectify the Party's Style of Work], in *Zhengfeng wenxian* 整风文献 [Rectification Documents] (Beijing:Xinhua shudian, 1949), 25. This is a later edition. The collection was already available in the early 1940s. It was the primary study material during the Rectification Campaign. The fact that it was republished in 1949 needs to be understood in light of the renewed effort to institutionalize the practice of self-criticism in concomitance with the establishment of the People's Republic. It seems ironic that the end of the civil war and the founding of the People's Republic reinvigorated rather than relaxed the effort to popularize self-criticism. This might be related to Mao's idea of continuous revolution and the importance he placed on mechanisms of surveillance and policing to build a strong nation.

> washed or they will be smeared with dirt. The same is true of our comrades' minds and our Party's work. The proverb: "running water does not go stale and door-hinges do not become worm-eaten," indicates how these things can by ceaseless motion be immune from the harmful effects of microbes or other organisms. To check up our work regularly, to promote the democratic style of work in the course of checking-up, to fear no criticism or self-criticism, to put into practice such good maxims of the Chinese people as "say all you know and say it without reserve," "blame not him who speaks but heed what you hear" and "correct the mistakes if you have committed them and guard against them though you have not"—all these are the only effective methods for us to prevent various kinds of political dust and microbes from producing harmful effects on the minds of our comrades and the physique of our Party. The campaign to rectify the style in work, aimed at "learning from past experience in order to avoid similar mistakes in the future" and "treating the illness in order to save the man," has been so effective because we have in this campaign unfolded criticism and self-criticism that are judicious and not biased, strict and not perfunctory.[20]

The above characterization of (self-)criticism as a means to keep the Party and its people "clean" is crucial to understand that the practice was not meant as a punitive measure to humiliate those who committed mistakes, but as an educational and transformative technique that could resolve contradictions *among* the people and guarantee the progress of the individual and the collective. (Self-)criticism emerged as the privileged weapon of the Communist Party and the proletariat. In theory, at least, (self-)criticism needs to be distinguished from forced confessions or other measures that the Party adopted to handle enemies and reactionaries. Contradictions among the people differ from contradictions between the people and the enemies and need to be handled in different ways, Mao explains in "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" (1957):

> In settling matters of an ideological nature or controversial issues among the people, we cannot use high-handed methods. […] To solve ideological matters, we can only use methods of discussion, of debate, of criticism, of education, and persuasion to win people's trust. […] In 1942, in Yan'an, we worked out the formula "unity-criticism-unity" (*tuanjie-piping-tuanjie* 团结-批评-团结). We used this method to solve contradictions among the people. To elaborate further, this formula means to

[20] Mao Zedong, "On Coalition Government," in Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Works*, 4: 313-314.

> start off with a desire for unity and resolve contradictions through criticism or struggle so as to achieve a new unity on a new basis.[21]

Self-criticism was supposed to operate as a democratic practice in which everyone participated—voluntarily—to safeguard the goal of socialist development. Even though the line between voluntarism and coercion remains hard to draw—especially because the boundaries between people and enemies constantly shifted—(self-)criticism epitomized the possibility to build a fairer society in which everyone is accountable for his/her faults regardless of one's position, rank, or class status, and in which the correction of mistakes becomes an enterprise that is at once individual and collective. For this reason, the critique of other people's mistakes coexisted and was interdependent with the practice of exposing personal shortcomings. Criticism and self-criticism are inextricably bound to each other and their link should not be reduced to a simple cause-effect relation in which criticism generates self-criticism. This is not to deny that criticizing an individual was also a call for the accused person to recognize the alleged mistakes and reform him/herself through self-criticism, but rather to say that the two dimensions should better be understood in a context of reciprocity and interrelation framed by ideals of democracy, collective learning, and shared responsibility toward the betterment of the individual and the collective.

The collaborative model of personal and collective improvement took the form of regular study groups that were organized in every working unit to provide a space where people could share their experience, exchange ideas on specific topics and assigned readings, and carry out criticism and self-criticism to learn from each other's mistakes. In *Studying the Experience of the*

[21] Mao Zedong, "Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti" 关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题 [On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People], in *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* 毛泽东思想万岁 [Long Live Mao Zedong Thought] (Beijing: s.n., 1967), internal publication, 148-149. This is a speech that Mao delivered at the Eleventh Session of the Supreme State Conference on February 27, 1957. The speech was published in *People's Daily* on June 19, 1957.

Small Group (*Xuexi xiaozu de jingyan* 学习小组的经验, 1951)—one of the many little books that the Party circulated to explain how to run successful study sessions—Yao Yu 姚宇 discusses in details the rationale and the structure of group meetings.[22] People were split into small groups led by a cadre or another Party member who was considered ideologically more advanced. Studying before the meeting, Yao Yu emphasizes, was expected and necessary. People attending the study sessions had to bring their study notes and be prepared to discuss specific topics, point out other people's mistakes during the discussion, and accept other people's criticism. It was the responsibility of the Chair of the group to stimulate active participation, to inspire interest in the discussion, to help people understand the benefits of collective study, to assess the level of people's experience and political thought, and to foster a friendly and collegial atmosphere. Collective study, Yao Yu often repeats, is not only beneficial to those who are behind in terms of political thinking, but also to those who are "proactive" (*jiji* 积极) or those who have made more progress. Engaging with the questions and the problems of those who have a lower understanding of theory is an occasion for the Chair and the more advanced members to reflect on their comrades' problems and learn how to use everyday language to explain theoretical issues (*shenru qianchu* 深入浅出).[23]

In the democratic space of the small group, the Chair was not immune from criticism and self-criticism. It is unlikely that the members of the small group had the power to criticize the Chair, but his work as the leader of the discussion was reviewed by peers and he had to learn to assess his own conduct. The success of the group depended also on correct leadership, as the

[22] Yao Yu, *Xuexi xiaozu de jingyan* 学习小组的经验 [Studying the Experience of the Small Group] (Shanghai: Tangdi chubanshe, 1951).
[23] Ibid., 38.

diary of group leader Tao Delun 陶德伦 reveals.[24] The diary, published in one of the little handbooks on study groups, records the difficulties Tao Delun encountered in running study sessions. In the beginning he thought that to be blamed was the laziness of the group members. But this thinking was flawed. After receiving the criticism of another small group leader, Tao Delun comes to realize that he is responsible for the failure of the study sessions. He does a self-criticism and apologizes to the group fellows for not having properly listened to them, for having subjectively criticized them, and having looked down on them. Only after acknowledging his own faults is Tao Delun able to win back the trust of the members of the group and turn around the dynamics of the study sessions.

What stands out in the story of Tao Delun, who records in a diary his work as a small groups leader, and in the numerous little books on how to run study sessions and conduct (self-)criticism is the way in which jiantao as a practice brought together orality and literacy. The speeches that members of a group delivered at the meeting were based on previously taken study notes and self-critical summaries. Even though this written material took a different life in the context of the public performance where under scrutiny was not only the content of the speech but also the "sincere" attitude of the speaker, it seemed possible to produce good jiantao simply by complying with certain rules of writing. Jiantao has to be thought of as a practice but also a genre with a distinct grammar and structure.

[24] Tao Delun, "Women de xiaozu gao hao le—yi ge xiao zuzhang de riji" 我们的小组搞好了—一个小组长的日记 [Our Small Group Did Well—The Diary of a Small Group Leader], in Yao Yu ed., *Xuexi yu xuexi xiaozu* 学习与学习小组 [Studying and Studying Small Groups] (Shanghai: Tangdi chubanshe, 1951), 84-96.

A Grammar of Jiantao

A close reading of a number of jiantao from the 1940s up to the 1970s shows the recurrence of similar rhetorical formulas. The earliest documents I examined are self-critiques from China's "Huabei" region produced by Party members with high social background in 1942.[25] The preface thus introduces the collection published in 1943:

> The texts included in this collection are some comrades' self-reflection notes (*fanxing biji* 反省笔记) from last year's rectification movement in Huabei. The authors' experiences and thoughts are expressed very clearly, and do not need any additional introduction. We highly respect the self-critical spirit of these comrades. The aim of this publication is to spread this spirit of self-criticism inside and outside the Party across the Huabei region, and present these works as useful references for thought reformation (*gaizao sixiang de jiejian* 改造思想的借鉴) for Party comrades (especially those from the petit bourgeoisie and the intellectual class). As for the main points and writing features of these texts, we have not changed them much so as to preserve their original genuineness. The collection comprises the self-criticism of three comrades from different places. If the readers will look at these texts, and even desire to study them deeply, they will be able to reform their own thought in a more practical way.[26]

Two things are especially emphasized in this preface: the supposed exemplarity of the texts; and their impact on the reader. Of course, being this a Party publication, one is made to think that the praised exemplarity of the documents may be part of a strategy to create a body of literature for indoctrination that heavily relied on meticulous search and abundant editing. And yet, by framing these documents as models, the collection is making an important claim on how (self)criticism should be written.

In the analysis of the word-choice and lexicon, one could hardly fail to notice striking similarities between the documents presented. The repetitiousness of politically charged terms together with the arguably formal register is not only an evident sign of the context in which and

[25] *Sixiang fanxing xuanji* 思想反省选集 [Selections of Materials on Thought Reform] (Washington distributed [i.e. reprinted] by Center for Chinese Research Materials, Association of Research Libraries, 1974).
[26] Ibid.

for which these documents were produced, but it may also be seen as a deliberate attempt to stabilize the plurality of meanings of certain words and/or to showcase a newly coined vocabulary that needed to be popularized across the various segments of Chinese society. Repetitiousness thus has a double valence. It certainly serves to emphasize the importance of certain concepts and make them stand out, but it also facilitates the memorization of the very terms being repeated—especially for the audience not yet familiar with them. Importantly, in the process of soliciting memory, I would contend, the potential plurality of nuances embedded in the terms tends to be annulled.

The effort to stabilize the meaning of words is not surprising in the backdrop of nation building and power struggle between different groups. As Pierre Bourdieu explains, "it is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language."[27] The "official language" is forged through a process of standardization and "normalization" of language. What this entails is that language ceases to be shaped and constrained by external circumstances, for meaning is always and already attached upon it. This may facilitate communication by making language clearer and more predictable, but also reduces the expressive possibilities of language. An inclusive list of the most repetitive words in these 1942 self-critiques cannot be compiled here, but a few concrete examples are worth to be mentioned.

Besides the wide range of "isms" that fill the pages of these texts—communism, Marxism, heroism, subjectivism, dogmatism, individualism, factionalism, and materialism—particularly striking is the usage of terms related to "modest heart" (*xuxin* 虛心). While the word is defined in opposition to arrogance, it seems to speak to deeper levels of consciousness beyond

[27] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 45.

concrete feats and behaviors. Proclaiming one's faith toward the Revolution and the communist cause is not at all the ultimate stage in the individual's construction of his/her revolutionary self. If not coupled with a modest heart, the entire enterprise is bound to come to naught. In the first of these self-critiques, the author (the writers' names are not revealed) revisits the main stages of his life to trace the trajectory of his personal ideological improvement. Born into an intellectual family, he admits having developed an individualistic personality marked by pronounced selfishness, arrogance, and heroic desires. The negative impact of the family background on him was gradually abated by his later entry into the communist Party, and yet, he explains, even while working for the Party, the inner struggle between subjectivism/individualism and communism was always at work. The study of right political texts, the proximity of exemplary cadres and their useful advice played an exceptionally important role in the process of recognizing and eradicating personal flaws, but progress could have not been achieved without attaining a modest heart.[28] Only by accepting criticism with a modest heart can the individual reconnect him/herself to the Party and the working class, and approach external circumstances in a more objective and analytical way.

The term appears in the 1950s little handbooks on how to do criticism and self-criticism. In *On Criticism and Self-Criticism*, for example, when Yang Fu points to the correctness of criticism raised by the people, he stresses that the communist government should listen to the masses' opinion with a "modest heart."[29] As in the former example, modesty does not refer to a virtue that may define human personality in general, but to a very specific quality whose first and foremost function is to reconnect the individual to the people. The Party as a collective individual is no exception. Like the singular individual, the Party needs to accept criticism and

[28] *Sixiang fanxing xuanji*, 12-14.
[29] Yang Fu, *Tan piping yu ziwo piping* 谈批评与自我批评 [On Criticism and Self-Criticism] (Beijing: Qingnian chubanshe, 1953), 11.

recognize its own mistakes with a modest heart, for this is a basic condition to bridge any distance separating it from the masses. Regardless of whether the masses could truly level criticism against the Party, the meaning that the term "modesty" acquires in the texts manifests the interesting way in which terms are pinned down to underscore a distinct semantic valence that eclipses the terms' multifarious signification. These terms became the lexicon of self-critical texts.

Another illustrative example is provided by the recurrent expression "patient education" (*naixin jiaoyu* 耐心教育). In both self-criticism from 1942 and Yang Fu's manual, "patient education" emerges as an expression with a very precise significance and context of usage. It appears frequently in the first self-critique of the collection every time the author laments his stubbornness and the inability to respond positively to his peers' "patient education."[30] Education here refers to the act of imparting correct teachings on flawed people, or at least people comparatively more backward from the ideological point of view. But, at the same time, patient education stands for the long and time-consuming learning process the individual has to undergo to achieve transformation. While this characterization frames education in contexts of interaction between the teacher and the learner—echoing the afore-mentioned relation between criticism and self-criticism—the notion of patience seems particularly important for it highlights the duration of the teaching/learning process itself. The adjective "patient" attached to the noun "education" does not perform a simple qualifying, descriptive function, but is inextricably tied to the noun, with which it forms a self-contained compound. The recurrence of the expression reinforces the inseparability of the two elements: education must be patient, linguistically and ideologically. It does not surprise then that self-criticism as a tool of learning and transformation could not be

[30] *Sixiang fanxing xuanji*, 39.

exhausted in one attempt. Self-criticism seldom obtained the approval of the higher-ups and the individual was often forced to resubmit a new self-criticism. The new text offered a revision of the earlier text and added more details to the analysis of the mistakes. While self-criticism of earlier self-criticism was an effective means for the Party to investigate deeper into the life, the connections, and the thoughts of the people, it also led to endless cycles of writing and rewriting that however never guaranteed the absolution of the individual.

In the texts I have observed, an analogous mechanism that establishes relations between words on the linguistic and conceptual/ideological levels, pulls together the terms "motivation" (*dongji* 动机) and "result/effect" (*xiaoguo* 效果).[31] Ideally, good motivation should lead to good results, but in reality there is not such an obvious equation. In the first self-critique included in the 1943 collection, the author explains that the correctness of his motivation was no guarantee for the attainment of desired results; methods and scientific analysis of the situation are fundamental to obtain the wanted effect.[32] Elaborating on the same idea, in his handbook, Yang Fu quotes passages from Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (*Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua* 在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话, 1942): "We are the theorizers of the unification of motivation and result/effect of dialectical materialism. Motivation toward the masses and the effect of being welcome by the masses cannot be separated, we have to unify

[31] It is interesting to look at how the term "motivation" is used and explained in *Exercises in Correct Grammar and Rhetoric*, a practical manual edited by Lǚ Shuxiang 吕叔湘 and Zhu Dexi 朱德熙. In the handbook, "motivation" is presented as a term that can be used only to refer to human beings. Lü & Zhu, *Yufa xiuci zhengwu lianxi* 语法修辞正误练习 (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1955), 3. Lü Shuxiang (1904-98) and Zhu Dexi (1920-92) are also the compilers of *Lectures on Grammar and Rhetoric* (*Yufa xiuci jianghua* 语法修辞讲话, 1951). The six volume book laid down standards for vocabulary, syntax, text structure, and punctuation. In the article "A Linguistic Enclave: Translation and Language Policies in Early People's Republic of China," Nicolai Volland notes that Lu & Zhu's book became the" blueprint" for correct writing in the PRC. Nicolai Volland, "A Linguistic Enclave: Translation and Language Policies in Early People's Republic of China," *Modern China* 35 no. 5 (Sept. 2009): 469.

[32] *Sixiang fanxing xuanji*, 30.

them."[33] In Mao's words, motivation seems close to (self-)criticism, while (good) effect coincides with the transformation of the individual.

The examples I have provided reveal ways in which the meaning of words is not independent from political concerns. The similar usage and conceptualization of certain terms and/or expression in the 1942 self-criticism and in Yang Fu's 1952 manual confirm the assumption that from the early 1940s a process of standardization of language was already taking place. In a seminal article, Rudolf G. Wagner uses the term "ortholalia" (*zhengwen/zhengyu* 正文/正语) to indicate the standardized language created through the Party's implementation of linguistic prescriptions.[34] For Wagner, while linguistic policies under the CCP show signs of continuity with laws and regulations set in the late Qing and early Republican period, the roots of the process that gave shape to the official language of the PRC are to be traced in the 1942 Rectification Campaign.[35] To the proliferation of the "normalized" language, crucial was the role played by media and their complicity with the Party's will and propaganda. After all, Wagner points out at the very beginning of his article, language is a symbolic capital. The argument recalls Bourdieu's discussion on the formation of a standardized language. Control over language amounts to the acquisition of a symbolic power over meaning construction. Bourdieu illustrates the impact that linguistic changes and authoritative control on communication have on the *formation* and *re-formation* of people's mental structures, with examples drawn from the experience of the French revolution.[36] In a similar way Rudolf Wagner takes the French example, at the beginning of his article, to introduce the CCP's transformation of language. It is curious

[33] Yang Fu, *Tan piping yu ziwo piping*, 39.
[34] Rudolf G. Wagner, "Zhonggong 1940—1953 nian jianli zhengyu, zhengwen de zhengce dalüe 中共 1940—1953" 年建立正语、正文的政策大略 [A Summary of the CCP's Policies to Establish a Ortholalia], in Peng Xiaoyan 彭小妍 ed., *Wenyi lilun yu tongsu wenhua* 文艺理论与通俗文化 [Literary Theory and Popular Culture] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo zhoubeichu, 1999), 13.
[35] Ibid., 20.
[36] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 47-48.

that both Bourdieu and Wagner, despite the different framework and direction that characterize their analysis, resort to the French revolutionary experience to inform their discussion on language changes. It might be the case that efforts to manipulate the way people speak, write, and think are certainly fundamental in times of nation construction, but they become even more important and prominent in times of revolution.

In "jiantao" writings, the proliferation of new ideas among the people is manifest beyond the automatic adoption of a whole set of new terms, or semantically revised expressions. In fact, a bird's-eye view of these texts allows us to capture the overall formal structure of these narratives and notice their distinct fragmented and sectioned nature. The excessive inner subdivision of these writings is an interesting feature that bears profound implications on the way the author approached his/her self-examination and how these texts may have been received by the audience. Although different degrees of fractioning and segmentation characterize the documents I have examined, inner enumerations, subdivisions are invariably the structural pillars on which these narratives are built. The breaking down of the narrative into distinct sections can be observed in both published self-criticism from 1942 and unpublished self-criticism from the late 1970s. Of course, important differences can be discerned as well, but the structural organization of the texts into specific parts or stages is a common feature. I understand structural fragmentation according to two different but related lines of thoughts.

First of all, inner subdivision epitomizes a strong desire for clarity and precision. This is especially evident in earlier writings, where the sectionalization of the text is used as a technique to underscore relevant points and their detailed elaboration. This complies with the aims of this type of writing. What the authors are trying to do is to peruse their past experience, individuate mistakes, and examine the roots of their failures. Accuracy and microscopic inspection are

therefore necessary requirements for the ultimate success of the self-critique. If mistakes are not properly indicated, the individual's elevation of consciousness can hardly be achieved. Thus we have points that develop into sub-points or enumerations/lists incorporating more detailed and deeper levels of sub-enumerations and sub-lists.

Interestingly, the items variously scrutinized and examined are very repetitive. And yet, the reiteration of an item—for instance, the analysis of how "individualism" manifested itself in the author's actions and behaviors—is always meant to provide further details that can help tracking down the cause(s) of the defect and ultimately push the individual toward the path of corrective resolutions and personal amelioration. The astonishing segmentation of the texts as a means to ensure analytical precision is reinforced by the impressive use—even abuse—of parenthesized expressions. The interpolation of these bracketed explanatory instances can be understood in light of the much sought-after clarity and accuracy. Ambivalence has to be escaped and omissions cannot be admitted. As a result, the meaning of words and sentences must always be intelligible and well-defined.

The second dimension that, I think, defines the structural division of self-criticism regards the striking correspondence between textual partitioning and the conceptualization of the individual's life experience as a succession of distinct temporal stages. The act of distinguishing different phases in one's life may not be immediately registered as a meaningful element. And yet, the striking coincidence between the events marking the beginning (or the end) of an individual's life period and historically significant happenings is telling.

In landowners' self-critiques (*zicha* 自查) from the 1970s, the identification between life stages and historical turnings is especially prominent.[37] From that historical perspective (the

[37] I thank Professor Jacob Eyferth for sharing with me these archival documents that he collected during personal fieldwork in the Hebei and Shaanxi regions.

1970s) the individual reviews his/her entire life according to the periodization of the History of China. The pattern that can be discerned features three major stages: 1/ before the 1949 Liberation (*jiefang qian* 解放前); 2/ after Liberation (*jiefang hou* 解放后); and 3/ the Cultural Revolution. However, tracing the junctures that punctuate the progression of the individual history and the History of the nation does not clarify the reasons of such operation. To a certain extent, this reflects the well-established official master-narrative, in which the unfolding of national History is bound to the events that have characterized the history of the Party in a line of progressive development. The fact that this is projected in the people's overview of their individual life, on the surface, could be seen as the re-production of the official discourse under constraint. This is a plausible explanation, if we remember that these documents were written by landowners who had to recognize former mistakes, declare their previous and actual possessions, and show firm willingness and desire to rectify their status. One of these records, Jin Shizhong's 靳史众 story, offers an interesting case.[38]

Originally named Shi Sifang 史思芳, Jin was born in a poor family. The cruel exploitation of rich landowners caused the financial collapse of his family, which led his two elder brothers to work for the landowners and forced Sifang, still too young for labor in the field, to roam around begging for food. Sifang's beggar life ended years later when he started working for the rich Jin household. As he got married to one member of the family, he was forced to change his name into Jin Shizhong. After many misfortunes, for Sifang, entering into the Jin family signified the beginning of a better life, but in fact, that was the beginning of his *real* disgrace, for, after Liberation, together with the other members of the household, he was labeled "rich peasant" (*funong* 富农). Now (in the mid-1970s), at the time when he writes his self-

[38] Jin Shizhong 靳史众. "Zicha" 自查 [Self-Examination]. Unpublished manuscript. Shaanxi, 1974.

examination, he humbly admits his faults and proclaims to be determined to become a new person (*juexin zuoren* 决心做人). The final resolution and the promise of "becoming a new person" is the conclusive formula in all these writings.

Like in other self-critical texts, Shizhong narrates his own history giving special emphasis to the turning points that characterized the national history. In light of what he tells us, the link between his life and external historical events is easy to be understood, given the profound impact that external changes had on his personal experience. Neither the vicissitudes Jin endured at a young age nor his joining the Jin household (or the fall of his status after "Liberation") can be seen as consciously pursued experiences or conditions. Some kind of human impotence is revealed by Shizhong's story of sufferings and difficulties. It is within this frame that we should read the distinct periodized structure of his account as well as his *need* to perform self-criticism. It is not much important, I contend, whether Shizhong was coerced to write self-criticism, as it is the fact the Shizhong may have even desired to critically review his own life. Two crucial issues are at stake. Through self-criticism, an individual like Shizhong could make sense of his own life experience—a process in which personal events cannot be divorced from national issues—and, at the same time, find an opportunity to re-connect himself to society and, to a larger extent, to the happenings of the nation. Embedded in self-critical writings, since their initial popularization, is the individuals' need to re-assert their sense of belonging and to ensure their inclusion and participation into the bigger historical moment. This is more clearly represented in later jiantao, where the reaching of advanced stages in the unfolding of the history of the Party and of the nation allows for a more complete picture of the various steps taken by the Party, the nation, and the individual throughout the twentieth century. And yet, the way in which people's consciousness is biographically re-shaped can already be

traced in earlier self-criticism. This is to say that from the very beginning not only was the process of manipulation of language and communication already set in motion, but also that the formal conventions of the genre were already established.

Coercive or not, writing jiantao required writing skills. It's interesting to notice that the popularization of self-criticism spurred the practice of commissioning to other people the writing of one's self-criticism, as Guo Xiaochuan's 郭小川 (1919-1976) narrative poem «A Story of Commissioned Self-criticism» reveals.[39] This piece is extremely interesting for, if on the surface reveals the irony of the story of a factory head (*guangchang* 厂长) that is misjudged by his superior on the basis of a disappointing self-criticism someone else has written on his behalf, in fact it seems to suggest much disapproval against approaching self-criticism as a commissionable service. In the poem, the character does not really reform himself, for he keeps entrusting the responsibility of writing his own jiantao to someone else. Behind the playfulness of the fictional representation, one can detect the transmission of an implicit yet forceful message: jiantao should be taken seriously and attempts to downplay its importance on the perfectioning process of the subject's consciousness are reproachable. What the poem ultimately foregrounds, however, is that while jiantao had become a highly standardized written genre with well-defined features, language, and structure that induced mechanisms of copying, compliance with the orthodox form of self-criticism could not be divorced from the individual's effort to work out his/her own autobiographical experience into the prescriptive model.

[39] Guo Xiaochuan, "*Daixing jiantao de gushi*" 《代行检讨的故事》 [A Story of Commissioned Self-criticism], in *Guo Xiaochuan daibiaozuo* 郭小川代表作 [Representative Works by Guo Xiaochuan], (Zhengzhou: Huanghe wenyi chubanshe, 1986), 37-40. The poem was published in *People's Daily* on June, 4, 1954.

Looking for the Lived Body in Self-Criticism

The constraints self-criticism imposed on articulations of the self has justified the widespread condemnation of jiantao and thought reform techniques as instantiations of political coercion and suffering. Playwright Sha Yexin's castigation of what he calls "the culture of jiantao" is illustrative of the dominant attitude toward self-criticism:

> Jiantao is the torture of the spirit, the assassination of the soul, the rape of thought, the annihilation of the individual. It strips you of your dignity, it demonizes your soul, it forces you to inflict pain on yourself, it turns you into a corrupted being, it engenders feelings of inferiority, it causes self-humiliation, it makes you victimize your spirit, hang your own soul, slap yourself in the face, spit at your face. It makes you think you are the ugliest person in the world, the most abject one, the person who has committed the worst mistakes and is the one who more than anyone else needs to be reformed![40]

The ensemble of graphic images of violence against the self and the body in the above description reflects Sha Yexin's idea that jiantao was primarily a political means of surveillance and subjugation. However scattered, scholarly discussions on jiantao appear in various histories, in Chinese and English, of the disciplinary system in modern China, the handling of criminals, the thought reform campaign, or the struggle sessions during the Cultural Revolution.[41] In different ways, these histories perpetrate one single vision of jiantao as a tool of normative

[40] Sha Yexin, "Jiantao wenhua," 222.

[41] In English, see, for instance, Edward Hunter, *Brain-washing in Red China: The Calculated Destruction of Men's Minds* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951); Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963); David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); Frank Dikötter, *Crime, Punishment and the Prison in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Michael Dutton's *Policing Chinese Politics: A History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Aminda Smith, *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes: Reeducation, Resistance, and the People* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); and Jan Kiely, *The Compelling Ideal: Thought Reform and the Prison in China, 1901-1957* (New Haven: Yale University, 2014). In Chinese, Gao Hua 高华, *Hongtaiyang shi zenmeyang shengqide: Yan'an zhengfeng yundong de lailong qumai* 红太阳是怎么样升起的: 延安整风运动的来龙去脉 [How the Red Sun Arose: The Origin and Development of the Yan'an Rectification Campaign] (Xianggang: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2000); Gao Hua, "'*Xin ren' de dansheng*" 新任的诞生 ["Birth of the 'New Person'"] in Gao Hua, *Geming niandai* 革命年代 [The Era of the Revolution] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2010). Yang Kuisong 杨奎松, "'Huai fenxi' shi ruhe chansheng de" "坏分子" 是如何产生的" [How Are the 'Bad Elements' Created?], paper presented at the conference "Between Revolution and Reform: China at the Grassroots, 1960-1980" (Vancouver, May 2010).

inscription of the self that the Communists introduced during the Rectification Campaign (1942-1944) to reform cadres and intellectuals, and later disseminated across all levels of society to ensure the correct political alignment of the citizens.[42] But jiantao did not disappear with the end of the Cultural Revolution. A jiantao discourse and practice resurfaced in the post-Mao period when the reassertion of the value of criticism and self-criticism as a tool to overcome contradictions served the purpose of distancing the Party from the errors committed during the Cultural Revolution.[43] It has reappeared in more contemporary efforts to revitalize practices of forced, public confessions and the recent publication of earlier theories of self-criticism and writings.[44]

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[42] There is no consensus, however, on the genealogy of self-criticism. Some scholars, like Li Jie, have emphasized the relation of jiantao to pre-modern traditions of confession and self-examination in Confucian culture, Daoist and Buddhist practices. Li Jie's "'Yu Qiuyu, Why Don't You Repent?' A Genealogy of Maoist and Post Maoist Confessions," in Li Jie, "The Past Is Not Like Smoke: A Memory Museum of the Maoist Era (1949-1976)," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010), 83-134. Object of debate is also the originality of the CCP's practices of thought reform. Some scholars stress the importance of the Soviet pedagogical model. See for instance Shang Changbao, *Zuojia jiantao yu wenxue zhuanxing*, 3-4; Aminda Smith's *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes*. Smith highlights the Chinese Communists' creative appropriation of the Soviet thought reform techniques (29). Other scholars, such as Jan Kiely, have de-emphasized the Soviet influence and have claimed that the Nationalists and the collaborationist governments had experimented with similar techniques well before the 1940s. Jan Kiely's *The Compelling Ideal*.

[43] The "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China"(*Guanyu jianguo yilai dang de ruogan lishi wenti de jueyi* 关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议) adopted by the Central Committee in June 1981 was key to redefining the Party's relation to, and reassessment of, the most recent past. The "Resolution" highlights criticism and self-criticism as the "weapon" that needs to be used "to overcome any mistaken thought that departs from the Party's correct principles." The document is available at http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64563/65374/4526448.html. After the issuing of the "Resolution," jiantao re-gained a prominent presence in journals and publications. See for instance the editorial "Overcoming Weakness and Laxity Is an Important Task of the Contemporary Ideological Front" (*kefu huansan ranruo zhuangtai shi dangqian sixiang zhanxian de zhongyao renwu* 客服涣散软弱状态是当前思想战线的重要任务) that appeared in *People's Daily* on September 1, 1981. Little books on jiantao came out in the early 1980s. See for instance, Cao Xianyong's 曹宪镛 *Tan tan piping yu ziwo piping* 谈谈批评与自我批评 [On Criticism and Self-Criticism] (Sanmingshi: Renmin chubanshe, 1984). In the postscript at the end of the handbook, Cao Xianyong explicitly links his book project to the Party's "Resolution" and defines criticism and self-criticism as a "sharp weapon" that enables the correct execution of the policies and directives laid out in the "Resolutions" (109).

[44] Consider for instance the publication, in 2001, of all the self-criticism written by poet Guo Xiaochuan's 郭小川 (1919-1976) in the 1950s. The collection, edited by his daughter, Guo Xiaohui 郭晓蕙, testifies to the renewed interest in the genre. *Jiantaoshu: shiren Guo Xiaochuan zai zhengzhi yundong zhong de linglei wenzi* 检讨书: 诗人郭小川在政治运动中的另类文字 [The Self-Critical Essay: The Other Kind of Writings of Poet Guo Xiaochuan in the Midst of Political Movements] (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 2001). Since the rise of President Xi Jinping 习近平 and the ushering in of a new authoritarian era, public confessions that evoke the practice of self-criticism have become more and more common. In some occasions, these confessions are broadcasted in television

The periodic yet unpredictable resurgence of jiantao in different times and under different historical conditions challenges attempts to reconstruct a linear history of this mode and has compelled me to cross the conventional division between socialist and postsocialist China, which many scholarly works continue to uphold, to explore the legacy of self-criticism and its relation to life writings—in particular memoirs—in post-revolutionary China. For this reason, "Socialist China" in my dissertation covers a time span that begins in the 1940s (well before the Communist takeover) and reaches the 1990s, when many memoirs appeared in published form.

If jiantao as a tool of self-transformation seemed to serve disciplinary purposes in the early years of the People's Republic, its function differed in the early 1980s when the discourse of criticism/self-criticism emerged in concomitance with the advocacy of "thought emancipation" (*sixiang jiefang* 思想解放).[45] In the 1980s, jiantao, as a means of self-reflection, was deployed to criticize the very history that had generated it and the errors it contributed to commit. This dissertation emphasizes the unpredictability of the jiantao form and its history, and sheds light onto jiantao's complex interconnection with other life writings. It would be naïve to deny jiantao's complicity with political, normative practices of self-inscription, but this history alone, by restraining jiantao to the reproduction of orthodox practices, runs the risk of homogenizing the variety of self-critical instantiations and perpetrating a stigmatized reading of this practice. This reading needs to be complemented with an affective history that takes into account

(https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/01/21/world/asia/china-televised-confessions.html). Interestingly, new collections of criticism and self-criticism have come out. Worthy of notice is the 2016 publication of a collection of critical writings that had originally appeared in the Party organ *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang ribao* 解放日报) in the Yan'an years. See Zhao Yaohong 赵耀宏 and Xue Lin 薛琳 ed., *"Jiefang ribao" shang de piping he ziwo piping* 《解放日报》上的批评和自我批评 [Criticism and Self-Criticism in *Liberation Daily*] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 2016).

[45] Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 5.

processes of embodiment and the experience of the lived body. To do that, this dissertation brings gender into the study of jiantao.

Why gender?

The rhetoric of sincerity proselytized in manuals on jiantao and life writing captures a major paradox of narratives of the self. People had to write sincerely (*laolaoshishi* 老老实实) and were encouraged to use their own words. At the same time, things like "the snacks you ate at breakfast, what you ate at lunch or dinner, how many hours you slept in the afternoon or at night" should not be included in a diary.[46] Life trivialities that "are not relevant to the interest of the people or the interest of the nation" should not be the object of jiantao.[47] Personal feelings (*geren ganqing* 个人感情) should not affect the way one analyzes oneself and the world.[48] The correct attitude is "seeking truth from facts" (*shi shi qiu shi* 实事求是).[49] People had to reconcile sincere expression with the restrictions imposed on what experiences could be narrated and how they could be narrated. By neutralizing the subjective viewpoint and asking individuals to find the objective truth in themselves and the world around them, these writings seem to standardize human experience and its representation. However, this process of normative standardization cannot fully be understood if we ignore how practices of cultural and political inscription interact with the subject's lived experience. The only differences the handbooks acknowledge pertain to class difference, family background, upbringing, and education. But difference exists also at the level of bodily experience and response. One viable way to explore the complexity pertaining to how the body as historically and socially situated lives out its position within disciplinary structures is to re-consider self-criticism through gender. Gender difference—the way it is at

[46] Qian Danian, *Zenyang xie*, 20-21.
[47] Yang Fu, *Tan piping yu ziwo piping*, 37.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

once discursively and materially constituted—offers an alternative perspective to integrate a discursive history of jiantao with a history of embodiment and affective experience. Jiantao itself was an embodied experience. Contemplating one's mistakes engendered feelings of shame, guilt, and other bodily reactions. How the body interacts with the disciplinary structures of jiantao cannot be reduced to one single paradigm. Writing life through the lens of self-criticism as a man or as a woman, for instance, might have been different. I don't intend to essentialize male/female difference. In fact, the outcomes of women's self-critical practice are diverse and heterogeneous. I nonetheless focus on women writers for the female body and female identity remained a site of major controversy in the socialist period in spite of the official rhetoric of gender equality. This dissertation examines how women writers creatively re-purposed self-criticism in their personal narratives to show the limits as well as the potentialities of this widely maligned practice.

Gender can be a tricky category. Since the linguistic and discursive turn in the 1970s, feminist studies have intentionally separated gender from sex to combat biologist approaches that essentialize women's bodily characteristics. Scholars like Judith Butler have articulated gender as the effect of cultural and discursive construction.[50] The body itself has become a surface of performative citation of normative scripts. While the constructivist approach is still important to understand the impact of social and political discourses on the formation of subjectivity and bodily comportment, it reproduces the troubling dualism between language and reality inherent in poststructuralist and postmodern thought.[51] A more nuanced perspective can be gained if we enrich gender with the notion of the lived body. The point is not to recover a pre-discursive material experience of the body, but rather to inquire into the multiple ways in which individual

[50] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[51] See for instance Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 2-3.

bodies—in this case, female bodies—enact in their own way the structures that constraint them. As Iris Marion Young aptly observes, "gender as structured is also lived through individual bodies, always as personal experiential response and not as a set of attributes that individuals have in common."[52] Built on phenomenological theories of subjectivity, Young's concept of the "lived body" can expand the exploration of subject formation via self-criticism to incorporate the specific ways in which women as lived bodies inhabit the norm.[53] The notion of the "lived body" allows us to shift attention from gender as one single script to gender as a multiplicity of ways in which the body takes up the set of ascribing, determining codes.

Chapter Two, for instance, shows how writer Yang Mo's 杨沫 (1914-1995) bodily impairment—her personal condition of hormonal imbalance caused by the removal of the ovaries—breaks into the self-criticism Yang Mo carries out in her diaries. Unexpectedly, jiantao—which was supposed to tame the mind in order to create healthy and obedient bodies—provides the writer with an opportunity to engage a bodily excess that was foreign to the socialist discourse. Bodily experience is also central to the way writer Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986) articulates her self-criticism when she was brought to trial, in 1957, on charges of individualism and counter-revolutionary activities (Chapter One). The self-analysis Ding Ling conducts in her jiantao brings to the fore the struggles that as a woman she has endured to stand up as a writer and cadre; struggles that always pit her against her male counterparts. The way she interprets her life is informed by how she experienced it. This experience emerges precisely within and through the prescribed structures of jiantao. Ding Ling does not defy the rules of jiantao. Instead,

[52] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 24. It is from Young's "Throwing like a Girl," the title of one of her articles, that I draw the title of this dissertation ("Doing Self-Criticism like a Woman").

[53] Sonia Kruks's "Women's 'Lived Experience': Feminism and Phenomenology from Simone de Beauvoir to the Present" offers an illuminating introduction to gender and feminist studies' adaptation of the phenomenological tradition to approaches to lived bodily experience. The article is included in Mary Evans et al., *The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2014), 75-92.

she is able to exploit the limits and possibilities of the form to give shape to a narrative of her self that is at once predictable and unique. Even though the object of debate was Ding Ling's ideological position, the woman's body is materialized in her self-criticism as well as in the critiques that male intellectuals leveled against her.

An approach to gender that attends to material lived experience bears important implications on the way we conceptualize agency and creativity in the reproduction of normative models. Models proliferated in socialist China. Written models like the ones included in *How to Write* developed next to fictional models, theatrical models, models of productive villages, as well as human models. In this sense, Pang Laikwan is right when she says that in entering the world of Maoist China one enters a world full of repetition and imitation.[54] Pang's study of processes and structures of mimesis during the Cultural Revolution however shows how the imitative impulse that drove the individual to copy from other people—the model functioned as a source of competition and learning—could set off transformative mechanisms. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity informs much of Pang's analysis and approach. For Pang "it is through the repeated performances of sanctified works that the mainstream was reinforced, yet alternatives were also articulated."[55] Even though not necessarily intentional, these alternatives could engender instances of resistance to ideological control. While I agree with Pang's idea that models and copies are not complementary, her theoretical framework, by defining resistance as the opposite of compliance, replicates the dualism between compliance and resistance that this dissertation intends to overcome. The norm does not need to be undone for a copy to be creative. The authors I examine—women writers committed to a political project—cannot easily be situated on either side of the compliance/resistance spectrum. I maintain that their bodily

[54] Laikwan Pang, *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production during China's Cultural Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017), 1.
[55] Ibid., 15.

experience creatively responds to fixed patterns of self-narrations. These women's self-critical/autobiographical writings stage the dynamic encounter between personal bodily experience and the social external world. The dynamic encounter of bodily experience and normative restrictions, in and through writing, can lead to idiosyncratic narrative outcomes that underscore the fluid boundary between complicity and subversion.

Undoubtedly, jiantao as a genre of life writing in and of itself and a technique that filtered into other autobiographical forms was extra-ordinary. The Party and its organs had to put into circulation countless little books on how to write life and manuals on self-criticism to spread the technique widely and ensure its correct application. These texts and the discussions that dominated the columns of various journals never conceal the extra-ordinary nature of the technique. Jiantao is deliberately publicized as the landmark of the proletarian revolution and the new era ushered in by the Communist Party, as revealed by the imposed and overemphasized divide between old China and new China that *How to Write* reiterates ad nauseam. The extra-ordinariness of the form epitomized the extra-ordinariness of the times people were living in. The extra-ordinary made ordinary in the routinized labor of self-analysis in life writings was oftentimes registered and lived as an instantiation of crisis and conflict. As a technique meant to overcome mistakes and turn people into new beings, jiantao itself represented the moment of contradiction—individual and collective—in the dialectical path of self-amelioration. And yet, we need to ask how this routinized extra-ordinariness, and the crisis it harbors, was processed at the level of individual experience. As it catalyzed contradiction—within the self and between the self and others—jiantao was also the space where the individual tried to respond to contradiction. From the perspective of how the lived body adapts itself to novelty and situations of crisis, an alternative history of pain can be traced; one that does not reduce jiantao solely to the source of

pain, but rather emphasize jiantao as the space where pain is variously grappled with, represented, and channeled.

Pain is one of the themes that keep coming back in the texts this dissertation examines. These texts show how pain is not a homogenous experience, but is plural and contingent to the social positioning of the body and its materiality. Yang Mo's physical suffering, for instance, intensifies, and blends with, the pain the writer feels for not being able to produce her novel and fulfill her political commitments. The pain that surfaces in her self-criticism differs from the intersubjective and collective experience of pain that Wei Junyi 韦君宜 (1917-2002) tries to voice in her post-Cultural Revolution memoir (Chapter Three). Jiantao, in these texts, turns into a strategy to cope with pain at the same time as it inflicts it. By attending to the lived body in practices of self-criticism, this dissertation brings to the fore multifarious experiences of, and responses to, pain that complicate the relation between jiantao and suffering: suffering emerges from the conflicting encounter between the female self and collective male expectations (Chapter One); from the painful interaction between physical disability and mind (Chapter Two); and from the unresolved question of individual and collective responsibility articulated in post-Mao testimony (Chapter Three).

Rethinking Women's Life Writings through Jiantao

Let us return to *How to Write* for a moment. The handbook and the manuals on jiantao reflect the prominent role that personal narratives held in socialist writing practices. Indeed, as I elaborated earlier, the interest in the autobiographical did not conflict with collective and national projects. Controlling how people interpreted their life was a means to reinforce the people's identification with national endeavors. Even so, it is remarkable that the socialist

discourse of the self allowed the autobiographical genres to move from the margins to the center of cultural production. This section asks two interrelated questions: how did the popularity of life narratives in the socialist period reshape women's writing, and what does jiantao add to our understanding of women's autobiographical practices in modern China.

An account of the status of life writings and women's engagement with these forms before the rise of jiantao in the Communist years is in order. As Jing M. Wang notes, the valorization of the individual advocated by the May Fourth generation of liberal intellectuals in the late 1910s and early 1920s legitimized the representation of the individual's personal and private life. The "May Fourth Movement" was born out of the Chinese students' and intellectuals' opposition to the decisions made at the Versailles Conference that ended the First World War in 1919. The handing of the Shandong Province to Japan highlighted the marginal and backward position of China in the international geopolitical order. Animated by nationalist sentiments, the May Fourth movement stood for the urgency of modernizing China and developing a strong nation. The battle that the educated class fought to assert democratic values, the freedom of the individual, and the liberation from oppressing traditional social and political institutions brought the condition of women at the center of intellectual debates. Women became the symbol of centuries of oppression. Their access to education and economic emancipation came to represent important goals in the process of building a modern nation. As Dorothy Ko has shown, the May Fourth male intellectuals' "victimization" of women and the repudiation of "tradition" as a monolithic, homogeneous oppressive system was instrumental to the construction of a new, modern China.[56] Ko's study of the vital literary and artistic culture of gentry women in seventeenth-century Jiangnan suggests that even though women were excluded from public roles

[56] Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1-5.

and could not participate in the civil service examination, they were able to negotiate their identities and agency in their everyday practice and writings in ways that make the inner-outer divide (domestic and public spheres) fluid and continuous.[57] The May Fourth narrative that deemed women as victims of the system is certainly a construction that was informed by nationalistic concerns, but women nonetheless benefited from the new possibilities that this moment of cultural transformation offered them to pursue higher education in public schools and seek a career outside of the domestic space. The figure of the woman as a professional writer emerged around this time.

From the outset, the literary production of women writers was marked by a strong autobiographical impulse.[58] In their writings women variously explored the struggles they had to face to liberate themselves of family and societal constraints and assert their individual autonomy. While women wrote short autobiographies in the 1920s, the autobiographical came to mark women's entire literary output. These women's creative fiction echoed the personal vicissitudes of the authors, and readers became accustomed to read fiction autobiographically. If the interest in exploring the psychology of the individual and a distinct autobiographical strand can be found in the writings of contemporary male authors, the autobiographical reading became inseparable from women's writings.[59] This complicates any attempt to divide women's non-fictional from their fictional production. The relation between women's writings and the

[57] Ibid., 12-17.
[58] Amy Dooling, *Women's Literary Feminism in Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2005), 105.
[59] See for instance Jaroslav Průšek, "Subjectivism and Individualism" in Jaroslav Průšek, *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies of Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Leo Ou-fan Lee (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980). Průšek identifies a lyrical strand within the realist literature that emerged in China in the inter-war period. In his analysis of Lu Xun's 鲁迅 (1881-1936) "My Old Home" (*Guxiang* 故乡, 1921), Průšek notices how the author drags on autobiographical material to subjectivize the approach to the real. The autobiographical serves artistic needs and bespeaks the capacity of individual experience to speak for a broader general situation. See also Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1973). For a discussion of autobiographies proper written by male authors, see Wendy Larson, *Literary Authority and the Modern Chinese Writer: Ambivalence and Autobiography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

autobiographical is inextricably tied to the gendered position of women and expectations about what a woman can write. The association between women and ideas of a "feminine" mode of writing centered on the representation of personal and sexual life and the exploration of the private world as opposed to broader national problems engendered women's writing and enhanced its autobiographical connotation. As Wendy Larson has demonstrated, even though women made a great effort to allow an interaction between women's bodily/emotional experience and their intellectual aspirations in their novels and short stories, these works invariably portray the female body as an obstacle to women's literary accomplishment.[60] In many of these stories, the effacement or sacrifice of the female body is a necessary condition to the woman's attainment of intellectual success. At stake was the legitimacy of women's involvement in writing practices. They continued to perceive the literary field as a male-gendered domain and were constantly forced to "negotiate a fine line between writing as a man, and thereby claiming their own share of the tradition, and writing as a woman, and thereby perhaps producing a modern subjectivity but at the risk of demeaning their labor."[61] The autobiographical was a distinct trait of the gender-inscribed relation between "writing" and "woman." Writing as a woman amounted to writing autobiographically.

In the 1930s, with the emergence of leftist literary theories in response to the Japanese imperialist threat and the internecine war, the concept of the personal underwent a deep transformation. Personal details were considered bourgeois and trivial as the country was fighting for national survival. The notion of literary revolution upheld by May Fourth practitioners evolved into a debate about producing a "revolutionary literature" that spoke to the masses and could serve as a means of social intervention by representing the social and national

[60] Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 110.
[61] Ibid., 206.

crisis. The reorientation of literature toward political goals did not alienate women writers. As Amy Dooling points out, "what distinguishes the mid-1930s is the extent to which socially conscious women authors gravitated toward the leftist cultural groups that organized in response to the political and economic crisis gripping the Chinese nation."[62] Ding Ling, Bai Wei 白薇 (1893-1987), Xie Bingying 谢冰莹 (1906-2000), Guan Lu 关露 (1907-1982) and many other women writers who had emerged in the 1920s became members of the League of the Left-Wing Writers that was formed in 1930 to create a united front of revolutionary writers and develop a program for proletarian literature and aesthetics. The works women produced in these years register their commitment to the revolution. But the shift from the exploration of the personal to the representation of national problems did not erase women's feminist concerns. Women strove to inscribe the gender question into the new agenda of revolutionary literature. Women's engagement with life writings in these years needs to be understood in this context. In their works, fictional and otherwise, women explore the setbacks women had to confront as they joined society as workers, political activists, and revolutionary agents. Their works debunk the idealized image of Nora who leaves the house—which became a metaphor of women's liberation in the 1920s—and reveal how women's emancipation could hardly be accomplished without a thorough social and economic revolution.[63] The rise of full-length autobiographies in the mid-1930s and early 1940s did not occur in contradiction with the standards of revolutionary

[62] Amy Dooling, *Writing Women in Modern China: The Revolutionary Years, 1936-1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3-4.

[63] Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* was translated by Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), one of the most vocal advocate of the May Fourth Movement, in 1919. The figure of Nora who abandons the family in Ibsen's play came to represent the emancipated New Woman. Interestingly, the idealized image of Nora was challenged by Lu Xun in "What Happens after Nora Leaves Home." Lu Xun delivered this a speech he delivered at Beijing Women's Normal College in 1923. In this provocative talk, Lu Xun addresses the difficulties that women encounter after they leave the house. They can hardly find a job and without economic independence freedom is only a dream. As long as society can't guarantee women their economic rights, the "Noras" who leave the house can only be left with the choice of either living a life of degradation or returning home. Lu Xun, "Nala Zouhou Zenyang" 娜拉走后怎样 [What Happens after Nora Leaves Home], reprinted in *Luxun xuanji* 鲁迅选集 [Selected Works of Lu Xun], (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1983), 2: 29-37.

literature, nor was it "a matter of necessity," as Jing M. Wang puts it.[64] Instead, women could and did capitalize on their real experience as organizers, soldiers, and revolutionaries to expose the gap between the feminist and revolutionary agendas across a variety of genres that include fiction, autobiographies, reportage literature, and diaries. Indeed, many full-length autobiographies appeared in these years. Pitched to the pressing themes of the revolution, texts like Xie Bingying's *Autobiography of a Female Soldier* (*Yi ge nübing de zizhuan* 一个女兵的自传, 1936) or Bai Wei's *My Tragic Life* (*Beiju shengya* 悲剧生涯, 1936) sensationalized these women's personal experience—which made these stories all the more marketable—while integrating feminist concerns into the revolutionary discourse.[65]

Women's life writings are understudied in the field of modern Chinese literature. Jing M. Wang's introduction to *Jumping through Hoops* and her monograph on women's autobiographies from the interwar period, *When "I" Was Born: Women's Autobiography in Modern China*, have filled a gap in the field, but Wang's invitation to study women's autobiographies separately from their autobiographical fiction is problematic given the manifest autobiographical edge of women's literary production.[66] Difficult to accept is her suggestion that autobiographies and autobiographical fiction from the 1920s through the 1940s did not serve the

[64] For Wang Jing M., the suppression of the personal in creative writing drew women to autobiography in the 1930s and early 1940s. For her, the rise of full-length autobiographies "was a matter of necessity, a historical inevitability" at a time in which other genres did not permit or limited the expression of the self. Wang Jing M, *Jumping through Hoops*, 14.

[65] Xie Bingying is also remembered for promoting the genres of life writing by taking the initiative of editing and publishing a collection of women's autobiographies in 1945. The texts collected in the anthology *Nǚ zuojia zizhuan xuanji* 女作家自传选集 [Selected Autobiographies of Women Writers] edited by Xie Bingying can be read in translation in Wang Jing's *Jumping through Hoops*. Similar efforts were made before 1945. One illustrative example is the collection of women writers' fictional and non-fictional diaries (fictional and non-fictional) published in 1936. It includes Ding Ling's "A Suicide's Diary" (*Zisha riji* 自杀日记, 1937) and Xie Bingying's "War Diaries" (*Congjun riji* 从军日记, 1928). Jun Sheng 俊生, *Xiandai nǚ zuojia riji xuan* 现代女作家日记选 [Selected Diaries of Modern Women Writers] (Shanghai: Fangu shudian, 1936). These endeavors testify to the existence of a market for women's personal narratives (fictional and non-fictional).

[66] Jing M. Wang, *When "I" Was Born: Women's Autobiography in Modern China* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

same function for women writers. For Jing M. Wang, women tended to use fiction to grapple with issues pertaining to sexuality, to their identities as wives, mothers, and lovers. In their autobiographies, instead, the attention shifts to their professional life. By effacing or minimizing details related to marriage, love, and sexuality, for Wang, they constructed representations of themselves that come across as "disembodied."[67]

Another important work on autobiography in China is Janet Ng's *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century*.[68] In her book, Janet Ng examines autobiographies by men and women to draw attention to the form of autobiography as a tool that allowed writers to express a "new sense of the self" in modern China.[69] She emphasizes the political and sociological function of the genre in modernizing China and complicates the perspective of "influence studies" that attribute the burgeoning of autobiography in China to the influence of Western romanticism. By focusing instead on the mechanisms at work at the site of reception, Janet Ng's approach is akin to Lydia Liu's conceptualization of "translingual practice."[70] Ng develops an interpretive method that debunks notions of the subject as a stable center of meaning to emphasize instead the sociopolitical conditions of cultural and linguistic borrowing.[71] Her project—unmistakably a product of poststructuralist approaches to texts and textual construction of the subject—helps contextualize the rise of autobiography and its ideological function in modern China, but the articulation of the overlapping between the

[67] Wang Jing M, *Jumping through Hoops*, 14-15. Wang Jing's over-emphasis on the "intentionality" of the authors who wanted certain works to be read as autobiography as a criterion to distinguish them from autobiographical fiction is also questionable, if we consider that women's works were read autobiographically and women "consciously" drew on personal experiences to make their works more marketable (Wang Jing, *When "I" Was Born*, 7-8).
[68] Janet Ng, *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).
[69] Ibid., 8.
[70] See Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).
[71] Janet Ng, *The Experience of Modernity*, 15-16.

personal and the political remains greatly underdeveloped. Wang Lingzhen's theorization of the personal in her study of women's autobiographical practices in modern China has filled this lacuna.[72] By exploring autobiography as a *practice* where multiple forces—social, political, national, emotional, intersubjective, material, bodily, subjective, and affective—interact and negotiate with each other, Wang brings out dimensions in modern Chinese women's identity formation that have often been neglected or silenced by dominant political and national discourses. Wang elaborates on the feminist concept of the *personal* and its various articulations in twentieth-century Chinese women's literary creation (fictional and non-fictional) to provide us with interesting insights into the history of modern Chinese women's struggle to carve a space where compliance and complicity with prescribed, orthodox gendered roles are constantly countered and even subverted by bodily, emotional, and affective forces.[73]

While these works have expanded our knowledge of women's personal writings in modern China, they have hardly exhausted the possibilities of inquiry into women's heterogeneous engagement with the personal. Especially understudied are women's life writings from the socialist period. The study of women's autobiographical works from the socialist years has fallen into broader historical and literary investigations into the relation between women and revolution; reconceptualizations of women's experience; and the search for the survival of a feminist narrative.[74] While these works have provided us with new insights into complex gender dynamics, women's identity formation, and the transformation of women's literary output after 1949, the autobiographical remains marginal to these discussions. One reason lies in the widely

[72] Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).
[73] Her approach has greatly inspired and affected my own vision of women's autobiographical writing.
[74] See for instance the essays collected in *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism,* ed. Tani Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). See also Anup Grewal, "A Revolutionary Women's Culture: Rewriting Femininity and Women's Experience in China, 1926-1949" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2012).

shared vision that the Communist Party's effort to subsume gender issues under national questions raised enormous obstacles to women's representations of the personal.[75] What these scholarly approaches have neglected is not so much that narratives of the self did not vanish in the Mao era as that representations of the self were de facto promoted by the Communist Party. My work shows how the popularization of jiantao triggered by the socialist biopolitical agenda paved the way for the unprecedented burgeoning of life writings, and explores how women writers adapted themselves and their writings to the prescriptive models of self-narration.

The socialist discourse of sex-sameness did not erase women's dilemma of writing as a woman (allowing the representation of their intimate life) or writing as a man (erasing the body). *How to Write* and Yang Fu's handbook on criticism and self-criticism remind us that subjective feelings and personal details unrelated to collective and national progress had better be left out of personal accounts. However, the introduction of jiantao into life stories opened up a new horizon of possibilities for women's autobiographical practices. Jiantao, as I discussed before, whether coerced or spontaneous, elicited bodily responses. The practice of jiantao was one that involved the body as much it did the mind. The process by which the body responded in unique ways to normative inscription, enabled women to construct, consciously or not, self-narrations that register the experience of the lived body. I am not suggesting oppose socialist embodied life writings to pre-socialist disembodied life writings. A clear-cut division is unwarranted, given the important role that the body had in earlier autobiographical writings. I nonetheless want to emphasize how the technique of jiantao released women of some inhibitions and biases related to

[75] Jing M. Wang, for instance, claims that the ascent of the Communists, for Wang Jing, put an end to narratives of the self (Jing M. Wang, *When "I" Was Born*, 13). Jing Wang's position is probably the most extreme. But even those who have complicated her vision by exploring the personal in women's writings continue to warn us about the limits that the rise of socialism posed to gender-specific writing. See for instance Amy Dooling, *Writing Women in Modern China*, 23. Wang Lingzhen's study of the personal in women's works before, during, and after the socialist period within the framework of the "autobiographical" remains one of the scholarly texts that, while complicating our understanding of the relation between the autobiographical and women's writing, challenges conventional periodizations.

the portrayal of female affective and bodily experience. Even though reforming one's thoughts was jiantao's priority and the necessary condition to correct the body, the texts I examine show that the actual experience of jiantao made the mind/body hierarchy that jiantao seemed to purport impossible. Chapter Two, for instance, shows that it is the jiantao mode of address that spurs and entitles Yang Mo to indulge in a critical analysis of her physical disease and come to accept a bodily excess that does not fit into the socialist discourse of normative, able bodies. Not for a moment, throughout her diaries, does Yang Mo think that she is misusing jiantao.

Furthermore, the gender-neutral language of jiantao, which seemingly equalized male and female self-narration, loosened the entrenched women/body and men/mind binary associations. This apparent gender-neutrality created a fertile terrain for women to re-cast gender issues in a new light. Chapter One reveals how Ding Ling's self-critique of her public and intellectual life is inflected by her gendered experience as a woman. In the gender-neutral space of jiantao, her professional identity coalesces with her identities as a woman and a lover. The failure of her jiantao to be approved of by her male colleagues reflects not simply the limits of the form to constrain the boundaries of "experience," but also the possibilities it offered Ding Ling to reconnect without apologies her various identities and experiences.

The acquisition of a gender-neutral and class-equalizing language is also crucial to Wei Junyi's effort to link her personal experience of pain with the pain of other people and bodies in her post-Cultural Revolution memoir. Chapter Three argues that the apparent invisibility of Wei's body and the construction of a collective subject/body do not index the dissolution of the individual self in the aftermath of trauma. Rather, building on the long-standing practice of jiantao and the opportunity it offered to negotiate and transcend gender and class differences, Wei Junyi strives to re-create in her critical recollection of personal and collective past the

conditions to overcome, or at least critically engage with, the differences that years of revolution and campaigns failed to erase. Ultimately, the replication of class differences in the memoir's articulation of "clumsy democracy" bespeaks the intrinsic inability of the jiantao form and language to resolve contradictions and bring about a higher level of unity.

Contradiction is the raison d'être of jiantao and a salient characteristic of these women's life writings. Contradiction captures the crisis of the individual torn between her future expectations (her own and/or others') and her present conditions of living; between the desire of transforming herself and the necessity of making her present livable; between survival and responsibility for the community. By "contradiction," I want to underscore the various ways in which these texts reproduce the emotional, bodily, and intellectual struggles these women confronted in the exceptional era of political campaigns and reforms. There is yet another layer to "contradiction." As I mentioned earlier, self-criticism was not an exercise that could be accomplished in one sitting. That diaries, for instance, served as a space to practice jiantao on a daily basis is symptomatic of the protracted effort that jiantao demanded. Self-criticism was a long-term process that required the individual to constantly monitor, edit, and re-edit one's life story. This is reflected in these women's multiple autobiographical attempts at correcting and stabilizing the narrative of their experience. Besides jiantao proper, they wrote diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, essays, and autobiographical fiction. These personal accounts are by no means coherent or complementary. Within the same diary, for instance, Yang Mo's self-critical analysis is subject to changes and the outcomes are sometimes contradictory with one another. In her jiantao, Ding Ling criticizes previous self-critical narratives at the same time as she grounds the new version of her jiantao on material developed in other personal writings.

Contradiction is not necessarily harmful to the way the individual narrativizes her self. A different kind of dialogue can arise between conflicting ideas, emotions, and representations. This dialogue can be productive and generative. Ding Ling's self-criticism, for example, becomes a space where various stages of Ding Ling's life, different personal accounts and writings are brought together and given a different meaning. Her self-criticism takes you to her diaries, her essays, as well as her fictional short stories. The dialogue between texts, temporalities, and experiences adds rather than detract from interpretive layers and possibilities of self-fashioning. This dialogue informs my approach to these women's autobiographical acts. Indeed, I primarily focus on texts that the authors explicitly wanted to be read as personal accounts. These texts unambiguously establish the identification between the narrating "I" and the author that constitutes the prerequisite of what Philippe Lejeune has called the "autobiographical pact" between writer and readers.[76] Without going into the details of the various critiques that poststructuralists have leveled against Lejeune's definition of autobiography, here I want to underscore how the texts this dissertation examines cannot be read in isolation and cannot be separated from these women's fictional creation.[77] They invite a

[76] Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," in *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[77] Even though Lejeune's model of autobiography does not suggest read autobiography as an authentic document that registers the "real" life of the author, its emphasis on the established identity between the narrating "I" and the author—sanctioned by the complicity of the readers—has been challenged by deconstructionists. Since Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (first published in 1967), the emphasis has moved away from authorial voice to the readers' interpretation of the text. This view nullifies notions of authorial intentionality or the possibility of retrieving a unified subject as the source of meaning in the text. See Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-148. In "Autobiography as De-facement" Paul de Man deconstructs not only the role of the author in autobiographical acts, but also the concept of autobiography as a genre. De Man defies the idea that life generates autobiography and rather suggests autobiography be thought of as a "figure of reading or of understanding" that occurs when the two subjects involved in the process of reading—the author and the narrating "I"—"determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution." This specular structure is not historically determined, but is manifested in language. It is "representational" and makes apparent the impossibility of bringing the text to interpretive closure. Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," 67-81. In the list of alternative approaches to autobiography and objections to Lejeune's theory, it is worth remembering Paul John Eakin's efforts to complicate the relation between autobiography and fiction. He emphasizes the fictionality of autobiography and its potential as an act of self-creation. His work has been very influential in studies on

dialogue between temporalities, texts, and representations, fictional and otherwise, that cannot be left unheeded. Life is central to these narratives and the dialogue they entertain. This is why I privilege the term "life writings" over the term "autobiography" that carries with it the idea of a coherent personal narrative with recognizable features.

This dialogue is generative not only in the sense that it can create new meaning by re-arranging the relation between various texts and forms of self-expression, but also in the sense of how it can redirect the subject toward new literary efforts. Yang Mo's case is illustrative. Serious gynecological problems forced Yang Mo to deal with chronic physical pain and bouts of depression that often impeded her from fulfilling her writing goals and her commitments as a Party cadre. Anger, self-commiseration, and other paralyzing affects overrun her diary entries. And yet, the methodic labor of self-analysis that Yang Mo conducts in the diaries helps her revive her desire and motivation to write. One of the outcomes of her journey of self-discovery via jiantao is the production of *Song of Youth* (*Qingchun zhi ge* 青春之歌, 1958), her most famous novel. We cannot separate Yang Mo's diaries from her other writing practices. Their mutually constitutive relationship forces us to re-evaluate the position and relevance of jiantao and connected autobiographical practices not only within the study of women's writing but also within the study of modern Chinese literature in general.

The interconnection between different genres is the organizing principle of this dissertation. More specifically, Chapter One brings to light parallels between jiantao and first-person fiction, which highlights the dialogue between the 1920s and the 1950s. Chapter Two elaborates on the relation between self-criticism and diary writing. Written between the 1940s and the early 1980s, and published in 1985, Yang Mo's diaries offer an exemplary case to look at

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autobiography. Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

the continuous interconnection between self-criticism and personal writing. Chapter Three, by focusing on the memoir that Wei Junyi wrote in the 1980s and published in the 1990s, emphasizes the legacy of self-criticism in post-Cultural Revolution memoiristic literature. The first two chapters deal with two famous authors, thus contributing to existing scholarly discussions of their work and life. Chapter Three, instead, by analyzing the work of an understudied and less known writer, opens up a window into the experience of a more "ordinary" woman.

Literature is a major concern and theme in these women's life writings. Many of these women's literary texts had become the target of criticism. In their jiantao, literature is invariably under trial. A large portion of Ding Ling's self-criticism is devoted to the apology for having written short stories and essays that the Party considered harmful to the collective. Under attack was also Ding Ling's overall approach to literature as a space of individual creation. Similarly, in her diaries, Yang Mo engages with her male colleagues' critiques of her novel, as well as the anxiety that reaching certain literary goals or standards caused her. Coming to terms with the accusations against specific literary works is also central to Wei Junyi's memoir. References to contested literary texts, her own or other people's, abound in her (self)critical recollections.

But jiantao also created a platform from which to re-imagine and reflect on how to write literature and what it means to write good literature. The thematization of literature in self-critical writings is paralleled by the thematization of jiantao in fiction. Jiantao often lends thematic coherence and structural framework to novels and short stories. Think, for instance, of Yang Jiang's 杨绛 (1911-2016) novel *Bath* (*Xizao* 洗澡, 1987). In this text, based on her personal experience, Yang Jiang develops a humorous parody of the self-criticism that intellectuals in a literary institute—evoking the Institute of Chinese Literature that Yang Jiang

and her husband Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书 (1910-1998) joined in 1952—were forced to do in the 1950s. Although differently configured, Wei Junyi's novella "Baptism" (*Xili* 洗礼, 1982) is also centered on the practice of self-criticism. In the novella, the work of self-analysis allows Wang Huifan 王辉凡—a Party cadre who suffers years of thought reform through labor during the Cultural Revolution—to reach a higher understanding of his past attitude as a cadre and bureaucrat. The narrative of responsibility Wei Junyi weaves in the short story is reminiscent of the work of self-reflection she carries out in the memoir. In these texts, self-criticism is an occasion to delve into the issue of truth-telling and the drama of individuals who are concerned with how to change themselves, how to become better individuals, within and beyond political contexts of coercion. Sincerity and truth-telling or truth production are central to the creation and the reception of self-criticism. Only "sincere" self-criticism was granted approval by the higher-ups. Because it is hard to understand how sincerity was assessed and examine the intentions of the authors, I did not engage with the problem of sincerity in the chapters of the dissertation. I think that the problem of truth-telling is better addressed in fictional representations of self-criticism. These texts do not offer a single answer. Most of the times, the attempt to change oneself proves to be a failure. But it is interesting to explore the multiple modes in which self-criticism and the question of sincerity are addressed and represented in fiction. By shifting attention to fiction, the coda gestures toward other possibilities of inquiry into self-criticism and its relation to articulations of the self in modern Chinese writing practices, fictional and non-fictional.

Chapter One
The Trial of Ding Ling in 1957: Miss Sophia's Self-Criticism

In the 1950s, a series of hearings against Ding Ling, the most popular female writer and bureaucrat at the time, forced her to write self-criticism to respond to accusations of individualism, anti-partyism, and other charges. Ding Ling's self-criticism was not accepted; it was harshly criticized by the entire intellectual community. Her self-criticism turned into an event that triggered a set of discussions about Ding Ling the woman, the writer, and the cadre that dramatized complex issues pertaining to articulations of the self, gender configurations, and literary practices in the increasingly politicized context of modernizing, socialist China. In this chapter I take Ding Ling's self-criticism and its reception as an alternative entry point into Ding Ling's life and work, on the one hand, and historically determined cultural discourses on womanhood and autobiographical writing practices, on the other. Her self-criticism offers a paradigmatic example to explore what it meant to write jiantao as a woman in socialist China. The complex gender politics that informs the way Ding Ling wrote self-criticism and how her self-criticism was received by her male colleagues—who unanimously compared Ding Ling to Miss Sophia, the self-indulgent fictional character from her late-1920s short story—encourages us to rethink the possibilities of jiantao as a form that women writers could variously adopt to negotiate their personal experience. In establishing a dialogue between the writer's biographical experience, her earlier first-person fiction, and her life writings, Ding Ling's jiantao is the apt place to start a reflection on the relation between jiantao and women's personal narratives, at the time when self-criticism had reached its most mature form.

The Technology of Self-Criticism

By the mid-1950s, self-criticism was a well-established and widely diffused practice. Undoubtedly, the launching of one campaign after another to eradicate dissent, and oppose sectarianism, corruption, and other detrimental phenomena, created favorable conditions for the proliferation of self-criticism. Every individual or working unit under suspicion was supposed to produce jiantao to confess their shortcomings. But jiantao was not simply a "confession." Acknowledging the charges was only one of the tasks self-criticism had to fulfill. Self-criticism required the individual to perform a work of self-dissection to identify the mistakes, single out the causes of the mistakes, and envision a concrete path of self-correction. In practice, this almost invariably involved the inspection of one's family, class background, and upbringing, where the roots of one's misconduct and/or ideological deviation generally lay concealed. Since its introduction in the early 1940s self-criticism had developed into a recognizable genre with distinct structural and linguistic features. The publication of a large number of manuals and guidelines on how to do self-criticism, as well as collections of exemplary samples, in the early 1950s, contributed to its institutionalization and standardization. By the time Ding Ling had to write her self-criticism, the form and characteristics of jiantao had been widely disseminated and propagated at all levels of society.

The Communist Party promoted the usage of self-criticism in the Yan'an years. At that time, the Party was still striving to consolidate its power across the country. The success of the revolution was contingent on the building of a strong community of loyal people bound by a similar vision of the world and ideological tenets. Yan'an became the laboratory where the Party tried to forge this ideologically integrated community.[1] A body of canonical texts was

[1] David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic*.

established and study sessions were set up to facilitate the dissemination and learning of the new language and ideas. Learning, however, entailed a process of unlearning, for people had to purify themselves of "old ideas" in order to embrace the new worldview. Everyone's life history, thoughts, and behavior were put under review and became an object of discussion in specially formed study groups. These "self-critical autobiographies" became both an exercise for the individual to define their ideological position and overcome their flaws, and a technology of power for the Party to transform people's thoughts and ensure their correct political alignment. The technique was employed in study sessions and was strengthened and popularized during the Rectification Campaign (1942-1944) that the Party launched to reform cadres and intellectuals.

"Stalin Discusses Self-Criticism": Jiantao and Soviet Pedagogy

Many have pointed out that the Nationalists and the collaborationist governments had already experimented with similar techniques of thought reform as tools of mass mobilization during the war years.[2] Some scholars argue that earlier precedents of jiantao can be found in the pre-modern Confucian tradition of self-examination and Buddhist and Daoist confessional practices.[3] I am however unconvinced by the effort to find the origins of jiantao in pre-modern, local traditions to emphasize the Chineseness of this form. Jiantao was a modern technology of the self; it was adopted as a disciplinary, transformative tool whose language and function mirrored the project of building a strong, modern nation. The impact of the Bolshevik practice of self-criticism on the Communists' articulation of criticism and self-criticism cannot be downplayed. Self-criticism emerged as a phenomenon of cultural and linguistic translation of Soviet forms and language that contributed to the dissemination of Hegelian notions of

[2] For instance, see Jan Kiely's *The Compelling Ideal* and Frank Dikotter's *Crime, Punishment and the Prison in Modern China*.
[3] Li Jie, "'Yu Qiuyu, Why Don't You Repent?' A Genealogy of Maoist and Post Maoist Confessions."

teleological history, Marxist-Leninist theory of dialectical materialism, and Communist understanding of class struggle as the main catalyst of historical progress. For self-criticism came to be valued as the Bolsheviks's and the Chinese Communists' distinct tool to transform the individual and move history forward, explanatory material on jiantao was enriched with descriptions of the theoretical underpinnings of the proletarian revolution, dialectical materialism, and class struggle. This material invariably evokes the Soviet experience as the model to be followed. It is not surprising that one of the key pedagogical texts that intellectuals and cadres had to study during the Rectification Campaign was a speech that Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) delivered at the 15th Congress of the Bolshevik Party. The text appears in the collection *Rectification Documents* under the title "Stalin Discusses Self-Criticism."[4] In this text we find the conceptual and linguistic foundations of the Communists' discourse on, and practice of self-criticism. The essay emphasizes how learning to disclose one's mistakes—without shame—parse them, and correct them was necessary to the success of the revolution and the consolidation of the proletarian regime. Through self-criticism the individual could become aware of his wrong ideological position, thoroughly embrace the standpoint of the proletariat, and become a new person. At stake was the overcoming of bourgeois egotism and the forging of selfless, revolutionary agents who would hold the interests of the working class, the Party, and the nation above personal concerns.

In the speech, Stalin boldly declares that "self-criticism is the indispensable, often-used weapon in the Bolshevik arsenal; it is the essential characteristic of Bolshevism: a weapon that is inseparable from the Bolshevik revolutionary spirit."[5] It suffices to compare Stalin's piece with Chinese manuals on how to perform or write self-criticism to notice the striking affinity between

[4] "Sidalin lun ziwo piping" 斯大林论自我批评 in *Zhengfeng wenxian*, 224-231.
[5] Ibid., 225.

the Soviet and the Chinese understanding of self-criticism as a revolutionary tool. The military metaphor, for instance, was ubiquitous in discussions of self-criticism. Jiantao was upheld as "the revolutionary weapon (*wuqi* 武器)" of the Communist Party and the proletariat"; it was considered "a method (*fangfa* 方法), a technique, a means to reform people's thought, to reform Chinese society, and to build the new China.[6]

The tight connection between the individual's transformation and the Party's long-term national and revolutionary goals enhanced the individual's sense of responsibility for the fate of the nation and his/her role as a historical agent. A distinct idealism was embedded in the possibility of transforming the self before the external material conditions and relations of production were altered. Nonetheless, this idealism remained grounded on the materialist vision that tied knowledge, of the self and the outside world, to the "laws of the objective external world."[7] This blend of idealism and materialism informed the way jiantao was theorized and pursued as a practice of self-understanding and self-transformation. In order to change oneself, one had to reach a profound understanding of the self and the world by "seeking truth from facts" (*shi shi qiu shi*).[8] "Seeking truth from facts"—an expression that had gained currency through the writings of Chairman Mao—was the method and the attitude the individual had to embrace to correctly examine one's thoughts and behavior. As Yang Fu explains,

> this attitude means to disallow any personal pre-conceived ideas (*chengjian* 成见), personal feelings (*ganqing* 感情), personal emotions, such as joy and anger, or personal good and bad situations from affecting the way one looks at oneself and world. Seeking truth from facts is the attitude of criticism; it is a sincere, materialist attitude.[9]

[6] Yang Fu, *Tan piping yu ziwo piping*, 4-5.
[7] Mao Zedong, "On Practice*"* in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 297.
[8] Yang Fu, *Tan piping yu ziwo piping*, 37.
[9] Ibid.

In the "daily labor" (*richang de gongzuo* 日常的工作) of self-criticism there was no space for individual feelings, personal opinions, or life predicaments.[10] Jiantao imposed on the individual a technique of rationalization and systematic organization and control of human experience that banished subjective emotions in order to achieve the objective truth. This mechanism of rationalization of human life and the military metaphors dovetailed with the image of a self-less, anonymous hero as the main agent and subject of revolution. The image of the nameless hero became pervasive in the socialist imagery. While this heroic figure did not bear any explicit gender connotation, for women, to live up to this ideal amounted to conceal their gender-specific goals. It is worth reading a passage from a talk Deng Yingchao 邓颖超—a renowned feminist leader and member of the Women's Federation—gave to women officials in 1948: "Because we cannot do women-work singularly or in isolation, the accomplishment of women-work cannot be expressed as a singular and isolated phenomenon either. Therefore, we should work in the spirit of a nameless hero."[11]

When Ding Ling was forced to write in the mode of jiantao in the mid-1950s she was coerced into adopting a discursive technology shaped by military tropes of combat and a de-personalized mode of self-analysis. How did Ding Ling, as a writer who had excelled in the portrayal of female psychology and personal vicissitudes, respond to these strictures? How did these strictures allow her to rethink the possibilities for female self-narration? In what ways did Ding Ling creatively repurpose the weapon of jiantao?

[10] Ibid., 34.
[11] Quoted in Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 50.

Ding Ling, the Icon of Self-narration

In the 1950s Ding Ling was the most popular woman writer and one of the most powerful figures in the Communist apparatus of cultural production. Her ascent up the ranks of the Party's bureaucracy started in the late 1930s when she fled to Yan'an after three years in Nanjing where she was held under house arrest by the Nationalists. Already in 1936 Ding Ling founded and chaired the Chinese Literary and Artistic Association (*Zhongguo wenyi xiehui* 中国文艺协会). Later, she was appointed editor of both the literary column of the Party's organ *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang ribao* 解放日报) and the *Arts and Literature Journal*, and became vice-director of the Chinese Writers' Association (*Zhongguo zuojia xiehui* 中国作家协会).

By the end of the 1940s, Ding Ling's leadership in the literary arena was unrivalled. She was elevated to the role of Chinese cultural ambassador and representative of Chinese women writers. This preeminent position granted her the opportunity to join a number of official delegations to Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union.[12] Her creative work was crucial to her rise to stardom. Interestingly, the highest acknowledgement of her literary success came from the Soviet Union in 1951 when her novel *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (*Taiyang zhao zai sanggan heshang* 太阳照在桑干河上, 1948) obtained the Stalin Prize.[13] Within the international socialist bloc, the Stalin Prize was a highly coveted award that signified personal

[12] Ding Ling recorded some of these experiences in her diary. In 1947 Ding Ling attended a meeting of the International Women's League in Hungary. Later in 1949, she traveled to Prague for the World Peace Conference, and in 1952 went to Moscow to participate in the activities organized for the 100th year anniversary of writer Nicolai Gogol's death. Ding Ling, *Ding Ling quanji* 丁玲全集 [The Complete Works of Ding Ling] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2001), 11: 367-380.

[13] The winners of the Stalin Prize for 1951 were Ding Ling and Zhou Libo 周立波. Ding Ling's novel obtained the second prize while the first prize was awarded to Zhou Libo's *Hurricane* (*Baofeng zhouyu* 暴风骤雨, 1948). Ding Ling and Zhou Libo were the first Chinese writers to obtain such a prestigious literary recognition.

and national prestige.[14] By winning the Stalin Prize, Ding Ling's novel, which portrays the collectivization of agriculture and the human struggles and clashes that followed the structural transformation of the countryside in the process toward the construction of a socialist society, officially entered the canon of socialist realist literature. While Ding Ling had turned to proletarian literature in the 1930s, the novel represented Ding Ling's complete abandonment of the May Fourth self-focused, bourgeois literature and her endorsement of the vision of artistic creation as a form of revolutionary practice that Chairman Mao laid out in his 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art." And yet, the reception of the novel in Chinese literary circles was neither smooth nor uncontroversial. In her diary, Ding Ling records the difficulty she had to face to have the novel published. From her diary entries it is easy to perceive the influential role that Zhou Yang 周扬, the most authoritative literary bureaucrat at that time, played in leveling criticism against the novel and dragging out the process of its publication:

> I know that he [Zhou Yang] truly wants me to work for him; he knows that I still have some principles and, among many writer- and artist-cadres, he is keen on using me, but toward my writing he intentionally shows indifference.[15]

Many have written about the personal conflict between Ding Ling and Zhou Yang and how their antagonistic relation determined Ding Ling's disgrace.[16] But it might be misguided to attribute

[14] Nicolai Volland explains that by 1949 the Stalin Prize was extended to the new socialist states and became an institution that while defining standards of writing that complied with the tenets of socialist realism, promoted "the integration of the socialist world, led by the Soviet Union." See Nicolai Volland, "Inventing a Proletarian Fiction for China: The Stalin Prize, Cultural Diplomacy, and the Creation of a Pan-Socialist Identity," in *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture*, ed. Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 96.

[15] By "my writing," Ding Ling meant her still unpublished novel. The passage is from the diary entry dated June 14, 1948. Later in the diary, she mentions giving the draft to Qiao Mu 乔木 and how he helped her publish the novel. *Ding Ling quanji*, 11: 337.

[16] See for instance Yang Guixin 杨桂欣, *Ding Ling yu Zhou Yang de enyuan* 丁玲与周扬的恩怨 [The Grudge between Ding Ling and Zhou Yang] (Wuhan: Hubei changjiang chubanshe, 2006); Shang Changbao, *Zuojia jiantao*, 257-258; He Guimei 贺桂梅, *Zhuanzhe de shidai: 40-50 niandai zuojia yanjiu* 转折的时代：40-50 年代作家研究 [The Transitional Period: Studies on Writers from 1940s-1950s] (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 209.

Ding's downfall solely to the power struggle with Zhou Yang. Ding Ling's reputation as a woman cadre and writer was contentious from the outset, and remained contentious even when she reached the apogee of her success. In spite of her efforts since the early 1940s to define herself as a loyal cadre and a promoter of the revolutionary new aesthetics that turned to the masses as the main source of inspiration, Ding Ling was never able to shed the legacy of her involvement in the May Fourth cultural movement and the subjective mode of her earlier literary experiments. As He Guimei emphatically puts it, "unlike Zhao Shuli 赵树理, Zhou Libo, He Jingzhi 贺敬之, Guo Xiaochuan, and other writers in the liberated areas, Ding Ling was the one who bore a rather distinct 'May Fourth' imprint."[17] In the speech Zhou Yang gave at the 1957 trial against Ding Ling, he remarked that: "her [Ding Ling's] individual self often emerges conspicuously in her works. Many readers wonder why Ding Ling cannot abandon the "I" and continues to portray her individual self so prominently."[18] In spite of the reorientation of her literary creation away from May Fourth individualism and toward the masses, male intellectuals continued to consider Ding Ling the icon of female self-narration.

Ding Ling emerged in the late 1920s as one of the most creative writers in the May Fourth constellation. The "May Fourth" has become a convenient designation for the movement of cultural renovation that sprang out of the students' and intellectuals' indignation at, and protests against, the handing of the Shandong province to Japan ratified by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The threat of foreign imperialism and the anxiety about China's military and

[17] He Guimei, *Zhuanzhe de shidai*, 206.

[18] Zhou Yang, "Zhou Yang tongzhi de fayan" 周扬同志的发言 [The Speech of Comrade Zhou Yang], in *Dui Ding, Chen, fandang jituan de pipan—zhongguo zuojia xiehui dangzu kuoda huiyishang de bufen fayan* 对丁、陈反党集团的批判—中国作家协会党组扩大会议上的部分发言 [The Critiques against the Ding-Chen Anti-party Clique—Some of the Speeches at the Enlarged Meeting of the Party Leading Group of the Chinese Writers' Association], material for internal circulation (Neibu jiaoliu, September 1957), 4. This collection, which includes some of the speeches that intellectuals made at the trial, has been crucial to my study of Ding Ling's case in this chapter. I cannot thank enough Professor Shang Changbao for having shared with me this material when I met with him in Tianjin in the winter of 2015.

cultural backwardness triggered a wide cultural discourse on the urgency of constructing a modern nation-state, building democracy, and introducing modern, Western educational structures and curricula. Iconoclasm was the hallmark of the May Fourth generation. They waged war against the old order, repudiated local traditions, and redefined the individual as an autonomous agent free of the fetters of patriarchal ideology, kinship relations, and Confucian etiquette. In literature, this translated into a revolution of language, forms, and subject matter. There is abundant scholarship on the popularization of the vernacular language at the expense of classical Chinese as the privileged writing medium and the introduction of foreign literary genres and techniques (realism, stream of consciousness, modernism, etc.).[19] What I want to reiterate here is the impact that the assertion of the individual as a self-conscious entity and his/her uncompromising claims to freedom and autonomy had on the rise of the confessional in May Fourth literature. This manifested in the growing interest in the exploration of the innermost feelings of the individual, the scrutiny of his/her psychology, and his/her capacity (or lack thereof) to make free choices.[20]

Ding Ling made her debut on the literary scene in this context of enhanced transformation and liberation. This was an unprecedented moment for women. The May Fourth ideal of free love, for instance, became a symbol of independence for women and denunciation of centuries of oppression inflicted upon them through the Confucian institutions of family and marriage. As family ties loosened, women found new possibilities to carve out a space for

[19] See for instance Yan Jiayan's "The Origins, Features, and Evaluation of the May Fourth New Vernacular," in *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 2, 4 (Dec. 2008), 599-616; Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture and Translated Modernity, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[20] The belief in free will and the individual's capacity to determine his/her life resonates with the Confucian idea that the individual can be perfected through education and self-cultivation. This belief was one the most important legacies of the May Fourth to the Communist discourse of self-transformation through self-criticism. The possibility of the individual of overcoming him/herself was grounded on the idea that the human mind is malleable and a strong will can guide the individual onto the right path.

themselves outside the confines of the domestic sphere. Many educated women like Ding Ling took up the pen and pursued a career as professional writers. Self-representation was a paramount concern for women writers. With their work, they supplied a gender perspective to the male dominated literary representation and discourse. In this respect, Ding Ling stood out for her blunt portrayal of female psychology, sexuality, and the ambiguities and uncertainties underlying women's position in the modern, urban space. "Miss Sophia's Diary" ("Shafei nüshi de riji" 莎菲女士的日记), in particular, was a breakthrough for its daring representation of female sexual desires and feminine decadence. Miss Sophia became the archetype of the dilemma women had to face after freeing themselves of the constrictions of the family. Most of Ding Ling's early works, in fact, feature self-liberated women who strive to define themselves and fulfill their desires or ambitions.

As Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker notes, because Ding Ling's early short stories are all about

> lone young women […] living unconventional lives in the amorphous semimodern city, they appear to share certain superficial characteristics with their author. Because of this many of Ding Ling's readers assumed that Ding Ling's stories mirrored in diverse way the story of her life.[21]

Indeed, Ding Ling's work was read autobiographically; her fictional characters were perceived as the alter ego of the author.[22] In her analysis of Ding Ling's early works (1927-1929), Feuerwerker complicates the autobiographical reading showing how the biographical material is always transformed and mediated by literary, fictional strategies, and that the author-character

[21] Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 19.

[22] The autobiographical reading was prominent in the 1930s, continued in the 1950s, and has remained the dominant interpretive perspective in more contemporary literary criticism. See for instance Qin Linfang's 秦林芳 discussion of Ding Ling's early works in *Ding Ling pingzhuan* 丁玲评传 [A Critical Biography of Ding Ling] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2012), 50-67. In a concise but incisive manner, Qin Linfang writes: "In brief, 'self-representation' (*jiang ziji huasheng zai zuopin li* 将自己化生在作品里) was the orientation of Ding Ling's early works" (52).

identification was informed by the identification of the readers with the fictional characters. The phenomenon by which the readers' identification with the character propelled the association between author and character is compelling but it does not explain why the author-character identification continued well into the socialist period and became a "burden she [Ding Ling] was condemned to bear" even after Ding Ling had turned to leftist literature and disavowed the early subjectivism.[23]

Ding Ling's shift from individualism to collectivism did not happen overnight and was less radical than her conversion to communism and its literary and artistic underpinnings might suggest. It has been noted how Ding Ling's earlier concern with women's subject position and living conditions, even though stripped of its earlier ostensibly feminist connotation, persisted and surfaced in various ways in her fictional and personal writings throughout the 1940s.[24] Take, for instance, Ding Ling's incisive and provocative critique of gender hierarchy and women's subordination in the Communist ruled areas in "Thoughts on March 8" (*San ba jie you gan* 三八节有感). The essay, published in the literary column of *Liberation Daily* on March 9, 1942, was emblematic of Ding Ling's deep-rooted sensibility to gender inequalities and discrimination. For its audacious commentary on the hypocrisy of Communist gender politics, the essay was subject to fierce criticism. Ding Ling's self-critique of the essay not long after its publication did not clear her compromised position, and the essay, together with other controversial writings, like

[23] Feurwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 21.
[24] See, for instance, Tani Barlow, *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling* (Boston: Beacon Street: 1989), 1-48. As Tani Barlow says: "Ding Ling did not make the transition from May Fourth Chinese feminism to Party communism easily. […] No matter how critical Ding Ling might have been of contemporary womanhood, she never stopped insisting that equality of women and men was central" (30). Interestingly, as Wang Xiaojue has shown, traces of Ding Ling's earlier feminist preoccupations can be found even in *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River*, her most mature venture in socialist aesthetics. Wang's feminist reading of the novel highlights Ding Ling's incessant struggle to reconcile feminism and socialism (even though it proved to be a failure). See Wang Xiaojue's "Over Her Dear Body: Ding Ling's Politicization after the Socialist Revolution," in Wang Xiaojue's *Modernity with a Cold War Face: Reimagining the Nation in Chinese Literature across the 1949 Divide* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 108-154.

her 1940s short stories "In the Hospital" (*Zai yiyuan zhong* 在医院中) and "When I Was in Xia Village" (*Wo zai Xiacun de shihou* 我在霞村的时候) featured as solid evidence of Ding's anti-partyism in the 1950s trial.

And yet, it is worth asking why, in the context of the trial, Ding Ling's literary production from the 1940s, which, in all its ambiguity, does however reflect a fundamental transformation of her literary and political outlook, redrew attention to the earlier fiction. Moreover, why did Ding Ling's literary creation merge with Ding Ling the woman? Why, in particular, was she paralleled to Miss Sophia, by far her most extreme, and the most remote (in the long span of Ding Ling's career), fictional character?

The Ding Ling Case

In the summer of 1955, at the dawn of a new political campaign against counter-revolutionaries (*sufan* 肃反), the Chinese Writers' Association orchestrated a series of meetings to assess Ding Ling's history and political stance.[25] This first round of debates concluded on September 30th with the drafting of the report "On the Anti-party Factionalist Activities Carried out by Ding Ling, Chen Qixia and Others and Some Thoughts on How to Treat These People," which was soon handed to both the Propaganda Department and the Central Committee.[26] The report includes a detailed list of crimes substantiating Ding Ling's oppositional attitude and conspiratorial activity since the Yan'an period. The report enlists her association with "bad

[25] The Sufan Movement, which lasted until the early months of 1956, was one of the many systematic campaigns aiming at wiping out political opponents and strengthening the centralized leadership of the Party. The movement caused the detention of a large number of cadres and intellectuals suspected of being reactionaries. Many were labeled as counterrevolutionaries and were sent to labor camps. Only some of the accused people were reinstated in 1956. See Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and after: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 122-124.

[26] "Zhongguo zuojia xiehui dangzu guanyu Ding Ling, Chen Qixia deng jinxing fandang xiaojituan huodong ji dui tamen de chuli yijian de baogao" 中国作家协会党组关于丁玲、陈企霞等进行反党小集团活动及对他们的处理意见的报告, quoted in full in Yang Guixin, *Ding Ling yu Zhou Yang de enyuan*, 74.

elements" in Yan'an, her affair with writer Xiao Jun 萧军—a dissident voice in Yan'an—her "anti-Party" essay "Thoughts on March 8," as well as her decision to publish Wang Shiwei's 王实味 article "Wild Lilies" (*Ye baihehua* 野百合花) in the literary supplement of *Liberation Daily*.[27] The list goes on to highlight Ding Ling's unwillingness, after 1949, to adhere to the Party's literary guidelines and her sectarian behavior, testified by her collaboration with Chen Qixia 陈企霞. Ding Ling was accused of having helped Chen turn *Arts and Literature Journal* into a domain of personal control and of having rejected the Party's critique of their editorial work. More importantly, the report declares, using her influential status within the literary and cultural arena, Ding Ling sowed discord among Party members and became a referent point for those who resisted the Party's leadership and supervision: "Ding Ling has become the converging point of all the anti-Party undercurrents of the literary field."[28] The report marked the beginning of Ding Ling's troubles. The accusations were severe and multiple, and dragged Ding Ling into the inescapable, vicious world of self-criticism.

Ding Ling's Self-criticism

Ding Ling's self-criticism is a more than twenty pages long piece in which Ding Ling digs into the last thirty years of her life and patiently addresses each and every charge leveled against her. The text I focus on is the last self-criticism that Ding Ling delivered at the trial in

[27] In the essay, remembering his love and revolutionary martyr comrade Li Fen, Wang Shiwei indulges in a critical reflection on why young revolutionaries in Yan'an have lost their enthusiasm and fervor. The memory of Li Fen turns into a pretext to tackle the system of power relations and social inequalities in Yan'an. For his outspoken criticism, Wang Shiwei was condemned. He was beheaded on July 1, 1947. The text can be read in English in Dai, Qing, David E. Apter, Timothy Cheek, and Jinshou Song, *Wang Shiwei and "Wild Lilies": Rectification and Purges in the Chinese Communist Party, 1942-1944* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

[28] "Zhongguo zuojia xiehui dangzu guanyu Ding Ling, Chen Qixia deng jinxing fandang xiaojituan huodong ji dui tamen de chuli yijian de baogao."

September 1957.[29] Like typical writings of this kind, the text is structurally and thematically fragmented. It features five sections, each comprising a number of subsections (the subsections are sometimes further broken into sub-points):

I. the Nanjing issue
   1) the mistakes in Nanjing
   2) the attitude toward the mistakes
   3) how I left Nanjing
II. the mistakes in Yan'an
   1) supporting Xiao Jun and other anti-Party elements
   2) distorting the editorial directions of the literary column of the Party's journal
   3) my dangerous anti-Party articles
III. the enlarged meetings of the Party leading group of the Chinese Writers' Association from 1949 until last year
   1) when I was working (building an independent realm, the faction, creating a cult of myself…)
   2) when I was not working (refusing to collaborate, separatism, anti-Partyism, one-bookism)
IV. anti-Party activities over the past year
   1) the anti-Party clique issue
   2) withdrawing from the Writers' Association; separatism in the literary arena
   3) my relationship with rightist elements
V. my initial recognition

But the structural division is countered by the unifying forceful voice of the speaking subject. It is not a timid "I" that emerges in the text, but an unabashed subject that strives to define herself, as she examines her actions and motivations using the seemingly de-personalized language of jiantao. This is how for instance she addresses, in the first section of her self-criticism, the imputation of collaboration with the enemy during the years of house arrest in Nanjing and her relation to her former partner and traitor Feng Da 冯达:

> Feng Da was originally a Communist, but after being seized he betrayed the revolution, he revealed my address, and sold me out. Anyone would hate bitterly a traitor like him, but I did not develop any class hatred toward a traitor who had sold

[29] Ding Ling, "Ding Ling de jiantao"丁玲的检讨, in *Zai zhongguo zuojia xiehui dangzu kuoda huiyi shang Ding Ling, Chen Qixia, Feng Xuefeng de jiantao* 在中国作家协会党组扩大会议上丁玲、陈企霞、冯雪峰的检讨 [Self-criticism of Ding Ling, Chen Qixia and Feng Xuefeng at the Enlarged Meeting of the Party Leading Group of the Chinese Writers' Association] (Zhongguo zuojia xiehui, internal publication, 1957).

> out his own comrade, nor did I feel personal hatred. Even though in the beginning I scolded him, I wanted to break up with him, I quickly believed his lies—he said that he wasn't the one who had provided my address. I believed his fake confession. Because of my own weakness, my tender feelings, my lack of correct political stance, because I wasn't able to look at things from a sharp, complex class struggle perspective, I didn't stand on the side of revolution, on the side of the Party and didn't hate Feng Da. Instead, I forgave him, I trusted him, and thought he could still give me some kind help. As a result I continued to live with him […] he asked me to write a note—it was a confession—I first didn't realize it, but it was obvious that by then Feng Da was not simply a traitor, he was working for the spies. I didn't stop him, I didn't fight against him. Rather, I listened to his words and shamelessly thought of even using his connection with the enemy (I also wanted to use Yao Pengzi's 姚蓬子 relation to the enemy) to relax the enemy's attention toward me.[30]

The incident in Shanghai—how Ding Ling ended up in the hands of the Nationalists and what she did after being captured and brought to Nanjing—remained one of the most problematic pages of Ding Ling's entire life.[31] Even later, Ding Ling continued to claim that she was kidnapped because Feng Da, betraying her, had revealed to the Nationalists their home address in Shanghai. In the passage above, the episode is recounted in a dramatic tone. Rather than the specific word choice, it is the rhythm of the language, the ever-increasing pace built through a syntax primarily made of paratactic clauses and anaphoric usage of words (e.g., "because…because…"), that lends to the narrative voice a distinct dramatic force. The drama

[30] Ding Ling, "Ding Ling de jiantao," 2-3. In the memoir on the years of captivity in Nanjing that Ding Ling wrote in the 1980s, Ding Ling remembers meeting with Yao Pengzi when the Nationalists resettled her in a house in the alley named Mingwalang (明瓦朗). Yao Pengzi was her neighbor. Ding Ling had met Yao Pengzi at Shen Congwen's 沈从文 wedding in Shanghai in 1928. Back then, Yao Pengzi was editor of *Literature Monthly* (*Wenxue yuebao* 文学月报). The excitement of running into a friend turned soon into a huge disappointment upon realizing that Yao Pengzi had left the CCP and was collaborating with the KMT. See Ding Ling's *Wangliang shijie* 魍魉世界 [World of Demons and Monsters], in *Ding Ling quanji*, 10: 51-55.

[31] Ding Ling was fully rehabilitated in 1979. In the report that the Writers' Association issued in 1979, the past decisions on Ding Ling's mistakes were reversed, except for the one related to the "Nanjing issue." The report says: "[As for the issue of the time she spent in Nanjing after being abducted by the Nationalist Party] On May 19, 1975, the special investigation group of the Central Committee revisited the case and confirmed Ding Ling guilty. Since the evidence supporting this verdict was the same as the evidence presented in 1956, we maintain the position the Central Committee laid out in 'The Verdict after the Examination of the Historical Problem of Comrade Ding Ling' on October 24, 1956." See "Yi jiu qi jiu nian wu yue san ri zhongguo zuojia xiehui fucha bandongshi 'guanyu Ding Lign tongzhi youpai wenti de fucha jielun'" 一九七九年五月三日中国作家协会复查办公室《关于丁玲同志右派问题的复查结论》 [May 3, 1979: 'A Revised Verdict on Comrade Ding Ling's Rightism' by the Review Office of the Chinese Writers' Association] in *Ding Ling quanji*, 10: 107-109. The Nanjing issue will be cleared only in the 1980s.

that unfolds is the drama of a woman caught in the midst of a wide range of relationships: her affair with Feng Da and the desire to receive protection from him ("I forgave him, I trusted him, and thought he could still give me some kind help"), the fear of aggravating her position in the eyes of the Nationalists, back then, and the pressure of explaining, in the present, her past actions to the Communist Party. This subjective perspective surfaces in a text that was meant to neutralize personal feelings to construct an "objective" analysis of the mistakes and their causes. Even though camouflaged by the political idiom of class struggle, a personal drama of relationships (that are always relationships between a woman and a man or a woman and many men) is played out.

It is remarkable that Ding Ling does not make any effort to mitigate her mistakes or crimes, and present a better or improved version of herself. She does mention her "weakness" and her "tender feelings," but this apparent fragility is immediately countered by her effort to exploit her relationship with Feng Da and his affiliation with the enemy to her own benefit. This seemingly contradictory account of herself—the fragile, gullible woman who needs the help and the company of Feng Da, on the one hand, and the woman who finds ways to free herself at the cost of manipulating personal relations, on the other—draws attention to herself not as a simple victim of a scheme, but as an active subject with a specific agenda.

If the "I" of Ding Ling in Nanjing seems past, throughout the self-critical piece, the gap between the past sinful I and the present speaking I is increasingly shortened, rather than widened. There is little discrepancy between past and present, as we read in the section where Ding Ling examines her mistakes after 1949 and how she convinced Chen Qixia to remain in Beijing and work with her:

> I needed him because I had to write and had to work as a cadre. So he remained. I was using him. Together we took on the editorial work of *Arts and Literature*

> *Journal*, which became our personal domain. He wanted to build his own realm. I allowed him to do what he wanted because he supported me, and more importantly, he helped me a great deal to find time to achieve my other ambition: he helped me find time to write.[32]

Ding Ling builds an ambiguous and yet seemingly coherent narrative of herself. The manipulative strategizing of the years in Nanjing returns in her later conduct. The convergence of the past and present self complies with the nature of self-criticism that presupposes a yet-to-be reformed subject. Unlike confession, which crystallizes the moment of conversion of the self, jiantao represents the self's work of coming to terms with the mistakes in the long path toward self-transformation. Embedded is a different temporal conceptualization of the self. Self-criticism does not trace a historical trajectory of transformation that pits the present, speaking self against a past self, but a work of excavation of one's history and thoughts that elicits self-recognition.

Counter-intuitively, it is the temporal collapse of the past in the present that allows Ding Ling to develop an assertive, militant voice in the text not *in spite of* but *because* of the critical engagement with her wrong and negative behaviors and ideas. This is especially palpable in the passages in which Ding Ling elaborates on writing and the "one-bookism" (*yi ben zhuyi* 一本主义) charge. The jarring term "one-bookism" came to synthesize Ding Ling's views on literary creation and the process of formation of a writer that she presented in a speech entitled "Settling Down among the Masses" (*Dao qunzhong zhong qu luohu* 到群众中去落户), delivered at the Second Congress of Representatives of China's Literature Workers on September 25, 1953. Echoing Mao's "Talks in Yan'an," in her speech, Ding Ling called writers to turn to the masses to find inspiration and produce a work of art that is in tune with real life. But by over-emphasizing the encounter with life, Ding Ling saw literary creation as a labor that had to be

[32] Ding Ling, "Ding Ling de jiantao," 10.

freed of the supervision of the relevant institutions and their normative instructions. While attending to the external world, writing for Ding Ling was an independent enterprise, the product of an individual subject.

The accusation of one-bookism was built around Ding Ling's ideas on literature and her seeming effort to carve a space for literary creation that was unaffected from political restrictions. Her vision seemed an indirect attack to the Party's effort to guide the world of cultural production and therefore a tangible evidence of Ding Ling's anti-partyism. In her self-criticism, Ding Ling devotes a long section to the examination of her faulty approach to literature; so long and articulated that the final statement in which Ding Ling discredits her "one-bookish" attitude to literature and invites writers to stand on the side of the Party to write a good book –"If you really want to write a good book, you have to really stand on the side of the Party, rely on the Party's leadership, and work for the people with a modest heart"—ultimately pales in comparison to the extended analysis of her flawed convictions. She quotes many passages from the controversial speech and critically analyzes the motives lying behind her words, as we read in this excerpt:

> The speech conceals an attack to the Party's leadership of the arts and literature bureaus. In the speech, the Party's leadership is seen as something that can only hinder creation: "By any means I oppose our creation organizations, but I believe that it is wrong to think that a writer can never leave their leadership. Writers are not children who cannot leave their nanny; they have to grow independent. Regardless of how creation is guided, a work of art is a personal creation: collectivity does not mean that we have always to create collectively. […] A writer is not someone who develops through training; a writer has to go to the masses." This passage is subtle. Sure, the form of creation organizations can be debated. On the surface, there seems to be nothing condemnable in my words, but what I really meant (*wo de zhongxin de yisi* 我的中心的意思) is to oppose the leadership's patriarchal system. This is why I said that a writer is not someone who develops through training.[33]

[33] Ibid., 12.

In analyzing the speech, Ding Ling goes even further saying that her call to "settle among the masses" was actually a pretext to live in the countryside, escape the responsibility to collaborate with the Party, and circumvent the supervision of the literary organizations. Her call for writers to write a good book—"in this epoch of heroes, we should have an ideal, we should have the heart of a hero, we should have a clear target for our fight: writing a good book (*yi ben hao shu* 一本好书)[34]—was finally a projection of her personal ambition to write a great work of art and consolidate her fame and success:

> Because I thought that I could still write a book, I became arrogant, I looked down on everyone, I didn't accept any criticism, I didn't reform my mistakes. Moreover, I wrongly believed that if only I could write another book, I would have readers, I would have the masses supporting me; and the Party would think highly of me. I thought that I would have nothing to worry about, that no one could knock me down (*wo shi da bu dao de* 我是打不倒的).[35]

Interestingly, the idea that writing a good book could make her stronger and no one could knock her down can be found, albeit in variation, in Ding Ling's June 22, 1948 diary entry: "as long as I write a book, a good book, I'm not afraid of anything; petty people can't do anything to me."[36] Scholars have read this line as an allusion to Ding Ling's adversarial relationship with Zhou Yang in the late 1940s.[37] It most certainly is. What is striking is the profusion, in Ding Ling's self-critical text, of references, explicit or not, to a variety of Ding Ling's writings or oral interventions: short stories, speeches, conversations, and diary entries. The opening of the last section of her jiantao, "My Initial Recognition" (*wo de chubu renshi* 我的初步认识), too, establishes a connection with Ding Ling's personal diary. Ding Ling recalls a meeting with

[34] Ding Ling, "Dao qunzhong luohu" 到群众落户 [Settling Down among the Masses], in *Ding Ling quanji*, 7: 366-367.
[35] Ding Ling, "Ding Ling de jiantao," 13.
[36] *Zhi you wo you zuopin, you hao zuopin, wo jiu yiqie dou bu pa, xiao ren shi mei you banfa de* 只要我有作品，有好作品，我就一切都不怕，小人是没有办法的! See *Ding Ling wenji*, 11: 342.
[37] See, for instance, Shang Changbao's *Zuojia jiantao*, 258.

Chairman Mao Zedong and paraphrases the words the Chairman told her before going to dinner: "Chairman Mao said that to assess a person one needs to look at what this person did, not over a few years, but over a couple of decades."[38] The same episode is documented in Ding Ling's diary entry from June 15, 1948: "After we walked, he [Mao Zedong] invited me to have dinner with him. I was sitting under a tree in his courtyard; he said that history is a matter of decades; in assessing a person, one needs to look at what the person did over a couple of decades."[39]

Self-citation is a mechanism that Ding Ling adopts frequently in her jiantao. References to her own words exist in a space where they are always in dialogue with the accusations of members of the Party, pronouncements made by her male colleagues, and their judgments on her actions, words, or beliefs. Ding Ling's admission of guilt, throughout the piece, and her complicit denunciation of friends, co-workers, and comrades—section four of the jiantao, in which Ding Ling describes her relationship with anti-Party elements, is Ding Ling's exposure of the people with whom she was affiliated—did not mute or resolve the drama of the self trying to define itself vis-à-vis the other. The tension between the female subject's self-understanding and other people's expectations or projections of the self remains palpable throughout Ding Ling's self-criticism. Self-citation has yet another effect: that of bringing together multiple moments of Ding Ling's biographical and literary life. In the jiantao, her personal predicaments, her relationships, her affairs, he professional successes, her demise, as well as references to her writings, speeches, or conversations co-exist and turn the self-critical piece into a rich documentation of Ding Ling's life as a woman, a bureaucrat, and a writer.

In reading Ding Ling's self-criticism, the Soviet trope of the weapon leaps to mind. Ding Ling's jiantao stages the struggle Ding Ling faced in trying to lay bare and conceal, at once, her

[38] Ding Ling, "Ding Ling de jiantao," 22.
[39] Ding Ling, *Ding Ling quanji*, 11: 338.

individualized perspective to obtain recognition and understanding. She re-tools the analytical strategies and the language of jiantao to create a space in which her "I" is ultimately not annihilated but emerges forcefully:

> My thoughts are obviously corrupted capitalist thoughts, my head brims with ideas of individual fame and status. I am a writer. Therefore I care about one book, or many books. Books are my capital, my property. Exactly as what Comrade Xu Guangping 许广平 said, reporting the things I said to her in 1949: "writing a book is one's own thing." I did say that, because that's my real thought. Since books are my property and capital, I could use this capital to demand the Party fame, a prestigious position, and special care. Why has a person like me been so reckless and bold? The more criticism she received, the fiercer she acted? Because I believe that having a book, having a capital, fame, and prestige would make the Party care about me. Actually, it would offer special care to me.[40]

Couched in heavily politicized language, Ding Ling's self-definition "I am a writer" stands out loudly; it bears a strikingly self-assertive force. Ding Ling used jiantao as a tool—a weapon, in fact—to strategically accommodate her experience and self-understanding as a woman, a writer, and a Party comrade in the prescribed language and formulas. The replacement of an explicitly gendered register with a politicized language does not efface her concerns to be accepted as a woman writer. Her effort to reconcile self-definition with the expectations of the contemporary male political and literary circle did not resolve the tension between them but made it all the more conspicuous.

The Failure of Ding Ling's Self-Criticism

The rise and subsequent downfall of writer Ding Ling in the 1950s resembles the predicament of many intellectuals, writers, and cadres in socialist China. To no avail were the self-criticisms Ding Ling delivered at different meetings, organized by the Chinese Writers'

[40] Ding Ling, "Ding Ling de jiantao," 13.

Association in the summer of 1957, to demonstrate her willingness to reform herself and win the authorities' forgiveness. In less than a couple of months' she was removed from her positions as chair of the Chinese Literary and Artistic Association and vice-chair of the Chinese Writers' Association, lost Party membership, and was sent into exile to Beidahuang, in Manchuria. In spite of Ding Ling's effort to take the charges seriously in her jiantao, her self-criticism was condemned as insincere and was ultimately deemed as further evidence of her individualist, capitalist-bourgeois mentality, and her "one-bookish" approach to literature.[41]

In principle, there seems to be nothing unique to the failure of Ding Ling's self-critical text at the trial; even after multiple rewrites, jiantao seldom led to absolution. And yet, reading through the comments of the witnesses of the trial—mainly male intellectuals and writers—one cannot fail to detect a distinct obstinacy to the attacks against Ding Ling's self-criticism. The trial against Ding Ling overlapped with the trials against her colleagues Chen Qixia and Feng Xuefeng 冯雪峰. Accusations of counter-revolutionary affiliation bound the three intellectuals. Even though none of them obtained forgiveness, Ding Ling's self-criticism was the one that was considered the most disappointing and problematic.[42] Why? Structurally and linguistically, Ding Ling's jiantao seems a "typical" piece of self-criticism. And yet, something went awry. The critiques were leveled not only against the specific content of her jiantao but also against the style of her writing considered too self-focused, her fake sobbing, and her acting as a "wronged

[41] Li Xiangdong 李向东, *Ding Chen fandang jituan: yuan'an shimo* 丁陈反党集团：冤案始末 [The Ding-Chen Anti-Party Clique: A Case of Injustice from the Beginning to the End] (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2006), 192-207.

[42] The collection *The Critiques against the Ding-Chen Anti-party Clique* includes the responses of intellectuals to the self-criticism of Ding Ling and Chen Qixia. In these interventions, Chen Qixia's self-criticism is praised as a manifestation of Chen's personal improvement, while Ding Ling's self-criticism is harshly condemned. *Dui Ding, Chen, fandang jituan de pipan*.

little wife" (*weiweiquqi de xiao xifu* 委委屈屈的小媳妇) at the trial.[43] Interestingly, in these vitriolic attacks, Ding Ling was compared to Miss Sophia, the morbid, self-indulgent female character from the fictional diary Ding Ling wrote in the late 1920s. How do we understand the resurrection of Miss Sophia in the context of Ding Ling's trial and the identification between Ding Ling and the literary figure propelled by Ding Ling's jiantao?

Miss Sophia was a pervasive trope in the responses of male intellectuals to Ding Ling's self-criticism. Miss Sophia seemed an appropriate example to illustrate the centrality of the individual "self" in Ding Ling's writings and an apt metaphor to describe the author's self-centeredness and other negative personality traits. In this chapter, however, I show that the identification between Ding Ling and Miss Sophia was the fruit of a more complex mechanism of autobiographical interpretation; one that is not so much based on the mimetic principle by which the text can be seen as a reflection of the author's life. The autobiographical reading is not dependent on how much Sophia's life resembles Ding Ling's life, and the other way around, either in the late 1920s or in the 1950s (even though male intellectuals often compared Sophia's attitude to love to Ding Ling's promiscuity). The bond between the biographical and the literary/fictional occurs in language, in the way the female subject narrates and represents herself.

The gender identity of Ding Ling was central to the activation of such an autobiographical association. Ding Ling, as a prestigious woman writer and revolutionary who never concealed her gendered position and boldly strived to grapple with the gender questions that socialism left unresolved, posed a threat to the male dominated literary and political circles and shed light onto the long-standing male anxiety about women writing. The funding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 did not bring the question of women's liberation to a quick

[43] Cao Yu 曹禺, "Cao Yu tongzhi de fayan" 曹禺同志的发言 [The Speech of Comrade Cao Yu], in *Dui Ding, Chen, fandang jituan de pipan*, 33.

resolution. While the Party promoted women's participation in production and in the construction of the socialist state, new gender and institutional hierarchies were formed. The story of how the All China-Women's Federation—the most important grassroots women's organization after 1949—managed to justify its existence and its work of mobilizing and educating women during the 1950s well captures the difficulties and hurdles women had to face to carry out a feminist agenda of dismantling patriarchy and gender discrimination.[44] The difficulties that women in the Women's Federation had to endure to voice their gender-specific concerns testify not simply to the secondary place that the woman question occupied in the Party's agenda after 1949, but also to the lingering male paranoia toward women's participation in policy-making processes. The precarious condition of women in the male-dominated power system, however, did not translate into a complete loss of agency for women. As Wang Zheng demonstrates, women did not renounce their feminist goals, but learnt to inscribe them into the Party's "central work."[45] This "politics of concealment" guaranteed the survival of a feminist line in the Party even though it forced women to operate behind the scenes, in a condition of "self-effacement."[46]

Ding Ling carried out her politics in her writings as she did in her life pursuits. She had escaped an arranged marriage when she was young to seek an independent life in the city. She later joined the revolution deeming it to be the solution to her search for independence and recognition. But even when she reached the top of her prestige and consolidated her position in the Party, she continued to feel that her work as a woman writer in the changing political environment had little impact. Take, for example, how Ding Ling describes her experience at the

[44] Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State*. In particular, see Chapter One, "Feminist Contentions in Socialist State Formation: A Case Study of the Shanghai Women's Federation," 29-53.
[45] Ibid., 17-18.
[46] Ibid.

Second Congress of the Women's International League that was held in Budapest, in December 1948:

> On the first day […] I was holding the flag, standing on the side. My elder colleague was standing at the center delivering the speech; Jin Tao 金涛 was translating. I was playing a role; I was playing the role of the banner holder, through and through. Fine. I should feel honored. Had "women" not recommended me, could I have seen this world? Could I have played this role? […] This time I learnt a big lesson. I understood my position, my tininess. […] In the Party I am irrelevant. I should feel satisfied. I have become a representative. I stand at the back holding a banner, being just another face in the crowd, and understand why many people have changed their jobs. It suffices to be able to speak a few words of English to be more useful than a writer (December 3, 1948).[47]

Ding Ling certainly cared about fame, but she also cared about agency. Her ambition and desire to make a real impact must have annoyed and even scared her male counterparts. Behind the caustic and sexist critiques male intellectuals raised against Ding Ling and her jiantao lie personal relations of competition and hostility, as well as the anxieties of the entrenched male elites toward women's ascendance to positions of power in the sphere of cultural production and politics.

In this context of gender bias, Ding Ling's re-tooling of the seemingly gender-neutral official language of jiantao and the outward unfolding of the female self in the self-critical act—the latter, a concept I borrow from Mikhail Bakhtin and that I will explain below—recast in new terms unsettled questions pertaining to the position of women in the political and literary realms and the tension between the female subject's effort to define herself, on the one hand, and other people's representation of the self, on the other. A comparative reading of "Miss Sophia's Diary" and Ding Ling's self-criticism reveals a similar tension, in the two texts, between the effort to define oneself, on the one hand, and other people's (mis)projections and expectations, on the

[47] Ding Ling, *Ding Ling quanji*, 11: 364.

other. Reading the early short story in light of the later self-criticism draws attention to the self-critical energy embedded in "Miss Sophia's Diary." The discovery of a self-critical impulse in a text that scholarship has hitherto placed within the canon of May Fourth confessional literature encourages a reflection on the conceptual and structural differences between self-criticism and the confessional. The different articulation of the self in the two modes of address proves crucial to approach Ding Ling's later criticism. Without suggesting a genealogical linkage between Miss Sophia's self-criticism and the Communist form, the comparative reading however helps us better understand not only why Miss Sophia was summoned in the 1950s but also how Ding Ling, the icon of female self-narration, retooled the technique of self-criticism that was imposed on her in the communist period.

The failure of Ding Ling's self-criticism recalls the failure of Miss Sophia's diary to be understood by a male audience. Rather than representing Miss Sophia's incapacity to analyze herself or Ding Ling's unwillingness to adopt the prescribed formula to analyze the self in the 1950s, failure points to the impossibility of the self-critical act to neutralize subjective emotions and experience and resolve the tension between the self and others. It is the form of jiantao itself that manifests its own failure at the trial. It shows how the expectations for a kind of writing that delves into the individual's personal life while at the same time remaining detached from the subject's individualized understanding of her life experience was already flawed from the outset.

Confession and Self-criticism

For its disclosure of the subject's innermost feelings, "Miss Sophia's Diary" is considered an illustrative example of May Fourth confessional literature.[48] A salient feature of

[48] See, for instance, Tang Xiaobing's "Shanghai, Spring 1930," in Tang Xiaobing's *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 97-98. For Tang, "another reason for Ding Ling's instant

the confessional lies in the subject's outpouring of personal afflictions and inner sorrows. The increasing popularity of first person narration certainly helped emphasize the subject's viewpoint typical of the confessional mode, even though the confessional was not limited to first person narratives, as Yu Dafu's 郁达夫 notoriously confessional short stories in the third person demonstrate. The emergence of the confessional coincided with the construction of a romantic, melancholic individual struggling to pursue personal and national liberation. Leo Ou-fan Lee, the pioneer of the study of May Fourth romantic literature, for instance, has read the confessional as a manifestation of a generational sentimentality that embodies personal and national predicament.[49] Departing from the sentimentality framework, and de-emphasizing the nationalist strain of May Fourth literature, Valerie Levan, in her analysis of Yu Dafu's confessional narratives, has turned to speech act theory to explain the confessional form as a performative gesture that contains three moments: 1) the constative declaration of sin; 2) the sincere admission of guilt, and 3) the performative contractual relation between the subject and the readers.[50] Unlike autobiography, in which readers are only supposed to accept the "truth" of the account, confessional narratives call for the readers to judge and grant absolution. The success of the performance is contingent on the sincerity and honesty of the declaration of guilt, and the readers' final judgment. According to Levan, May Fourth intellectuals experienced profound frustrations at adapting to the historical changes; they felt that "the time is out of joint, and that they have no

success as a young woman writer and spokesperson of her generation is the confessional mode of narration that she employed in most of her stories" (98). See also "Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 29-30.

[49] Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

[50] Valerie Levan, "The Confessant as Analysand in Yu Dafu's Confessional Narrative," in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 34 (2012): 31-56.

way of setting it right." Their longing "to be 'brought back into the wholeness of people and of things'" was, for Levan, the motivation underlying confessional literature.[51]

Strikingly, Levan's model of confessional literature accords much agency to the readers as judges of the subject's confession. The subject's task is to offer a sincere display of feelings to obtain the readers' absolution. By emphasizing the role of readers/audience, the confessional emerges as a "centripetal" utterance that privileges the movement of external forces inward and toward the self.[52] There is a fundamental distinction then that needs to be made between the confessional and a self-critical mode of self-narration. Even though obtaining forgiveness is one of the aims of self-criticism, it is however not its primary raison d'être. Self-criticism's first and foremost mission is helping the self overcome the mistakes. Regardless of the outcome, the work the individual has to do to parse his/her shortcomings and condition is crucial and confers on them an active role in the self-critical act. Self-criticism underscores the self's outward unfolding that qualifies the utterance as "centrifugal," to use Mikhail Bakhtin's terminology. Unlike the centripetal that is associated with authoritative, unifying forces of meaning, the centrifugal, according to Bakhtin, by trying to escape from the center, engenders disunification, dispersal, decentralization. In the context of self-narration, this translates into a different spatial articulation and constitution of the self that is less driven by the question "how can I obtain absolution?" than it is by the questions "who am I? How can I change myself?" While centrifugal and centripetal forces are always implied in any kind of utterance and discourse, their distribution is not necessarily equivalent. In the confessional, the outside dominates the encounter and the way the

[51] Ibid., p. 55.
[52] I adapt the terms that Mikhail Bakhtin uses to describe different types of utterances. See Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

self constructs itself. In the centrifugal self-critical act, the self expands outwardly and confronts the outside.

In the specific case of Ding Ling, the outward spatialization of the self is complicated by her female identity and the gendered context in which her self-criticism was produced and received. What is at issue is not so much the fact that Ding Ling could employ a political form of self-analysis to de-gender her subject position and seek recognition and forgiveness, but rather how self-criticism offered her an occasion to recast the gender question in a different, apparently de-gendered language. The centrifugal movement that self-criticism emphasizes creates the conditions for Ding Ling to draw attention to the ambiguities, the negotiations, and the struggles the female self has to face to assert herself in the encounter with the outside. For bringing to the fore the predicament of a female subject who strives to stand up, Ding Ling's self-criticism evokes the self-critical labor Miss Sophia engages in the fictional diary. Teasing out the presence of a self-critical impulse in the "Diary" enriches the way we read the text but also the way we understand how Ding Ling, the woman and the writer, approached the self-criticism that was imposed on her in the 1950s. It shows that the struggle Miss Sophia faces in defining herself and the tension with the way others see her are replicated in the later self-criticism in the contrast between Ding Ling's politics as a woman writer and the way she is perceived and forced to operate.

The dialogue I entertain between the two texts encourages us to question clear cut generic divisions between the earlier literary short story and the later official document. Insofar as Ding Ling used self-criticism as a weapon to negotiate her identity as a woman writer and the demands of the male political and literary arena, the failure of her self-criticism—criticized by male intellectuals as a show-off of Ding Ling's writing skills, among other things—bespeaks a deeper

failure of how self-criticism was conceptualized and what it was meant to do as a political form of writing lying outside of the literary sphere. Practically, the failed text invites us to reevaluate conventional definitions of the literary and what constitutes a legitimate object of literary inquiry. The dialogue between the short story and the self-critical essay shows not only how bringing jiantao into literary study can enrich our interpretation of literary texts, but also how a literary—and humanistic—perspective on self-criticism can complement historical methods of analysis. Besides loosening hard boundaries between the literary and the non-literary, my interpretive approach makes a contribution to studies that have tried to emphasize continuities within the work of Ding Ling and between historical periods.[53] It is not a new genealogy of self-criticism that I intend to construct, but rather a dialogue between texts and times that occurs and coalesces through and around the historical and literary life of the woman Ding Ling.

Miss Sophia's Self-criticism and the Limits of Female Self-narration

"Miss Sophia's Diary" chronicles the thoughts and afflictions of Sophia, a young woman who suffers from tuberculosis. Her malaise is however less related to her physical fragility as it is to her condition as an independent woman who strives to pursue a fulfilled life. Sophia, who has chosen to live alone in a tiny room in Beijing, embodies the predicament of the modern woman who refuses to remain trapped in the patriarchal domestic space and at the same time cannot find a satisfying alternative. She struggles to define herself. This struggle spurs a complex process of self-questioning and self-critical analysis of her thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The diary articulates her efforts to achieve clarity about herself and what she needs. "Can I spell out what I really need?" is a question that returns often in the diary and dramatizes Sophia's

[53] Tani Barlow's *I Myself Am a Woman*; Wang Xiaojue, "Over Her Dead Body: Ding Ling's Politicization after the Socialist Revolution," in Wang Xiaojue's *Modernity with a Cold War Face*.

difficulty to capture the root cause of her distress and envision a way out.[54] This internal conflict is exacerbated by the frustration of being misunderstood by other people. It is in the context of interpersonal relations that the tension between self-definition and people's perception of herself unleashes moments of heightened self-critical consciousness.

The diary entry dated December 28th is illustrative of this tension. Sophia has invited her best friends Yufang 毓芳 and Yunlin 云霖 to go to the movie theatre. Unfortunately Yufang brings with her Jianru 剑如, a person with whom Sophia does not get along. The outing becomes a nightmare for Sophia; she has to suppress her feelings and while her friends are distracted at the waiting line outside the movie theatre, she runs back home. Feeling sorry for having disappeared without notice, she writes in her diary:

> Besides myself, no one else can forgive me. People criticize me, but they do not understand the feelings I have to bear when I am with other people. They say I am eccentric. But they don't know what I do sometimes to please other people and win their favor. But no one would encourage me to say things that contradict my instinct. They often endure my eccentricities and this gives me more cause to reflect on (*fanxing* 反省) my behavior. As a result, I feel even more distant from them.[55]

Sophia's self-reflection, as this passage shows, is triggered by the double realization that she does not entirely know who she is and what she wants, on the one hand, and that other people constantly fail to understand her, on the other. She recognizes that she is responsible for her own misery but forgiveness has to come from herself. That is crucial to the self-critical act. Shamelessly, one has to confront one's own mistakes and weaknesses, and absolve oneself before obtaining absolution from others. Oftentimes, Sophia lays bare her inner thoughts and

[54] Ding Ling, "Shafei nüshi de riji," in *Ding Ling quanji*, 3: 48. In translating "Miss Sophia's Diary," I use Tani Barlow's translation of the short story (in *I Myself Am a Woman*) as a reference, but, at times, my translation departs slightly from hers.
[55] Ibid., 44.

from a distance observes her inexplicable attitude hoping to find an interpretive key to her anguish and inappropriate behavior, as we read in the following excerpt:

> I really don't know how to analyze (*fenxi* 分析) myself. Sometimes, I feel a boundless, unfathomable sadness when I see a white cloud being blown and scattered by the wind; yet when I see a what, twenty-five? year old man (Weidi 苇弟 is four years older than me) shedding tears on the back of my hands, I laugh at him with the satisfaction of a savage.[56]

Weidi is a young man deeply in love with Sophia, but his love is unrequited. Not only does Sophia not reciprocate his feelings, she also constantly reproaches his demonstration of affection as pathetic sentimentalism. Instead, Sophia is attracted to Ling Jishi 凌吉士, a handsome Westernized business man from Singapore introduced to her by Yufang and Yunlin. The encounter with Ling, a symbol of Western values of masculinity and capitalism, makes Sophia consciously aware of her desires and femininity. Boldly, she declares: "I understand myself completely. I am a thoroughly female woman, and women concentrate everything on the man they've got in their sights."[57] In these words, one can find an echo of Ding Ling's later statement "I, myself, am a woman" from her "Thoughts on March 8." In the obsessive efforts male intellectuals made in the 1950s to parallel Ding Ling to Miss Sophia, echoes like this one must have not gone unnoticed and may have contributed to reinforce the autobiographical reading of Miss Sophia.

It has been pointed out how, in the relationship between Sophia and Ling Jishi, the gender dynamic is reversed in that it is the man who becomes the object of female gaze and desire while Sophia turns into the seducer.[58] But little has been said about how Sophia's inner

[56] Ibid., 45.
[57] Ibid., 51.
[58] Rey Chow *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 164; Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 175.

struggle—her self being torn between yielding to her sexual desire and suppressing it—catalyzes a work of self-inspection that is furthered by Ling Jishi's incapacity to understand Sophia's thoughts and sensibility. A pattern can be discerned: moments in which Sophia acts and thinks without restraint are invariably followed by moments in which she steps back and self-critically examines her thoughts and behavior. For instance, Sophia impulsively decides to move out and resettle in a small room to be closer to Ling Jishi. She deceives her friends, telling them that this will allow her to be closer to Yufang, and gets them to help her move fast. But upon moving in, she critically and courageously confronts the motives behind her decision:

> Now that I can reflect on this carefully, I am afraid that my impulsiveness is dragging me into a worse place. Let me stay in this room with the iron stove. How can I tell people that I am in love with this man from Singapore? I don't know anything about him. His lips, his eye-brows, the corners of his eyes, his fingertips, are pure fantasy. These are not things a person should need, but I am obsessed and keep thinking about them. I won't move for now and will take care of my health here. I'm decided now. I'm so full of regret! I regret all the wrong things I did today, things a decent woman would never do.[59]

I said "courageously" because it takes guts to come to terms with one's own desires, especially when they are detrimental to the flourishing of the self. Even if Sophia's machinations to lure Ling prove successful, she ultimately realizes that what Ling can give her is not what she needs either. With lucidity, she is capable of seeing beyond Ling's surface beauty and comes to despise his attachment to money and his frivolous life. Driven by contradictory feelings of self-preservation and self-hatred, Sophia terminates the affair with Ling. And yet, the centripetal forces that pressure her to "normalize" her behavior and act as a "decent woman" do not lead to her re-integration. Sophia responds by leaving Beijing. That is the moment when she stops writing the diary altogether, giving the readers no hint of what will happen to her.

[59] Ding Ling, "*Shafei nüshi de riji*," 50.

As Lydia Liu notices, the primary interlocutor of Sophia's diary is her female friend Yun 蕴.[60] Yun is, for Sophia, the only person who can understand her. Indeed, when Sophia shows the diary to Weidi hoping to make him understand her soul, he fails to fathom the meaning of her words. Her writing cannot be grasped by a male reader. "Writing," Lydia Liu suggests, "is understood to be a form of emotional connection between two women and resistance to moral authority embedded in conventional, male narratives about desire and sexuality."[61] The premature death of Yun, however, prevents her from reading the diary, which signifies, for Liu, the failure of "feminine talk."[62]

Without negating the underlying "feminine talk" in the diary and the inscription of gender in the acts of writing and reading, I want to point out the fact that it is not the death of Yun that makes Sophia give up writing. Sophia abandons the diary when she realizes that her soul-searching has left her clueless as to what the meaning of her life is. Her decision to stop writing has much to do with the recognition of the limits of writing as a tool to represent herself and resolve the tension between her and others. What the story attends to is the failure of writing as a means through which Sophia redirects her inner tribulations outwardly and tries to negotiate her feminist sensibility with the outside world of male expectations.

Back to the 1950s: The Resurrection of Miss Sophia

"What happens to Miss Sophia [after she leaves Beijing]?"[63] In the article "On Miss Sophia" writer Zhang Tianyi (1906-1985) thus responds to the question:

[60] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 177.
[61] Ibid., 178.
[62] Ibid., 179.
[63] "那么，这个莎菲女士将会怎么样呢?" Zhang Tianyi 张天翼, "Guanyu Shafei nüshi" 关于莎菲女士 [On Miss Sophia], *Renmin ribao*, October 15, 1957.

> Well, we can say that the material on Ding Ling's thought and behavior that has recently been disclosed in the series of meetings held to counter the Ding-Chen anti-Party clique—even if not exhaustive—is the sequel (*xubian* 续编) to "Miss Sophia's Diary."[64]

This passage ends Zhang Tianyi's long critical piece on the protagonist of Ding Ling's early short story. In the article, Zhang elaborates on Miss Sophia's self-centered personality, her selfish attitude toward love, the choice of her love object (Ling Jishi), as well as her incorrigible inclination to toy with people at her will. In the end, he believes, the story depicts "the tragedy of a self-centered individual: she plays with people; as a result, she plays with herself."[65] Zhang Tianyi's analysis takes him to define Miss Sophia as being at once the product of and a departure from the May Fourth spirit. While the May Fourth showcased a distinct bourgeois character—also a result of Western influence, according to Zhang—its struggle against feudalism was progressive and helped the country's advancement. Unlike her May Fourth sisters, who maintained a sense of self-dignity and seriousness (*yansu* 严肃) as they strove to liberate themselves from patriarchy, Miss Sophia, for Zhang Tianyi, does not show any revolutionary spirit or traces of that kind of "seriousness that a real struggle engenders."[66] Historically, Zhang notices, Miss Sophia appeared years after the heyday of the May Fourth movement. By the late 1920s, many of those who had been at the forefront of the May Fourth movement had rechanneled their fighting spirit and taken the "inevitable" path of the proletarian revolution. Instead, Miss Sophia remained indifferent to the national struggle. For Zhang, she only cares

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

about her own happiness; she belongs to the capitalist, bourgeois strand that developed out of the May Fourth period but did not make any progress.[67]

Throughout the article, Zhang Tianyi refrains from making explicit attacks on the author of the short story and rather lashes out against the fictional character, speaking of Miss Sophia as though she was a blood-and-flesh person. That Miss Sophia is treated as a projection of the author is revealed at the end of the article, when Zhang, whether ironically or seriously, directs the readers to the trial against Ding Ling and the material on her thought and behavior as a place to catch up with what happens to Miss Sophia after she leaves Beijing. The identification of Miss Sophia and Ding Ling was by no means Zhang's original invention, but it explains why a male intellectual would write an article on Miss Sophia in October 1957, only a few weeks after the end of the trial against Ding Ling.

Miss Sophia came back to life in the interventions that famous male intellectuals and writers made at the trial against Ding Ling in 1957. Ding Ling was unanimously compared to Miss Sophia. Lin Mohan's 林默涵 address well illustrates how male intellectuals capitalized on Ding Ling's alleged individualism or other charges to justify the analogy:

> Why has Ding Ling constantly stood in opposition to the Party to the point of becoming an anti-Party element? First, this has to do with her tenacious individualism. I very much agree with comrade Mao Dun's 矛盾 ideas: since Miss Sophia, her individualism has never waned; in fact it has developed even further. Because her position today is different, her ambition is obviously greater. Ding Ling is like Miss Sophia: a thoroughly self-centered person. If, back then, Miss Sophia's opposition to her surrounding mediocre lifestyle bore some positivity, today, this way of thinking is in absolute conflict with the outside world; it conflicts with the Party. In comrade Ding Ling's heart there is only one "I." It is not surprising that everyone feels that "I" dominates throughout her work.[68]

[67] Ibid.
[68] Lin Mohan, "Lin Mohan tongzhi de fayan" 林默涵同志的发言 [The Speech of Comrade Lin Mohan] in *Dui Ding, Chen, fandang jituan de pipan*, 51.

The comparison served a variety of purposes. Here, the emphasis on the different historical contexts—the 1920s bourgeois society vs the 1950s communist order—makes Ding Ling's individualistic stance vis-à-vis the Party all the more despicable. If Miss Sophia's aversion to bourgeois, capitalist values could engender some sympathy, Ding Ling's self-centeredness in the socialist era was absolutely unacceptable.

The trope became so ubiquitous that appeared not only in individual's speeches, but also in the final report on the anti-rightist trial that Zhou Yang wrote and submitted to the Writers' Association in September 1957. Even the official report recommends reading "Miss Sophia's Diary" "to understand Ding Ling's character and thought."[69] The passage in which Zhou discusses the political incorrectness of Ding Ling's 1940s short story "In the Hospital" is especially compelling for the way in which the author-character identification is brought to a level of physical embodiment:

> Starting with Miss Sophia, the experiences and character of most of Ding Ling's literary heroines bear the shadow of the author. She has a penchant for women like Miss Sophia. Her appreciation of Lin Xiling 林希翎, a notorious rightist woman, is not accidental. She [Ding Ling] has turned this kind of femininity into an adorable, strong personality trait that she obviously extols. We can say that, after so many years, the soul of Miss Sophia has always resided in Ding Ling's body. It's just that she later put on a Communist outfit, people could not quite recognize her real face, and the harm of her wrongdoings became even greater.[70]

For Zhou and his contemporary male colleagues, Miss Sophia is the soul that inhabits Ding Ling's body. Sophia incarnates a negatively inscribed model of femininity that evokes treachery, slyness, deceit, and narcissism. This embodied negative femininity warranted many of the

[69] "许多同志提到了《莎菲女士的日记》。要了解丁玲的性格和思想，读一读她三十年前的这篇成名之作，倒是有帮助的." Zhou Yang, "Wenyi zhanxian shang de yi chang da bianlun" 文艺战线上的一场大辩论 [A Great Debate on the Battle Lines of Literature and Arts," in Yang Guixin, *Ding Ling yu Zhou Yang de enyuan*, 161. The report appeared in the 31th issue of *Selected Works* (*Huoye wenxuan* 活页文选) published by *People's Daily* on March 2, 1958.
[70] Ibid., 162.

critiques that were leveled against Ding Ling. On the basis of this negative femininity, some intellectuals drew attention to Ding Ling's manipulative, plotting personality or emphasized her promiscuous lifestyle. The line separating body and soul, external manifestations and inner motives, was blurred to the point that even Ding Ling's sobbing at the trial became object of critique and proof of her deceitfulness: "tears and a streaming nose are her weapons, but behind those tears she hides all kinds of poisonous arrows," said Lin Mohan.[71] The allusion to Miss Sophia's "diary of tears" was unmistakable.[72]

Indeed, Miss Sophia kept coming back in male intellectuals' responses to Ding Ling's self-criticism at the trial. She seemed a convenient and concrete trope intellectuals could employ to dismiss Ding Ling's self-criticism as "insincere," qualify Ding Ling's character as arrogant and treacherous, corroborate the accusations of factionalism, anti-Partyism, individualism, sexual promiscuity, and criticize her literary writings as poisonous. Miss Sophia however was not simply a "convenient trope" that male intellectuals used to support their arguments. The potency of the analogy points somewhere else. Behind the author-character connection, I argue, at work is a much more complex mechanism of autobiographical identification that links Ding Ling's fictional character to Ding Ling the woman, the writer, and the cadre, as well as to Ding Ling's other literary figures. While Miss Sophia seems the linking piece, and the origin of Ding Ling's sins—as though the creation of Miss Sophia preceded and anticipated the mistakes of the author—the relation between Ding Ling and the fictional character is neither metaphorical, nor temporal. The stake of this relation is caught in what might seem a rather inconsequential comment that writer Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 (1898-1958) jotted down in his August 8, 1957 diary entry: "Ding Ling made her fourth speech, but she only talked theory, recognized her

[71] Lin Mohan, "Lin Mohan tongzhi de fayan," 43.
[72] Lydia Liu, 177.

mistakes, but did not address concrete issues. It seemed like a lyrical narrative, it wasn't self-criticism."[73] Whether or not Ding Ling addressed "concrete issues," by describing Ding Ling's self-criticism as "lyrical," Zheng Zhenduo captures the core of male intellectuals' anxiety and their autobiographical interpretive gesture: Ding Ling's politics and practice of female self-representation and self-narration. In the era of de-personalized self-criticism—Yang Fu's emphasis on banning personal feelings and predicaments from the examination of one's mistakes comes to mind—Ding Ling's individualized mode of self-analysis struck as "lyrical." Ding Ling's self-criticism needs to be read as an instantiation of self-narration that invokes Miss Sophia's self-representation and brings together Ding Ling's biographical and literary life.

Conclusions

This chapter started off with the question of why Miss Sophia, the literary character from Ding Ling's 1920s fictional diary, became a ubiquitous trope in the male intellectuals' responses to Ding Ling's self-criticism in 1957. Women writers are accustomed to seeing their own work read autobiographically. This gendered reading that associates women writings with their personal life is not unique to modern China, but the resurrection of Miss Sophia, in the socialist period, spurred by Ding Ling's self-critical text at the trial, points to something more than a stereotyped reading grounded on the gender bias that women can only write about trivial details of their personal life. In the chapter I argue that the author-character identification was the fruit of a complex mechanism of autobiographical interpretation that is informed by the way the female subject narrates herself, in the short story and the self-criticism alike, but also by the male elites' entrenched anxiety toward women writing.

[73] Zheng Zhenduo, *Zheng Zhenduo riji quanbian* 郑振铎日记全篇 [The Complete Diary of Zheng Zhenduo] (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chuban, 2006), 541.

Without suggesting a genealogical linkage, I engaged in a comparative reading of the earlier short story and the later official document to reveal a self-critical energy in the fictional diary and illuminate a similar tension, in the two texts, between the way the female subject defines herself and other people's projections of the self. The discovery of a self-critical impulse in "Miss Sophia's Diary" has helped identify an outward expansion of the self in the self-critical mode of address that complicates the confessional reading of the short story and provides a new interpretative key to approach Ding Ling's self-criticism in the 1950s. In light of this outward movement that self-criticism emphasizes and the tension it underscores between the self and others, the failure of Ding Ling's self-criticism to weave an objective analysis of the self in compliance with the official formula of jiantao exposes the limits of self-criticism as a technique aimed at the effacement of the self and, at the same time, expands the autobiographical possibilities of this practice.

My understanding of the autobiographical possibilities of self-criticism resonates with Wang Lingzhen's conceptualization of the personal as a site where a plurality of forces are interconnected and with her effort to rescue the importance of the human subject, her body and individual experience, as the material location where this interaction takes place.[74] The emergence, in Ding Ling's jiantao, of unresolved tensions between the female self and others, self-citations, references to personal vicissitudes, makes the text a space where multiple concerns and forces—political and private, subjective and intersubjective, discursive and material—interact and coalesce around the figure of Ding Ling the woman and the writer.

Ding Ling's identity as a woman and a writer is crucial to the way self-criticism was produced and received. Underneath the male intellectuals' harsh critiques of Ding Ling's self-criticism lies their enduring paranoia toward women writers. As Wendy Larson has shown, while

[74] Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 1-26.

women were increasingly introduced into public working spaces in the modern period, the emerging figure of the woman writer remained problematic. Being a woman and being a writer seemed unreconciliable subject positions and women continued to be caught in the dilemma of how to combine their female identity with their literary ambitions.[75] By re-tooling the political form of self-criticism to recast gender questions pertaining to how women write, what they can write about, and their position in the new socialist state, Ding Ling manifests her effort to search for a new form of writing that, while departing from the femininity paradigm that had stigmatized women literature, secured a space for women's self-expression. The failure of her self-criticism, I would suggest, bespeaks the success of the writer to creatively re-purpose the language of jiantao and exploit the possibilities of self-criticism as a site of autobiographical construction.

Ding Ling's engagement with the essay form from the 1940s and throughout the 1950s needs to be reconsidered in light of her self-criticism.[76] Li Tuo 李陀 has read Ding Ling's essay production as a result of her internalization of the "Mao style."[77] The embracing of the new language and discourse, for him, was not a simple manifestation of compliance. Moving away from the Cold War "compliance/resistance" binary thinking, he explains that the assimilation of the new language had to do with the language's modern, anti-imperialist, and nationalist connotations. This language, for Li Tuo, was appealing to the intellectuals. This idea helps Li Tuo overcome the narrative that divides Ding Ling's work into an early stage of resistance and a later stage (especially the fiction she wrote in the 1980s) of compliance. His belief that the story

[75] Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*.
[76] In her 1941 essay "We Need Essays" (*Women xuyao zawen* 我们需要杂文), Ding Ling explicitly ties the possibility essay writing offers to carry out a true analysis of the self to the practice of self-criticism. See *Ding Ling quanji*, 7: 58-59.
[77] Li Tuo, "Ding Ling bu jiandan—Mao tizhi xia zhishi fenzi zai huayu shengcheng zhong de fuza juese" 丁玲不简单—毛体制下知识分子在话语生成中的复杂角色 [Ding Ling Is Not so Easy: The Complex Role of Intellectuals and their Discursive Behavior under Maoism], in *Jintian* [Today], no. 3 (1993): 222-242.

of Ding Ling mirrors the story of many intellectuals who welcome the new language is however not entirely accurate. Ding Ling's gender identity made her approach to the new language unique. My analysis of Ding Ling's self-critical essay has shown how the assimilation of the official language did not erase gender concerns nor did it rule out creative experimentations.

Finally, by showing how self-criticism can enrich our understanding of the short story, and the other way around, this chapter has challenged deep-seated disciplinary boundaries and proved the importance of bringing self-criticism into the study of modern Chinese literature.

Chapter Two

Writing out of Pain: Diaries, Self-criticism, and the Gendered Body

A study of the intersection of self-criticism and women writers' autobiographical practices in socialist China demands a special discussion on the connection between political self-criticism and diary writing. Earlier, I showed how the Party called people to adopt the diary as a space for daily self-examination, but the nature of the merging of the two different genres and the outcomes of this combination are neither obvious nor immediately palpable. It is the encounter with Yang Mo's diaries, written from 1945 through 1982 and published in 1985, that has reshaped my understanding of jiantao in relation to diary writing and pushed my inquiry toward a new direction: the relation between the body and self-criticism in the context of life writings. Yang Mo's diaries figure multiple instances of ideological self-analysis that unmistakably reproduce the widely diffused practice of self-accusation and confession that became popular in the Communist years as a means of indoctrination to ensure people's correct political alignment. In Yang Mo's diaries, self-criticism emerges as a dominant interpretive mode through which the writer examines her thoughts, her life experiences, her role as a mother and wife, her literary career, her commitment to the Party, her relation to the world, and, surprisingly, even her own body. The complicated relation between jiantao and perceptions of the gendered body in Yang Mo's diaries opens up a new window into the fascinating and previously unexplored presence of the body in self-criticism within the specific context of diary writing. In particular, it is the figure of the female body in pain and its relation to jiantao that demand attention.

Yang Mo's diaries are replete with accounts of physical disabilities and pain. Not only is pain tightly related to her self- and literary creation, but the relation between pain and the

fashioning of her identity as a writer is mediated by Yang's systematic labor of political self-analysis. Intuitively, the mind is the primary object of scrutiny in self-criticism. This sounds commonsensical within the disciplinary regime of thought reform that was conceived to refashion people's worldview, their beliefs and ideology, and turn them into apt citizens of the nascent communist state. Jiantao and its emphasis on dissecting the mind to uncover and reform threatening aspects of one's personality testify to the privileged position that the mind/soul occupied over the material and bodily dimensions in socialist normative discourses and practices. Yang Mo's articulations of pain throughout the diaries, however, not only expose the presence of the body in self-criticism, but also show how the female body in pain and its representations actively and productively interact with self-criticism, and enable mechanisms of self-fashioning and creation that complicate the deconstructive, mind-oriented nature of jiantao.[1]

The lack of attention to the gendered body and the figure of the body in pain in scholarly discussions of jiantao and thought reform is striking.[2] In the *Sublime Figure of History*, Ban Wang places self-criticism within a set of rituals and trends that constituted in the Communist period and in particular in the years of the Cultural Revolution "a pleasure-in-pain" structure of feeling, an aesthetic apparatus that shaped behavior, culture, and taste.[3] In his reading of jiantao,

[1]A large corpus of scholarly studies exists on the representation of pain in Chinese literary and cultural production. See for instance Xiaobin Yang's *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-garde Fiction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), David Wang's *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), Yomi Braester's *Witness against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-century China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), and Michael Berry's *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008). In these studies pain is normally discussed in relation to experiences of historical trauma, violence, and other forms of brutality. Jiantao could fall within the same framework, if one emphasizes its psychological brutality. But the type of pain I discuss here is primarily physical pain due to disease and bodily disabilities.

[2]Aminda Smith's book on thought reform sheds light on the relation between the efforts to reform ordinary criminals like prostitutes, thieves, and beggars in the 1950s, and the later establishment of labor camps for the reeducation of counterrevolutionaries. Her attention to prostitutes is compelling but is not illustrative of a gender-oriented inquiry. Aminda Smith, *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes*.

[3] Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1997), 219.

Ban Wang draws attention to the systematic search of the enemy inside and the mechanism through which violence is turned inward against oneself. For him, the inward-oriented aggression of self-criticism testifies to the internalization of external hegemonic power. Drawing on psychoanalytic language, Ban Wang explains how self-criticism stages an inner conflict in the individual between unconscious libidinal energies and the authority of external normative discourse internalized by the superego. The struggle generates senses of guilt and masochistic desires for self-persecution. Hence the pleasure-in-pain structure implicit in jiantao rituals. While Ban Wang's definition of jiantao as an aesthetic ritual and an affective experience offers a plausible explanation for self-inflicted violence and seemingly makes room for a reflection on the individual's bodily response to jiantao, his emphasis on self-criticism's psychological mechanisms ultimately re-asserts jiantao's nature as a disciplinary tool through which power reaches out to the most remote areas of the human psyche. Rather than the body as a unique living organism, at the center of Ban Wang's analysis are the human unconscious and the people as a community of shared rituals.[4] Not only does his reading overlook questions of gender and the body, but also, by privileging the psychological structure inherent to jiantao, it reiterates the fundamental subordination of the body to the mind that has qualified self-criticism since its earliest theorizations.

The fact that scholarship has done little to interrogate the role of the body in self-criticism or to consider a gendered experience of jiantao makes the question of what happens to bodies—female bodies, in particular—in self-criticism even more urgent. Does the body disappear in self-criticism? We cannot forget all the tears, the blushing faces, the averted eyes, the shudders, and other physical manifestations that often accompanied the self-humiliating act of self-accusation, whether it was performed in struggle sessions or other public occasions, or carried out in a

[4] It is not surprising that Ban Wang discusses jiantao along with the formation of a mass psychology in those years.

private setting. In the memoiristic essay "Self-Analysis," writer Ba Jin 巴金 (1904-2005) recalls the scene of the first struggle session he participated in as a victim. He describes how his body started to shudder (*hun shen zhanli* 浑身战栗) upon hearing the "East is Red" tune that opened the session. He was nervous and worried. He had brought a pen and a notebook onto the stage. With bowed head and bent waist (*di tou wan yao* 低头弯腰), he wanted to record every single word of critique and reform himself.[5]

Indeed, it is easy to perceive or visualize physical reactions in the theatrical setting of a struggle session where the individual becomes, physically, the object of others' critique and is confronted with the pressure of acknowledging his/her faults. Much more difficult, perhaps, is to imagine what happens to the body when one points the finger at oneself and writes a piece of self-accusation. One can hardly find any trace of the tears, the shudders, or the blushed face in a typical jiantao essay, but the invisibility of the body does not equate with its absence. The sense of shame and all the bodily manifestations that occur when one feels that she has become the object of others' judgment in a struggle session might similarly be experienced by the writer of jiantao in private. Jiantao was not simply a psychologically internalized mode of self-analysis, nor was it a mere technique of indoctrination. While what was targeted for accusation were thoughts, primarily, the individual's turning into an object to be judged and the awareness that this judgment will condition the subject's (physical) belonging to the community made the experience of self-criticism one that was lived physically as much as it was psychologically—an embodied experience. Considering the relation between the body and jiantao as mutually constitutive is crucial to this chapter's exploration of the gendered body and bodily pain in jiantao.

[5] Ba Jin, "Jiepou Ziji" 解剖自己 [Self-Analysis], in *Ba Jin quanji* 巴金全集 [The Complete Works of Ba Jin] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1986), 16: 396.

Acknowledging the embodied nature of self-criticism is however insufficient to pursue the exploration of the gendered body and bodily pain in typical jiantao essays. The apparent invisibility of the body in these texts, while exposing a subtle play between visibility and invisibility, poses a challenge to a scholarly inquiry into the body. In this chapter, I therefore turn to diaries to study and rescue the neglected presence of the gendered body in self-criticism. Diary writing is not specific to the Communist period, but became especially popular in those years together with other forms of personal writings like autobiography and memoir. The popularization of life writings occurred in concomitance with the politics of thought reform and the promotion of jiantao. The circulation of manuals on how to write a diary or an autobiography was parallel to the dissemination of handbooks and guidelines on how to write a self-critical essay. Reading through these little books one can immediately perceive how the encouragement to experiment with autobiographical narratives, on the one hand, and the call to write self-critical essays, on the other, were part of the same effort to instill in the people a self-critical sensibility and provide them with the instruments to autonomously conduct self-analysis and transform themselves into socialist beings. The diary, in particular, was seen as a convenient tool to monitor and reform one's thoughts and behavior on a daily basis. Already in the lecture "How to Be a Good Communist" delivered at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Yan'an in July 1939, Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇, a politician and theorist who later became State Chairman of the Republic, defined self-criticism as a form of self-cultivation and designated the diary one of the viable tools to carry out the long process of learning and self-elevation.[6] He observed that "there should be different kinds of methods and forms of self-cultivation. For example, many of our comrades keep a diary in order to have a daily check on their work and thoughts or they write down on

[6] Liu Shaoqi, *Lun gongchandangyuan de xiuyang* 论共产党员的修养 [How to Be a Good Communist] (Chengdu: Xinhua shudian, 1950). Liu Shaoqi's speech became very influential in the first years of the Republic and went through multiple reprints.

small posters their personal defects and what they hope to achieve and paste them up [sic] where they work or live, together with the photographs of persons they look up to and ask comrades for criticism and supervision."[7] While diaries were not necessarily meant to be read by others, Liu Shaoqi's suggestion to use the diary as a tool to become good revolutionaries intimates the way by which the account of personal experiences in diaries came to be informed by the preoccupation of transforming oneself into an active participant of contemporary historical and political events. This marked a profound transformation of the genre of the diary in the socialist period. Diary writing ceased to denote a space devoted solely to personal life; it became a site where the distinction between personal/private and public became blurred.[8]

As a form of self-cultivation, self-criticism takes time and energy. Liu Shaoqi parallels jiantao to earlier practices of self-reflection in Confucian culture and other Chinese traditions to illustrate that self-criticism is an enduring enterprise that requires perseverance and time:

> In ancient China, there were many methods of self-cultivation. There was Tseng Tze who said: 'I reflect on myself three times a day.' *The Book of Odes* has it that one should cultivate oneself 'as a lapidary cuts and files, carves and polishes.' Another method was to 'write down some mottoes on the right hand side of one's desk' or 'on one's girdle' as daily reminders of rules of personal conduct. The Chinese scholars of the Confucian school had a number of methods for the cultivation of their body and mind. Every religion has various methods and forms of cultivation of its own. The 'investigation of things, the extension of knowledge, sincerity of thought, the rectification of the heart, the cultivation of the person, the regulation of the family, the ordering well of the state and the making tranquil of the whole kingdom' as set forth in *The Great Learning* also means the same. All this shows that in achieving one's progress one must make serious and energetic efforts to carry on self-cultivation and study.[9]

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[7] Liu Shao-chi, *How to Be a Good Communist* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1951), 23.
[8] A striking parallel can be found in diary writing in Soviet Russia. As Jochen Hellbeck notes in *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* "Soviet diarists revealed an urge to write themselves into their social and political order. They sought to realize themselves as historical subjects defined by their active adherence to a revolutionary common cause. Their personal narratives were so filled with the values and categories of the Soviet revolution that they seemed to obliterate any distinction between a private and a public domain." See Jochen Hellbeck's *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2006), 4-5.
[9] Liu Shao-chi, *How to Be a Good Communist*, 23-24.

Since one's progress must be achieved over time, it does not surprise then that the diary, as a form that allows for a continuous account of the changing self over an extended period of time, seemed a suitable place to keep record of one's introspective labor. Like diaries, jiantao can be thought of as a daily practice of self-cultivation. In Yang Mo's diaries, jiantao is not only inserted in specific diary entries, self-criticism also emerges as an interpretive principle that shapes the diaries as a whole. In the preface Yang Mo wrote in 1983, two years before the diaries were published with the title *Confession—My Diaries*, she emphatically appeals to the Communist method of criticism/self-criticism to nail down the meaning of her daily chronicles and justify their publication:

> I publish my diaries to give my heart to the readers, to let the readers see my true heart. Because I believe readers can forgive my naiveness, my childishness and superficiality. […] I'm not happy with my 'Self' (*wo* 我) in the diaries. […] I didn't accomplish what I should have accomplished, or I didn't do it well. If I were not a Communist, today I could turn to God and absolve myself …God cannot forgive me, I am the only one who can redeem myself—I will shine, and pry into, my conscience with the extinguishing light of my life, or, in our language, I will use the spirit of criticism and self-criticism (*piping he ziwo piping*) to push myself, to reform myself and let that extinguishing light shine to its utmost.[10]

However, the diary, as a genre, functions in a way that differs from a typical jiantao essay. The diary is a heterogeneous container for disparate details that are not necessarily linked to one another by a causal logic. Unlike jiantao essays that aim to trace a cause-effect narrative of the individual's life, or part of it, and offer a rational explanation of one's mistakes, the diary refrains from creating causal links between the items it documents. The diary entries, as well as the specific events, facts, and details within a single entry, are placed next to one another in a flow that seems to equalize their value and significance. In Yang Mo's diaries, political self-criticism stands side by side with ordinary things like taking care of children, sewing clothes,

[10] Yang Mo's *Zibai— wode riji*, 8; 10-11.

reading, a friend's visit, watching a movie, descriptions of the weather, and accounts of illness. The question, then, is not how much the diaries resemble jiantao but rather what a woman could do with diaries in the age of self-criticism. What does Yang Mo achieve by inserting moments of political self-criticism within the diaries and next to more ordinary and personal events like her daily readings or her bodily illness?[11]

The Communist Party promoted the highly rational and meticulous technique of jiantao as a method to level class differences and overcome one's limits. In the backdrop of discourses of gender equality, the self-transformative and empowering possibilities inherent in jiantao seemed to serve well women who were committed to challenging stereotypes of gender fragility and inferiority.[12] As a zealous Party member and an advocate of women's liberation, Yang Mo might have felt the need and perhaps even the desire to use self-criticism in her diaries to carry out her project of self-emancipation—a project she had started earlier on in her life. Born in an upper-middle class family—Yang Mo's father was the founder and director of Xinhua University (新华大学)—like many other women who had the opportunity to go to school and be exposed to modern education, Yang Mo fought against family's impositions and fled home to avoid a forced

[11]I take inspiration from Jennifer Sinor's original and fascinating reading of ordinary writing. Sinor's analysis of the ordinary diary of an ordinary woman, Annie Ray, teaches us that the only way to value what gets discarded because it falls outside the categories of the literary and the aesthetic is to change the questions we ask. By turning attention away from what the text does to what the writer is doing, Sinor shows that ordinary texts are made texts like any other form of writing. Annie Ray's adoption of a paratactic structure linking contents, paragraphs but also diary entries not only illustrates the diary's function as a means to measure the "in-betweenness" of time (the time "in" rather than the time "when"), it also proves to be a strategy to stabilize what the writer cannot control in her life. The tension between what is ordered in and what is ordered out does not give Annie full agency, for she is still conditioned by dominant cultural discourses, but it "documents her performance of identity – largely through gaps, absences, and emptiness - and ultimately comments on how a woman in the nineteenth century replicates and resists cultural directives naming how and when women should write, think, feel, and appear" (188). A study of ordinary texts then not only illuminates the partiality of writing—of all writing—but it also questions the literary categories we often apply to judge and attach value to texts. Jennifer Sinor, *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing: Annie Ray's Diary* (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2002).

[12] Lu Fu's 鲁妇 little manual *Xin funü duben* 新妇女读本 [Study Guide for the New Woman] discusses the importance of bringing self-criticism and criticism in the domestic space. The possibility for women to voice their critique toward other members of the family and toward themselves was emphasized as an opportunity to democratize the family and equalize the status of women. See Lu Fu, *Xin funü duben* (Hong Kong: Xin minzhu Press, 1949), 58-59.

marriage with a military official.[13] Exposure to Marxist theories in the early 1930s revolutionized her political positions. In 1936, she broke up with her partner, whom she considered too bourgeois, and married Ma Jianmin 马建民, a Party cadre doing underground work. Yang Mo soon joined the CCP and became increasingly involved in the Party's activities as a woman organizer.[14]

However, the form of the diary itself, its fragmented, paratactic structure, complicates Yang Mo's self-critical effort. While the possibility of placing jiantao next to things as disparate as family issues, illness, relationships, among others, might have helped Yang Mo domesticate jiantao and seek stability against the destabilizing practice of criticizing herself, the paratactic alignment of discourses that were meant to be kept separate, or at least hierarchized, problematizes the endeavor. In particular, the surfacing of the gendered body in Yang Mo's numerous accounts of bodily pain and illness, throughout the diaries, testifies to a tension.

In the theoretical articulations of jiantao, revolution had to happen in the mind. Only a strong mind can tame the body and lead to the creation of a revolutionary subject. The remarkable role the body and bodily pain play in Yang's diaries, however, creates a tension that deserves to be discussed. I do not suggest turn this into a case of subversion or resistance to contemporary political and gender codes, but the intermingling of elements that were not supposed to be mixed—the mind and body, the political and the emotional, the public and the private, the literary and the non-literary, the author and the reader—does complicate conventional understandings of self-criticism.

[13] See Yang Mo's "Xiao Zhuan" 小传 [A Short Autobiography], in Nie Zhonglin's 聂中林 *Yang Mo zhi Lu* 杨沫之路 [The Way of Yang Mo] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2003), 267-271.
[14] For more biographical information, see Ma Bo 马波, *Muqin Yang Mo* 母亲杨沫 [My Mother Yang Mo] (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2005). Ma Bo, a writer himself, is one of Yang Mo's sons.

The notion of alignment between discourses, contents, and genres is paramount to my investigation and approach. I appeal to the concept of besideness to analyze the analogical relation between jiantao and the diaries, on the one hand, and the paratactic, horizontal distribution of diverse discourses in the diaries' entries, on the other. I am inspired by Eve Segdwick's theorization of besideness as a useful perspective to resist dualistic approaches and teleological narratives. In her words:

> Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings. Beside comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.[15]

Besideness privileges spatial, horizontal relations over vertical, hierarchical ones. Thinking in terms of besideness, I want to revisit the relation between jiantao and diary writing, and the political and the non-political. Rather than emphasizing the influence that jiantao might have exerted on personal, non-political writings, this chapter underscores their contiguity. They existed next to one another. Similarly, besideness offers a productive interpretive framework to inquire into the alignment of the politicization of the female body and the individual's unique experience of bodily pain in the diaries' entries. The paratactic alignment of disparate things and discourses attests not so much to the invasion of the political into the sphere of the private, as to 1) the significance of diary writing and what it could do for a woman in those years, 2) the emergence in and through jiantao of a kind of body (ill and female) that could not be accommodated within the discourse of the socialist body, and 3) the connection between life writing (diary writing and jiantao both as forms of personal writing), the shaping of self-identity,

[15] Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 8.

and the making of a writer and a text. The chapter's exploration of the relation between jiantao, the diary, and the representations of bodily pain mediated by self-criticism, in Yang's diaries, will demonstrate how the experience of bodily pain in and through jiantao proves crucial to Yang's commitment as a literary writer and the creation of a work of art.

Jiantao in and through the Diaries

Let's start from the end. On December 1982, writer Yang Mo attended the four day Symposium on Fiction Creation (*Changbian xiaoshuo chuangzuo zuotanhui* 长篇小说创作座谈会) organized by the Chinese Writers Association.[16] At the Symposium, Yang Mo delivered a speech in which she critically compared two of her novels, *Song of Youth* (1958) and *Dawn Is about to Break in the East* (*Dongfang yuxiao* 东方欲晓 1980), and pointed out the strengths of the former work and the shortcomings of the latter. Interestingly, Yang Mo reported the content of the speech in her diary entry from December 28, 1982.[17] The meticulous analysis of the conditions of writing, the content, and the outlook of the two novels takes the form of a systematic critique of her literary creation and her career as a writer. The severity of her self-critique is echoed in the final entry of her lifelong diaries. It is worth reading passages from the December 31, 1982 diary entry:

> Recently, I've been waking up at three in the morning, my mind is lucid, but I feel a kind of heavy pain oppressing my heart….what is this thing that is torturing me? …after the Writers Association's Symposium on Fiction Creation and after receiving a letter [of criticism] from a reader who signed it as "Autumn Night," I suddenly understood—I've been frustrated because of my poor skills as a writer, the impasses in my writing, and the incapacity to produce the work of my dreams…no one has openly criticized or accused me, but I cannot forgive myself…I want to use Lu Xun's words to put an end to this year's diary and the diaries of the past thirty-

[16] Yang Mo, *Zibai—wode riji*, 786.
[17] Ibid., 786-790.

> eight years: "I indeed constantly scrutinize (*jiepou*) other people, but most of the times, I mercilessly scrutinize myself."[18]

The quote from Lu Xun's "Postscript to the 'Grave'" (*Xie zai "Fen" houmian* 写在《坟》后面, 1926) closes the diaries that cover thirty-eight years of Yang Mo's life, from 1945 to 1982, and emphatically reiterates the harsh critical attitude that characterizes Yang's daily chronicles. One can find multiple instances of self-criticism in Yang's diaries, but what the above passage shows is that self-criticism became, for Yang Mo, an attitude, a mode to examine not only her thoughts, but also her work as a writer and her life in all its dimensions. The fact that Yang Mo continues to speak in terms of critical introspection in the 1980s is compelling. Indeed, self-criticism was revitalized in the post-Mao years as a method to evaluate the mistakes the Party committed during the revolutionary years. But the relation between jiantao and diaries, which the Party promoted in the socialist period, was no longer central to the post-Mao revival of jiantao. In appropriating the language and the techniques of Communist self-criticism, after the years of political campaigns and struggle sessions had come to an end, the diaries beg question of how one might approach the linkage between the diaries and jiantao, beyond temporal determinations.

The seeming anachronism makes theories of influence and causal relations inadequate and insufficient to illustrate the nature of the link between different texts and practices. Indeed, the integration of numerous instances of normative, political self-criticism in Yang's diary entries from the late 1940s through the late 1960s can easily be related to the contemporary climate of thought reform. In that context, it became common to use diaries to practice self-criticism. The connection between the political form and diary is however less obvious when self-criticism is evoked in a different historical, political, and thematic context. Neither causal

[18] Ibid., 795.

nor reflective, the relation between jiantao and the diaries, in my view, might better be conceived in terms of analogy, on the one hand, and besideness, on the other. Analogy and besideness denote two different dimensions. The analogical relation captures the way the diaries seem to operate *as* jiantao on the micro and macro levels respectively. The exploration in this section of how jiantao occurs in single diary entries and the way in which the diaries as a whole seem to reproduce the logic of self-criticism helps locate the presence of jiantao in and through Yang's text as a dominant mode of self-analysis. However, the analogical resemblance, as the chapter will ultimately show, proves unsatisfactory to come to terms with the variety of themes and discourses that pervade the diaries and are parallel to, if not even in conflict with, self-criticism. The appearance of the gendered body and the narration of pain, in particular, defy the conventional disappearance of gender questions and the body in jiantao. They also highlight the relation of besideness between divergent items in the diaries and, by extension, between genres and forms.

Yang's listing of her oeuvre–literally, a summary of the pieces and works she wrote up to that point–at the end of the diaries, might represent a closure, a farewell to writing. And yet, I would argue otherwise. The end of the diaries and the final self-review constitute a new opening rather than a closure. If on the surface Yang does not provide explicit strategies of self-correction, in practice, her commitment to literature and self-improvement is renewed and affirmed by her decision to have the diaries published. The publication of the diaries turns the diaries as a whole into an instance of self-criticism. The work of editing and compiling the volume to be published forces Yang Mo to re-read and revisit in a critical way her life accounts. The labor of re-reading and editing the diaries, which she mentions in various 1982 entries, can be thought of as a life

(re)writing that is comparable in many ways to the autobiographical writing that characterizes earlier jiantao. Like the life narratives compiled in self-criticism in order to unearth the causes of one's mistakes, the diaries in their entirety—the macro-level—trace a similar autobiographical trajectory when looked at from the vantage point of the time of their publication. They become the site in which Yang not only grapples with questions like "Who am I?" "How have I become who I am?" or "How can I change myself?" but also questions like "How can I write?" "How can I make my work recognizable and recognized?" By criticizing herself and exposing her self-critique (the diaries), Yang Mo is seeking acceptance and recognition, of herself and her work. The desire for recognition is coherent with the pursuit of validation and acceptance implied in political jiantao.

The connection between the diaries and jiantao manifests itself in a more straightforward fashion when Yang fills her diary entries with the analysis of her ideological shortcomings and the negative effects of her class origins. The diary entry from November 25, 1945, for example, is illustrative of the unique overlap between personal journal and political jiantao:

> Starting today, everyone in our small group of editors has begun reporting his/her thought situation (*sixiang qingkuang* 思想情况). I haven't yet written it. Here I will now outline my thought situation:
>
> I. My understanding of current historical changes:
>
> 1) On August 11th, after learning that the enemy had surrendered unconditionally, I felt excited but I could not quite believe it. […] Mainly because I still think that the enemy has a strong army. Even though the Soviet Union has joined the war, it's only been a few days; it can't have defeated the enemy completely […]
> 2) My gradual and nervous (*jinzhang* 紧张) understanding of the civil war. I believe Chairman Mao's directives: when we win the war of resistance against Japan, the Nationalist Party will start a civil war to plunder the gains of the victory. On the other hand, I don't think that the civil war will be a large scale war or that it will be fought for a long time. […]
> 3) My doubts toward the Sino-Soviet agreement and the attitude of the Soviet Union—I understand that there is an agreement between the Soviet Union and China and that the Soviet Union has declared that it won't interfere in

China's domestic affairs, in order to safeguard peace in the Far East and the rest of the world. But the fact that the United States is supporting the Nationalists makes me wonder if the Soviet Union is actually too soft. […]

II. Life, study, work:

1) Life—even though there hasn't been much change or spoiling luxury, while being at the sub-district Ten (*Shi fenqu* 十分区), we captured a lot of war material. Some clothes, coats and other things were distributed among the cadres. Because I have two children, the cadre responsible for the sub-district said that I should be given more things. […] This is what I thought: I joined the war of resistance many years ago; wanting these few things is not excessive. I even thought I deserved them. But now that I am examining myself, I can see that my holding out the hands to the Party was an expression of selfishness. […]
2) Study—I am not paying much attention to material that exposes the cruel behavior of the Japanese invaders. Instead I very much like reading documents and material on the Nationalists. Perhaps because the situations has changed. That's how it should be. I however spend entire days taking care of the children; the enthusiasm for study has dropped, I seldom study hard and diligently.
3) The emergence of the desire to raise my status (*diwei guannian* 地位观念). I used to think that after winning the war of resistance, I would become a senior cadre. I thought that, according to the demands of the situation, I would be assigned a more important job. This is a reflection of the desire to raise my status. Moreover, because of my vanity, I am not satisfied with editorial work and writing; I think that these jobs cannot bring any success; they are not valued by people. It's better to do mass work (*qunzhong gongzuo* 群众工作) or political work to engage deeper with the concrete reality and gain people's respect. But I know that these thoughts are incorrect. I am always fighting with myself. For this reason, on the level of thought, my situation is not too serious. These faulty thoughts cross my mind only occasionally.

III. My thoughts about entering the city [Beiping]:

[…]

These are my hopes regarding entering Beiping:

1) I can reunite with my family people. I might be able to see my sister and my brother. I might also be able to let my children go to school. Because of the war, my children have not been able to go to school. This time I can pick up Qingke (my older son), who is leaving in the countryside, and let him go to school with Xuran. The children can receive a regular education.
2) I can meet with my friends and old classmates. In particular, I have to speak to those friends who laugh at the Communist Party and think that the Party has not accomplished anything. I have to show them that the Party has finally succeeded. The facts prove that we were not messing around aimlessly. To be honest, these thoughts conceal my heroism (*yingxiong zhuyi* 英雄主义), my exhibitionism (*fengtou zhuyi* 风头主义): I hope to show off in front of old friends and classmates.[…] This vanity

> of mine includes my scorn toward the peasants: I think that being appreciated by intellectuals in the city is more honorable than the support, love, and esteem of peasants…it's true. I used to despise peasants. After eight years of war, this thought has not completely disappeared. I should do harsh self-criticism (*ziwo piping*) to address these wrong thoughts. Above, I did the analysis of my thoughts, but I haven't discussed them at the meeting. I think I should be harder on myself—even the occasional wrong thought is not acceptable.[19]

The self-examination Yang Mo develops in this section adheres in content and form to the self-critical essay. The occasion that spurs Yang Mo's self-analysis is a meeting where her husband Ma Jianmin reported the case of G, a cadre turned "bad element" (huai fenzi 坏分子) who disappeared after having been accused of exploitative behavior and opportunism. Yang Mo transcribes Ma's critique of G in the diary and by expressing her agreement with Ma's analysis she actively participates in an instance of public criticism. Criticism then morphs into self-criticism. In the self-critique, Yang elaborates on 1) her understanding of the current historical and national situation; 2) her personal life, study, and work; and 3) her hopes about entering Beiping. Like Ma's speech and jiantao essays from the same period, the content of Yang's self-examination reflects the contemporary political rhetoric that invites intellectuals to dispense with elitism, to take in the perspective of the workers, and make a closer experience of life in the countryside.

The discussion is couched in a highly standardized and ideologically charged lexicon, but it is the splitting of the analysis into distinct units that makes Yang's self-analysis in the diary entry immediately recognizable as jiantao. The breaking of the narrative into distinct sections, as I showed earlier, is a salient feature of jiantao essays. As Yang notes, she is writing her jiantao in the diary in response to the Party's urge to produce self-criticism to contain and combat the emergence of despicable thoughts among the cadres. At the same time, however, the interrelation

[19] Ibid., 18-21.

between self-criticism and the preceding criticism embodied by Ma Jianmin's article cannot be downplayed. As Yang Fu explains in *On Criticism and Self-Criticism,* if criticism is mainly the weapon of the proletariat—by far, the most unselfish and sincere social class—it has to be coupled with self-criticism. The assumption is that no-one is perfect, but everyone can redeem one's mistakes, and even learn from failures (*shibai wei chenggong zhi mu* 失败为成功之母).[20] Being able to recognize one's errors is therefore the very premise of pursuing effective criticism against other people. What this entails is a process of (un)learning and education for both parties—the criticizer and the criticized. As Yang transitions to personal jiantao from Ma's critical report, the diary entry enacts a complete scene of criticism plus self-criticism.

What the aforementioned diary entry shows is how jiantao is often literally inserted in the diaries. Yang Mo was supposed to turn in her self-criticism and found the diary a convenient location to jot it down. However, in Yang Mo's diaries, jiantao does not consist merely of instances of imported, interpolated pieces. Rather, it functions as a mode to conduct a steady labor of autobiographical examination. Jiantao in Yang's diaries is not limited to the analysis of political incorrectness; Yang's critical ruminations are inextricably entangled with her obsession with artistic creation and the limits posed by her gendered identity and her bodily illnesses. The techniques of self-examination developed and practiced in (Communist) jiantao serve well Yang Mo's effort to push herself and construct her identity not only as a woman revolutionary, but also, and especially, as a writer. Specific diary entries (the micro level I mentioned earlier) can be read as individual jiantao pieces: Yang's self-criticism of her revolutionary and literary work. What is important is that the logic and the structure sustaining Yang's critiques of her writing are equivalent to those defining political jiantao.

[20] Yang Fu, *Tan tan piping yu ziwo piping*, 15.

Four main parts can be discerned in jiantao writings: the recognition of the mistake, the analysis of the causes of the mistake, the categorization of the mistake according to political/ideological criteria, and the resolution to adopt adequate measures to overcome the mistake and elevate one's own self. While the mistake (it can be more than one) is not necessarily attributed to ideological faults (sometimes it is) and the structure is not always clearly partitioned in Yang's jiantao of her literary work, a four-step sequence is generally maintained. An example can be found in the entry from May 2, 1949:

> When I am not busy, I should think about writing. Feelings of dejection are extremely harmful. I need to cheer myself up; everywhere there are opportunities to do something for the Party. I've been reading too little, I've been writing too little. Even though I often write in the diary, that is only to pour out some inner thoughts, some occasional emotional surges, or things related to my children and life's trivialities. I don't read enough nor do I take enough study notes; I don't analyze myself enough; I don't know myself enough; I don't keep enough record of my understanding of, and serious reflections on, life. If you don't fertilize your crop, how will it grow robust? If people do not read (add fertilizers), how can they become useful beings? So, it's better if I don't commit to any particular work or if I just accept some part-time job. In this way I will have more time left for intellectual work like reading and writing.[21]

Four stages can be identified in the above passage. The first one—"I should think about writing" (I am not writing)—corresponds to the recognition of the mistake. The second—from "I've been reading too little" to "robust?" articulates Yang's analysis of the causes of the mistake. In the third—"If you don't fertilize your crop, how will it grow robust?"—Yang names/categorizes the mistake. The last part, from "so, it's better if" up to "writing," constitutes the course Yang intends to follow to improve herself.

[21] Yang Mo. *Zibai—wode riji*, 97-98.

If the passages examined thus far can be deemed as the product of contemporary thought reform movements, they do not constitute isolated instances of self-analysis. The diary context cannot be taken for granted. Even if these passages reproduce and/or evoke the widely diffused practice of ideological self-analysis, they need to be read within the flow of the diary writing. The diaries of thirty-eight years weave a rich narrative of personal itineraries, travels, interpersonal relations, experiences, work achievements, failures, illness, and ideas. Jiantao must be read within the variety of items documented in the diaries. A different reading experience is offered if one approaches self-criticism amidst and as parallel to Yang Mo's accounts of her struggles to produce the work of her dreams, to take care of her children, and the chronicles of her lifelong diseases. Take for instance the entry from April 8, 1958:

> This past week I worked on the script sporadically. Haunted by headache and liver pain, again! There was nothing to do but to get shots of hormones again. This time I did the injections by myself, it's been already four days—four shots.
> The day before yesterday, the Party general branch held a meeting to mobilize people to counter the "five." After I got my salary, I headed to the market and bought a couple of things, yesterday I re-ordered earlier chunks of the diary, I don't know how, but I offended Old Mr. Liver again, it felt sick, it got swollen and started to hurt. Damn it! I thought of going to Kong Bohua's 孔伯华 son to be checked, but I was out of energy and didn't go.
> In the past two days, yesterday and today, I wrote five big posters, one is my self-analysis (*ziwo jiancha*). This is what I think. People have criticized me because I haven't finished the script, I should adopt the "blame-yourself-severely" (*ze ji yan* 责己严) spirit to wash myself (*xi yi xi lian* 洗一洗脸).
> Lately, good things like positive feedback on *Song of Youth*, meeting with the readers, and writing pieces have been numerous. I warn myself, I have to be careful, I have to treat myself rigorously. This time I'd better strengthen my Party spirit; this book wouldn't exist without the Party![22]

In the rest of the entry, Yang gives account of the remuneration the publishing house has agreed on giving her, an upcoming critical article on her novel, and the fact that her husband has not yet come back from Taiyuan. While self-criticism emerges forcefully in the diary entry, it

[22] Ibid., 352.

does not occupy a special, privileged position. A reader may equally be struck by Yang's self-critical narrative as he or she might be by Yang's bodily vicissitudes or the accounts of her struggles to get her work done. Jiantao and the political campaigns to identify enemies around and inside oneself marked an extraordinary page of Chinese history. Extraordinary because it forced people to rearrange their vision of the world according to fuzzy divisions between friends and enemies, right thoughts and wrong thoughts, political and personal, or ideology and emotions.[23] But the alignment of self-criticism to Yang's bodily disorders and her concerns about writing de-stabilizes clear-cut separations and brings jiantao down to the level of her daily routine. The domestication of jiantao might bespeak Yang Mo's need to naturalize and make ordinary extra-ordinary experiences like self-criticism or her disease. Illness is a recurrent topic throughout Yang's diaries. It is striking how accounts of bodily pain unfold throughout Yang's chronicles. This aspect of her life becomes implicated in her self-critical labor and her work as a writer. The besideness of the body in pain and self-analysis invites a more nuanced understanding of jiantao beyond the mind/body binary that self-criticism seemingly purports.

[23] David Apter and Tony Saich have coined the term "exegetical bonding" to describe the rise of a new epistemological structure that shaped people's world-view. The place where this discourse was created—the moral moment of the Chinese revolution, as they call it—was Yan'an. Yan'an, the headquarters of the CCP after the Long March, was the laboratory where the Communists forged a new vision of the world; a knowledge that became symbolic capital. Access to this worldview and the new interpretive tools was crucial for the individuals to overcome their condition and achieve personal and collective redemption. By aligning the narrative of national loss with individuals' stories of personal dispossession, the new hermeneutical system legitimized the revolution from the bottom-up, while securing the formation of a strong centralized political power. The construction of a discursive community was predicated, therefore, on the dissemination and internalization of the new language, the alternative outlook, and new norms of conduct that bound the individual to the collective. A standardized body of texts was compiled to spread the correct knowledge and provide every individual with linguistic and conceptual tools by means of which they could reinterpret the world and their life. Apter's and Saich's analysis of the emergence of a discursive community poignantly captures the way in which innovations in language and communication were germane to the revolutionary project. See David Apter's and Tony Saich's *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic*, 263-277. Worth mentioning is also Michael Dutton's influential discussion on how the friend/enemy distinction—the divide between the people and the enemies of the people—turned into a driving force that informed not only the revolution and political and legal actions, but also daily life. See Michael Dutton's *Policing Chinese Politics*.

The (Gendered) Body in Pain

Yang Mo started suffering from various diseases in 1939. At that time she was serving as the head of the Women Rescue Foundation. The team was moving constantly to follow the army and perform rescue work after each battle. In the harsh conditions of malnutrition and extreme fatigue, Yang Mo contracted leishmaniasis, which almost took her life. Her body continued to manifest signs of sickness that forced her to half-year hospitalization in 1941. But it is in the late 1940s, when Yang was working for *Jinchaji Daily* (*Jinchaji ribao* 晋察冀日报) based in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, that disease turned into a chronic state that profoundly affected her working and personal life. Accounts of her physical conditions, medications, and other related details abound in Yang Mo's diaries from that period. Especially important are Yang's gynecological problems, which acquired prominence in 1948 when a late diagnosed ectopic pregnancy caused her abdominal pain, bleeding, and serious headaches. The surgery cost Yang Mo the removal of her right ovary (September, 9, 1948).[24] Another similar episode occurred in 1949, after Yang Mo had joined the Women's Association in Beijing, when another case of extrauterine pregnancy was handled with surgery and led to the removal of the uterus. The consequences of these events on Yang's body and mind were immense. The ensuing hormonal disorders were aggravated by chronic headaches, excruciating liver pain, arthritis, as well as increasingly frequent bouts of depression. For Yang, that was the beginning of an interminable struggle against pain and the limits that physical disabilities imposed upon her life and career advancement. In the diaries she never misses a chance to vent her frustrations and blame her illnesses as major obstacles to her progress:

[24] Yang Mo, *Zibai—wode riji*, 74.

> Another year has passed by and the revolutionary high tide is surging forward. But because of this ill body, I, a Bolshevik, have become the stone and silt in the mud of the raging tide; I am wasting my time. Everyone around me is bravely moving forward, while I am stagnating, doing nothing. Healthy people, who are able to work, can hardly understand my inner pain. Since December 26, every day, I've been suffering from splitting headaches and I've not been able to do any work. […] Comrade K said that I don't have to worry about asking for leave, but how much longer can I continue to rest? How can I not be worried? Illness is tormenting my body and my mind (January, 2, 1949).[25]

By work, Yang Mo does not refer solely to her political commitments as a cadre and organizer, but also, and most importantly, to her writing and intellectual activities in general. The impaired body, as the passage above shows, is perceived as a paralyzing factor that hinders the fulfillment of her intellectual and professional goals: "I'm always thinking about writing something. The life and death of familiar heroic characters are brewing in my head. But I keep procrastinating and haven't written a thing. ... Half of my life, actually, more than half of my life has dissipated amidst the gloom of disease (*bingtong* 病痛)."[26] The conflict between the body in pain and intellectual endeavor is powerfully dramatized in Yang Mo's remarkable attempt to literally "jiantao" her physical condition. The diary entry from September 20, 1950, stages a compelling self-analysis of the causes of her physical/mental disease and pain:

> In the afternoon, I was lying alone on the couch, meditating. I started thinking of how I have lost my health, and examined myself (*zuo le yi fan jiantao* 做了一番检讨): I realized that it is probably because of my incorrect thoughts that I fell ill. This makes me very sad. In the past, I used to think that my bodily condition was the result of the unhappy environment. In fact, the problem is in my thoughts. According to my analysis, three things caused my neurasthenia (*shenjing maobing* 神经毛病):
> (1) After the victory, I gave myself the airs of a hero (although unconsciously) and I was unhappy with the work I was assigned. As a result, my mood was low, but in spite of the low mood, I worked hard and that affected my health.
> (2) I've been too much concerned about my children. It was always a pain for me not to be able to take care of Little Fatty when she needed my help after falling sick. Every time I went home and then back to work, it felt like a knife was cutting my

[25] Ibid., 82-83.
[26] Ibid., 109.

heart. Over time, this has greatly damaged my nerves—this is the unforgivable supreme motherly love.

(3) I am a sturdy heroic individualist, who overestimates her actual strength. I fear people saying that I force myself to endure work and refuse to rest adequately. For this reason, I often overwork to the point of exhaustion...this kind of unhappy work is the most harmful.

[..] If I want to be healthy, I first need to reform my thoughts. I have no right to ruin my body—this body belongs to the people. Think about it. If I am healthy, my progress, my contribution can be much greater than they are now. At the moment, everyone in the Party is going through rectification (*zhengfeng*) under the supervision of leaders of the Central Committee. This piece in my diary marks the beginning of my rectification amidst illness.[27]

To locate the root of pain and disease in ideological/thought mistakes conforms to the logic of jiantao that assumes a dualistic, hierarchical relation between the mind and the body. I say "assume," because questions related to the body or disease are virtually absent in the numerous manuals on self-criticism and the articles on that same topic that inundated journal columns since the early 1950s. Self-criticism referred primarily to the confession of mistakes that were associated with a bourgeois mentality and/or a wrong outlook on life and the world; wrong because considered in conflict with the position of the proletariat—the most extolled class in those years—and the project of building a communist society. Learning how to become aware of one's faults and identifying their origin entailed an exercise that had the mind as its main target. The emphasis on the mind is further attested by the interchangeability of the term jiantao with expressions like "thought summary" (*sixiang zongjie*) or "self-reflection" (*ziwo fanxing*).

The priority afforded to the mind in both theoretical discussions on jiantao and self-critical essays however does not mean that the body was ignored or fell into oblivion. The project of developing a strong country and improving production could not depend solely on the formation of an ideologically correct community; it was also dependent on the availability of strong labor force. Strong people with vigorous bodies could help speed up production and raise

[27] Ibid., 109-111.

the wealth of the nation. As a result, parallel to the popularization of thought reform techniques was the dissemination of information and guidelines to raise people's awareness about hygiene, sanitation, and health care. Among the various campaigns the CCP launched to promote sanitation and cleanliness, the 1952 Patriotic Hygiene Campaign (*Aiguo weisheng yundong* 爱国卫生运动) deserves attention. Reports about America's use of germ warfare in the Korean War raised fears about biological weapons. The CCP responded with the national weisheng campaign that continued and escalated earlier programs and movements to rationalize the population and raise consciousness about the invisible threat of germs. The campaign included rallies and household inspections to monitor cleanliness.[28]

Women's bodies were an integral part of the Party's biopolitical agenda. In the Communist period, women were encouraged to join the revolution and become active members of the working class. The Party's encouragement to get women involved in the construction of the new state tapped into women's longstanding desire and struggle for emancipation. But by deferring women's liberation to the establishment of the communist society, the socialist state appropriated the women's cause and translated it into the political terms of class struggle. In her insightful study of gender in Soviet films that became popular in Maoist China, Tina Mai Chen has demonstrated how representations of the socialist woman seemed to merge revolutionary zeal with a sexualized, female subjectivity. However, the model of female subjectivity that combined the figure of the militant partisan with a "fun-loving post-revolutionary female agency" that allowed for the free expression of desires and flirtatious sexuality, remained an aspirational ideal located in the future yet to come.[29] In the revolutionary period, the dominant discourse on

[28] See Ruth Rogaski's *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 285-287.
[29] See Tina Mai Chen's "Film and Gender in Sino-Soviet Cultural Exchange, 1949-1969," in *China Learns From the Soviet Union, 1949-present,* ed. Thomas Bernstein and Hua-Yu Li (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 421-445.

women stripped the signifier "woman" of its gendered content and reduced it to a symbol of class oppression. As a result, the woman question was silenced and subsumed under the national project of building a socialist state.[30] This chapter seeks to complicate the view that the encroachment of the political onto the spheres of the emotional and the private caused the repression of the emotional and the sexual. Yang Mo's diaries' relentless iterations of her womanly dilemmas *within* self-criticism suggest that political/ideological discourses did not suffocate completely a specific gendered perspective nor did they erase the private realm of emotions and feelings; they developed *next to* them.

The socialist rhetoric of sex-sameness, which recognized women's right and ability to do what men can do, and the politicization of the signifier "woman" were integrated through regulation of the female body. Lu Fu's *Study Guide for the New Woman*, for instance, devotes a large section to women's health care.[31] The guide offers basic knowledge and practical advice on a number of topics including diet, menstruation, hygiene, and the prevention of diseases. Interestingly, when it comes to disease, the booklet warns women against holding old, superstitious beliefs according to which health or lack thereof is attributed to fate or the intervention of supernatural forces. Negligence toward the body is often considered as a symptom of the legacy of old-fashioned beliefs. Combating superstitions and overcoming false

[30] Meng Yue's discussion of the representation of women in socialist literature offers important insights into the politicization of women and female images in the socialist period. In her article "Female Images and National Myth," she observes how the strategy to replace earlier sexist, gender codes with a political/ideological code was made possible through a process of displacement of earlier systems of representation. For her, the strategy was effective in allowing the state to create a public sphere/discourse that appropriated all other possible articulations. Whether woman represented the exploited class or stood as an allegory of state authority, woman turned into an agent that politicized desire, the private, and family relations. The consequence of this inscription was the repression of love, sex, self and all private emotions. Meng Yue's argument echoes Tani Barlow's conviction that the replacement of the question of gender inequality with the question of national salvation displaced the possibility of gender-specific psychology and sensibility for the socialist idea that women can do what men can do sanctioned gender difference only on the material level of physiology. See Meng Yue, "Female Image and National Myth," in *Gender Politics in Modern China*, ed. Tani Barlow (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1993), 118-136, and Tani Barlow, "Theorizing Woman: *Funü*, *Guojia*, *Jiating* (Chinese Woman, Chinese State, Chinese Family)," *Body, Subject & Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani Barlow, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 253-289.

[31] Lu Fu, *Xin funü duben.*

ideas is therefore crucial to learning how to take care of one's body. Jiantao's emphasis on the correction of people's thoughts corroborates this assumption: the mind is meant to regulate the body, thus reforming the mind is the key to making docile, obedient, and healthy bodies.

Yang Mo's critical examination of her illnesses and her attitude to illness are illustrative of the pervasive nature of the socialist normative discourse. But what Yang Mo's analyses also remind us of is that physical pain, as Susan Wendell asserts, "is an interpreted experience."[32] This means that not only is physical pain variously understood according to the specific social, gender, political, and historical context within which it occurs, but also that pain can be the product of different sensations, thoughts, and desires. Pain can be enhanced by the desire to get rid of it, for example, or it may be diminished by an attitude of acceptance and may help one envision alternative paths of self-development. I will return to the transformative capacities inherent to pain later. Here it is important to notice that in spite of the apparent privileged position granted to the mind, Yang Mo's attitude toward the body and pain in the diaries is not one of absolute disparagement. The body is at once condemned and forgiven.

The body and physical pain are made the principal culprit, for instance, when Yang Mo needs to defend herself from the accusation of having wasted her time and not produced a commissioned script when working as an editor in the Script Writing Department of the Film Bureau during the 1958 anti-waste campaign.[33] In her self-defense, which she transcribes in the February, 1, 1958 diary entry, Yang Mo holds her body responsible for delays in her work schedule: "Because of my illness, from 1956, I haven't been able to continue my work. I

[32] Susan Wendell, "Feminism, Disability, and the Transcendence of the Body," in *Feminist Theory and the Body*, ed. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), 326.
[33] In 1958, in the context of the new economic planning and the politics of the Great Leap Forward, two new "anti" campaigns against waste and conservatism were launched and merged with the rectification campaign. In his "Sixty Articles on Work Method," Chairman Mao called every unity, cooperative, factory, and school to struggle against waste. The campaigns were intended to improve work performance and boost production. See Alfred Chan's *Mao's Crusade: Politics and Policy Implementation in China's Great Leap Forward* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 166.

couldn't attend meetings but I pushed myself to write the script in spite of my illnesses…At the end of September 1957, I was asked to return from Beidaihe to join the anti-rightist campaign. I started attending the meetings, my body fell ill again and I did not finish the script."[34] Yang Mo accuses her bodily weakness of hindering her work as a cadre and a writer. Countless are the passages in the diaries in which she blames her body for slowing down not only the writing of the script but also the novel she was trying to produce. At other times, like in the self-criticism above, bodily pain and disease are interpreted as symptoms, while the real offense and culpability are thought to reside elsewhere. The accusatory position toward the body acquires a milder, more nuanced tone when Yang turns her anger and condemnation against her inconsiderate attitude toward disease or other inappropriate ideological stances. Interestingly, this ambivalence, which makes bodily pain at once a cause and a symptom to be addressed, assumes more subtle and profound implications in Yang's relation to, and representations of, her gynecological problems.

The removal of her reproductive organs had an enormous impact on the writer's overall well-being. In the diaries, her fixation with this particular dimension of her bodily impairment is striking. Throughout, she gives detailed accounts of her gynecological condition, the symptoms, the depression that followed the surgical operation, as well as the various therapies she undertakes. Yang's depression is diagnosed as a form of neurosis and she moves to her youngest sister's place in Shanghai in the fall of 1950 hoping that a change of environment might help her body and her work. In Shanghai, Yang seeks specialized psychological support to overcome insomnia, anxiety, and other symptoms, and embarks on a path of self-discovery via

[34] The Anti-Waste Committee of the Script Writing Department of the Film Bureau where Yang Mo was working at that time criticized her for having not submitted the long-due script. In this entry Yang Mo literally transcribes the jiantao that she later handed to the Committee. As she reports in the diary, her jiantao was accepted and her "waste crime" (*langfei zui* 浪费罪) no longer existed. Yang Mo, *Zibai—wode riji*, 343-344.

psychoanalysis.[35] In the diary, Yang mentions writing an autobiography for her analyst. The process proves beneficial to Yang Mo's sleep, mood, and her bodily functions. Remarkably, however, the work of self-analysis pushes and reinforces Yang Mo's attention toward her body and sex-specific disease:

> Today I slept a lot; I feel well, I don't feel any panic. It looks like my illness is not a kind of "depressive neurosis" (*youyuxing shenjingbing* 忧郁性神经病). I feel (*ganjue* 感觉) it is due to the fact that in my thirties I had my ovaries and uterus removed, and the endocrine system lost its natural balance (I've heard that disorders of the nervous system are common among women who have their uterus and ovaries removed). It seems that my disease is connected to this, too. Otherwise, why do I immediately feel better every time Doctor Su gives me a shot of foreign hormones when the illness breaks out? When a woman lacks hormones, every kind of nervous symptom can occur. Otherwise, how could a cadre like me who has pledged her loyalty to the revolution suffer from "depressive neurosis," given that nothing else has happened to me? I think that Western medicine's "treat the head when the head aches and treat the foot when the foot aches" principle lacks Chinese medicine's holistic approach. Doctor Su, too, has only focused on my neurosis and has overlooked my gynecological disease (*fuke bing* 妇科病).
> Even though the gynecological surgery did not take my life, it has doubled the suffering of this already sick body. But even if disease is disease, as long as it is not death, it won't change my determination to write (October 21, 1950).[36]

In all its lucidity, this moment of self-understanding is incredibly significant. Yang Mo *feels* that the neurosis is caused less by her ideological mistakes or improper attitude to disease,

[35] Yang Mo mentions that it was the neurologist in Shanghai who put her in contact with doctor H to speak to him about her "psychology" (*xinli* 心理). Doctor H asks her to write an autobiography to dig into her self and past experience. Ibid., 119. Yang Mo's mentioning of psychotherapy is a very intriguing detail. It is also interesting that she provides the name of the neurologist but conceals the name of the analyst. Freudian theories were introduced and variously appropriated in China in the Republican period. But the rise of Communism, scholars have argued, caused the demise of psychology because it was considered the product of a bourgeois society. Even though Wendy Larson's comparative study of the Freudian theory of the "sexualized unconscious mind" and the spiritual core of the revolutionary subject in Communist China has brought to the fore analogies and differences between Freudian and Communist approaches to the subject, Wendy Larson believes that interest in Freud almost vanished in the Communist years and Freud was rediscovered again only in the 1980s when a "'Freud fever' broke out." Wendy Larson, *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 33. On the appropriation of Freudian theories in early twentieth century China and their impact on literature, see Jingyuan Zhang, *Psychoanalysis in China: Literary Transformations, 1919-1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992). Starting from Yang Mo's experience, it would be interesting to uncover further evidence on the existence of psychoanalysis and its practice in the Communist period.

[36] Yang Mo, *Zibai—wode riji*, 119-120.

than it is by the endocrine disorders caused by the removal of the reproductive organs. The recognition of an organic life of her body independent of her thoughts allows Yang Mo to experience a form of bodily excess that cannot be recuperated into the dominant discourse of the socialist body. Granting autonomy to the body means to acknowledge its capacity to affect the individual in spite of herself. It seems to imply a sort of helplessness on the part of the individual. And yet, Yang Mo's meticulous outlining of her bodily symptoms in the diaries, her effort to listen to her body suggests a more interactive and even interdependent relation between the individual's mind and the body. The disease does not alienate Yang Mo from her body, it rather helps her re-appropriate it from aversive thoughts; it encourages her to learn how to listen to it, to live and work with and out of it.

Yang Mo's determination not to let her body stop her from writing is the most telling manifestation of Yang's acquired awareness of her corporeality and her urge not to overcome her body but rather to heed and attend to it: to reconcile it with her writing aspirations. The diary entry from May 21, 1951, further illustrates Yang's reconnection to her own body:

> I think again of my disease, it cannot have been caused by "vexation" (*ciji* 刺激) or "exhaustion." I've been taking care of my body for over a year, and the cause of vexation no longer exists. Why am I still not well? The lack of hormones ought to raise my attention. How irritating it is that, since my uterus was removed, I've started suffering from neurasthenia. And yet, even though I've seen many doctors, none of them – including the one who operated on me – has told me that the lack of hormones has caused my illness. But, of my illness, I now have a grasp. A long illness turns the patient into a doctor, eh?[37]

Yang Mo's path to learn how to live and work with disease and pain traces an important thematic strand in the diaries, which unfolds alongside her steady labor of self-introspection in a jiantao fashion. This path is marked by Yang's recurrent, multifarious chronicles of suffering. How pain

[37] Ibid., 147.

is represented in the diaries matters. But equally important, I believe, is to ask what it means to voice pain and how this effort relates to jiantao and Yang's work as a writer. In what follows, I will try to think about pain, conceptualize the effort to narrate it in the diaries, and explore the way in which the narration of pain not only mediates jiantao, but intimately informs Yang's production of her major and most famous novel, *Song of Youth.*

Narrating Pain and the Making of the Work of Art

Pain is difficult to express verbally. Yang Mo records in the diaries her frustrations for not being able to share her suffering with her husband Min. Physical pain has raised a wall between them, it has strained their marital relationship: "at night, he sleeps outside of the room, I sleep in the room. We basically sleep separately."[38] It has also hampered their communication: "Every time I speak to Min about my physical condition, he shows me that he is sick and tired of it, he doesn't even want to listen. Two days ago I hadn't finished saying 'Disease has become a pattern (*guilü* 规律) in my life…' before he twisted his neck and replied, annoyed: 'the pattern again! It's been a pattern for a year!'"[39] Pain, Elaine Scarry emphasizes, is a certainty for the person who experiences it, but might raise doubt for a person hearing about it.[40] Pain isolates

[38] Ibid., 170.
[39] Ibid., 169-170
[40] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 4. Scholars have challenged Scarry's conceptualization of pain as an inexpressible state. Disabilities studies have shown the existence of a rich history of representations of pain. Joanna Bourke, for instance, objects to Scarry's vision of pain as an independent entity that exists outside of language. For Bourke, the problem in Scarry's theory lies in the fact that "'pain,' rather than a person-in-pain, is given agency." Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkilles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5. I agree with many of the critiques that historians of pain and scholars in disabilities studies have raised to counter Scarry's approach to pain. In this chapter, I do not treat pain as an entity independent of the woman's body. To the contrary, I strive to show that the experience of pain and its narrativization constitute a process that stems from and brings to the fore the individual body. However, I find the parallel that Scarry establishes between pain and labor as metaphors useful to understand Yang Mo's experience of writing about, and out of, pain. I will elaborate on this later in the chapter. I also think that Scarry's idea that pain is difficult to express remains relevant. Yang Mo struggles to talk about her pain. I struggled, too, to let people around me relate to, and understand, the pain I was feeling when my hair started thinning out due to the hormonal imbalance caused by my past history of anorexia. Pain alienated me. It isolated me. This alienation does not

because it is difficult to articulate. Its inexpressibility lies in the fact that pain does not have a concrete object. This makes pain as a felt-experience very different from other psychic, affective, physical, or mental states. Hunger, thirst, or desire, for instance, is always hunger, thirst, or desire *for* something. These states are felt in relation to a referent that exists outside of the sentient body. Physical pain lacks this external referent; objectlessness makes pain difficult to communicate, to verbalize, and therefore less sharable. The lack of a concrete, external object turns physical pain into an experience that resists and even destroys language. Language is reduced to inarticulate moans, wails, and cries. When verbally expressed, pain is at best described by means of metaphors and "as if" constructions that render its intensity, quality, and effects.[41]

Scarry's conceptualization of physical pain as an inexpressible, alienating state in which the individual feels hurt by his/her own body is useful to examine Yang's experience of bodily pain, but falls short of addressing the peculiarity of Yang's pain: her gynecological issues. The gendered dimension of her pain in a context in which societal and medical discourses tried to appropriate the body of women and the signifier "woman" for political reasons cannot be overlooked. This becomes especially significant if one considers the tight link between representations of pain, the work of self-diagnosis, and self-criticism in the diaries.

The difficulty of verbalizing physical pain is evidenced by Yang Mo's multifarious accounts and representations of pain. The variety of these representations spans a broad spectrum including seemingly detached descriptions of symptoms and treatments, self-diagnoses, complaints, moments of self-commiseration, apocalyptic forecasting and fear of death, as well as

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however preclude one from finding ways to represent it. The articulations of pain in Yang's diaries, while speaking to the difficulties of verbalizing it, also show that the effort and process of externalizing pain can be transformative. Pain can trigger the process, but it is the individual who carries it out.

[41]Ibid., 15.

instances of self-encouragement in a forward-looking perspective. In the May 17, 1951 diary entry, for instance, a detailed account of the treatments Yang is undertaking and specific bodily symptoms seems to function as a means to communicate the severity and seriousness of her condition:

> From the 14th, I've been seeing Doctor H for treatment. I did acupuncture 8 times and took 7 doses of medicine. I don't feel it's been helpful. I won't go again. Recently I've also been to the Department of Health and did acupuncture twice. The second time, the points that were treated were the abdomen (*san yinjiao* 三阴交) and the inner pass point (*neiguan* 内关). A third time I was treated on the shenmen (神门) and the xinyu (心俞) points, but so far I haven't noticed any benefit. On the contrary, my arms have become numb, I've been suffering from palpitations over the past two days, hands and feet tremble, and I feel emotionally upset.[42]

At other times, pain is disclosed in the form of anxiety and fear of death: "recently, when I suddenly wake up in the middle of the night, I feel the threat of death. I'm reluctant to part from the world, I don't like the idea that I won't be any more in this world…[sic] I know that this feeling is triggered by my disease, but I want to use my will to beat this feeling (February 1, 1956).[43]

Whether physical pain finds voice in manifestations of fear, in descriptions of symptoms, in complaints or self-encouraging pledges, the significance of recording pain lies in the very effort to externalize it, to make it communicable, sharable, and thus less painful. I read Yang Mo's constant urge to record and analyze her pain, especially her gynecological disorders, as a gesture to externalize her suffering and make it narratable. The process of objectifying pain in words, as Elaine Scarry suggests in her book, transports pain outside of the body and makes it less severe. That pain can be diminished by verbalization and its objectification is illustrated in Yang's diaries by Yang's relation to her work as a writer and the history of producing her novel.

[42] Yang Mo, *Zibai—wode riji*, 145.
[43] Ibid., 257.

Pain (*tongku* 痛苦) surfaces in the diaries not only in the context of Yang's physical disorders, but also in connection to her work impasse. Work and physical pain resemble one another in the diaries in that work is felt as pain as long as it does not get externalized, as long as it does not accomplish itself in an object, an artifact beyond itself.[44] The correlation between physical pain and intellectual labor is captured by Yang's distress for not being able to give shape to the novel she has started picturing in her mind. Writing is hard and causes her indescribable pain: "Every day I feel like a stone were oppressing my heart; I feel as if I were pregnant but could not deliver the baby […] besides a few drafts or ill-written short stories, I have nothing! [...] Sometimes I think: maybe my dream will never come true. Alas, how miserable! What a pain (*tongku*)![45]

Interestingly, the narrative of pain that links Yang's experience of physical disease with the history of writing and editing her novel is deeply imbricated with, and sustained by, Yang's labor of self-analysis via jiantao. The three conditions—self-criticism, pain, and work—do not exist in the diaries as autonomous dimensions; they are mutually dependent. They call on one another constantly throughout the diaries. As the previous sections of this chapter have shown, Yang's self-analysis is implicated with her disease as it is with her work as a writer. Similarly, to think about writing sparks her harsh critical attitude toward her limits, both physical and intellectual. The interplay between jiantao, physical pain, and labor is compelling for it confers

[44] Elaine Scarry devotes much of her book to conceptualizing the correlation between pain and work. Their relation is illustrated by means of a third word: imagining. Imagining represents the extreme opposite of pain: "while pain is a state remarkable for being wholly without objects, the imagination is remarkable for being the only state that is wholly its objects" (162). Pain and imagining are the extremes of a large array of states and feelings, the more a perceptual state is perceived as itself, the more resembles pain. The more it identifies with an object of imagination, the closer it gets to imagination's transformative activity. Establishing the relation between pain and imagination helps understand the way work operates like pain. The more it is felt as deprived of an object (because it lacks it or it is separated from it), the more it is felt like pain. When work externalizes itself in the making of something that did not exist prior to it, the conditions of its occurrence (pain) become sharable and "the sentience becomes sociable." See Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 170.

[45] Yang Mo, *Zibai—wode riji*, 124-125.

on pain the double capacity of being at once a destructive and constructive force. On the one hand, pain cripples Yang Mo's ability to write, and unfruitful writing becomes pain in and of itself. On the other hand, the externalization of pain can activate a transformative process that can change the subject's perception of one's own suffering. The possibility of envisioning an object, verbal and otherwise, through which pain/work can be brought into visibility and extended outside of itself—outside of the suffering/working body—turn pain/work into a less painful and more creative experience. On October 15, 1951, Yang Mo writes: "when I think about the novel I will start writing soon, I grind my teeth and take up the pen. Unlike Xianglin Sao (祥林嫂) who loses everything after A Mao's (阿毛) death, I still have something to feel happy for. Disease has not taken everything away from me: there are still many lovable characters living in my head."[46]

Imagining an object outside of her self—the novel—reduces pain. It is not accidental, then, that when Yang Mo begins to write the novel, every time she makes progresses in the writing, she also feels less physical and mental pain: "I've really started this autobiographical novel. Today I sat at the desk and bearing my bodily pain I spent the entire day writing the outline. I mainly reflected on the fate of my characters, the development of the plot, I haven't written much. […] Today I feel happy, even though last night the backache made me sleep badly."[47] The direct relation between producing more pages and the reduction of pain is crystallized in the often-repeated formula "I need to work feverishly. If I don't work, I feel pain."[48]

[46] Xianglin Sao is a female character in Lu Xun's short story "New Year's Sacrifice." Ibid., 172.
[47] Ibid., 170.
[48] Ibid., 232.

The diary entries from 1951 through 1959 record Yang Mo's struggles to create her novel—quite literally—out of pain. In the diaries, she records the demanding ambitions, the small successes, the frustrations, and the self-critiques she faces to get her work published. Yang's efforts to channel her pain and externalize it in an object outside of herself culminate in the production of the literary artifact. In January of 1958, *Song of Youth* is finally published by Writers Publishing House (*Zuojia chubanshe* 作家出版社). The work of art is the instantiation par excellence of extending pain outside of the self: the making of an artifact, as Elaine Scarry suggests, is a social act, for the object "is intended as something that will both enter into and itself elicit human responsiveness."[49] The creation of a work of art that can be shared with others not only catalyzes a change in Yang's perception of her own pain—it alleviates pain—but also solicits other people's reactions.

For example, the story of personal growth and the raise of political awareness of the young female character Lin Daojing (林道静) in *Song of Youth* struck a chord in many people. The novel soon became an object of many discussions and debates. The responses were various and controversial. While the novel acquired great popularity and became influential in the arena of cultural production, in China and abroad (in Japan, for instance, the novel received much commendation), it also aroused contentious responses. Among the criticisms the novel received, Guo Kai's (郭开) was crucial.[50] He found Yang's choice of giving prominence in the novel to an intellectual with bourgeois upbringing and outlook objectionable. Guo Kai's critique raised a huge debate among intellectuals and party cadres about the correctness of Lin Daojing's—and by

[49] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 175.
[50] Guo Kai was a worker in the Beijing Electronic Tube Factory. His article "A Brief Discussion on the Faults in the Description of Lin Daojing" (*Lüe tan dui Lin Daojiing de miaoxie zhong de quedian* 略谈对林道静的描写中的缺点) was published in *China Youth* in 1959.

extension, Yang Mo's—stance.[51] The debate that unfolded in personal letters, public meetings, and journal articles is partly documented in Yang's diaries. She incorporates the criticism as well as the positive feedback she receives from friends, readers, and colleagues. The dialogue between the author and the readers in the diaries makes manifest the capacity of the work of art, material or verbalized, to render the sentient being a social being. The object bears the signs of the history of its own creation and proves to be capable of making Yang Mo's painful experience available, albeit in a different form, to others while spurring ideas and reactions. Not only does the work of art diminish pain by transforming it, the work also turns the subject into a maker, and places her in a ground of collective, sharable sentience.

Tucked away within the externalization of pain through creative work with the verbal artifact is then also a question of agency. By projecting the body outward and turning the experience of pain into an act of creation that might solicit further human response, the self attains agency and provokes meaningful societal change. The diaries document well the process of creation, the anguish, the pain of the maker. They unveil not just the creation as a literary achievement, but the intentional work behind it and the incorporation in it of the maker's body. In the era of jiantao, this makes the whole enterprise an act with deep political implications. The narrative of creation that mediates and is mediated by jiantao in the diaries shows how the work of de-construction (the dissecting of the self and language) in self-criticism can turn into an act of construction in which the plight of the individual is captured in a poignant way with implications for the self and others.

At the same time, the surfacing of the body in Yang's narrative of pain and creation can expose the system of unmaking, of reduction and appropriation of human minds and bodies

[51] Under the pressure of political objections, Yang Mo felt the urge to revise the novel and added a few chapters that portray the character's life in the countryside and foreground her close relation to workers. The additional chapters were first published in installments in *Beijing Evening News* (*Beijing Wanbao* 北京晚报).

underlying the institution of jiantao. Deconstruction and construction are not mutually exclusive; in Yang's diaries, they are facets of the same enterprise. By attending to the limitations of the lived body, Yang Mo's diaries emphasize the space between compliance and resistance to the body. The body in pain is at once approached and transcended by means of externalizing it in the work of art. In this space between compliance and resistance, the work of art emerges as the product of pained labor and an intentional act that transforms the pain-paralyzed self into a subject of creation.

Conclusions

When I started working on this chapter, the question of how one might feel, physically and psychologically, when he or she constantly examines one's own thoughts and behaviors, was tormenting me. It must be hard to be judge of oneself, and maintain the necessary lucidity, distance, and objectivity to assess one's actions and ideas. Reading a number of self-critical essays by people with different background and personal upbringing, I felt that behind the formulaic language of self-accusation, the ideologically-laden rhetoric of class struggle, and the refrains of self-improvement, there were living, feeling bodies. Yang Mo's diaries have offered a compelling case to address my concern and have reoriented my inquiry toward the exploration of the relation between the body and jiantao in the context of diary writing.

This examination of Yang Mo's diaries within the context of jiantao has delineated the relation of contiguity between life narratives and self-criticism during and after the socialist period in China. The heterogeneous nature of the diary form plays a fundamental role in making visible the co-existence and overlapping of texts, practices, themes, and ideas that were supposed to be kept separate or arranged hierarchically. The paratactic alignment of diverse items in

Yang's diaries shows how the relation between the political and the private, class and gender, the rational and the emotional, the mind and the body cannot adequately be discussed in terms of subordination or influence. Rather, they might better be conceptualized in terms of besideness. The horizontal, spatial dimension besideness evokes helps capture the relation between self-critical essay and diary, on the one hand, and the multiplicity of discourses and themes within those diaries, on the other.

In my reading, I paid special attention to the surfacing of the body in, and next to, self-criticism. This greatly expands the understanding of jiantao beyond the mind/body dualism that has characterized self-criticism since its earliest theorizations. The emergence of the female body in pain in jiantao complicates the vision that the mind is the only object of scrutiny in practices of self-analysis. Not only does the body appear conspicuously in Yang's self-criticism, but the work of self-analysis becomes the occasion for Yang to reconnect with her own body and discover a bodily excess that does not fit into the discourse of the socialist body. Moreover, self-criticism offers Yang a context in which she can attend to her ailing body and project her ambitions as a writer. Throughout the diaries, the narrative of pain that mediates and is mediated by jiantao spurs Yang Mo's desire to become a better writer and informs production of her major novel, *Song of Youth*. The interplay between pain, jiantao, and literary creation activates in the diaries a transformative process that turns pain into a more bearable experience and the illness-paralyzed self into the active maker of a work of art.

That jiantao becomes implicated in Yang's production of a work of art complicates the de-constructive nature of self-criticism. De-construction and construction work in tandem in Yang's diaries. The apparently genuine effort to dissect her mind in self-criticism ultimately does not conflict with her coming to terms with her body and her literary ambitions. In the diaries, the

work of self-analysis provides her with a technique through which she learns how to attend to her body: to live and work with and beyond it. Ultimately, if the re-appropriation of the body exposes the politics of regulation of bodies in the socialist period, then Yang's literary achievement cannot be understood in opposition to her labor of self-criticism. The practice of jiantao underlies Yang Mo's artistic endeavor.

Chapter Three

Clumsy Democracy: the Construction of a Collective Identity in Wei Junyi's *Recollections of Pain*

The self-critical outlook Yang Mo attaches to her diaries at the moment of their publication, in 1985, highlights the continuous presence of self-criticism in practices of self-narration well beyond the end of the era of socialist campaigns and thought reform movements. This chapter focuses on the survival of a self-critical consciousness and practice after 1976, when the death of Chairman Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution seemed to have brought to a closure the era of collectivization and ushered in a new historical stage marked by economic and political liberalization and the concomitant rediscovery of the individual. Many scholarly works have explored the rise of the individual, the attention to human psyche and subjective interiority in post-Mao literature.[1] The failure of the communist experiment deepened sentiments of disillusionment over grand political collective ideals and spurred renewed interest in the individual.[2] The resurgence of the individual and humanist values, however, was not simply a response to, or a replacement of, earlier collective narratives. The assertion of the individual was a facet of a broader reflection on what cultural and political route was conducive to modernization and democracy in the post-Mao years. The fate of the nation remained at the

[1] It has become a common understanding that the end of the Cultural Revolution was accompanied by a shared disillusionment toward the earlier collective political ideals. As a result, literature turned toward narratives of the self. See, for instance, Paola Iovene's discussion of Wang Meng's 王蒙 (1934 -) usage of stream of consciousness to examine "the multiple facets and contradictions of the individual psyche." Paola Iovene, "Why Is There a Poem in This Story? Li Shangyin's Poetry, Contemporary Chinese Literature, and the Futures of the Past," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 19, no. 3 (Fall, 2007): 94. See also, Xiaobing Tang's analysis of Yu Hua's 余华 (1960 -) and Su Tong's 苏童 (1963 -) subjective narratives. The demise of totalizing historical narratives translates into the discovery of interiority and new articulations of the relation between the individual and the outside reality. Xiaobing Tang, "Residual Modernism: Narratives of the Self in the 1980s," in Xiaobing Tang, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 196-224.

[2] A broad intellectual and philosophical discourse on humanism developed in the 1980s. The realization that years of socialist revolution had not eliminated individual and class alienation catalyzed revisionary neo-Marxist currents of thought aimed at integrating a humanist perspective into Chinese Marxism. See Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 9-36.

center of the various debates, or "fevers" to use Jing Wang's term, that punctuated the 1980s.[3] The belief that past mistakes could be corrected and a better future was lying ahead fostered great hopes and expectations among Chinese people. But this "euphoria," Jing Wang observes, was coupled with a deep sense of crisis.[4] The crisis was especially felt by the intellectuals who tried to envision an alternative path to democracy and modernization. But the culture of enlightenment and humanism that intellectuals proposed in the 1980s did not merge with the contemporary political project of modernization. The splitting of the intellectuals' agenda of cultural enlightenment and the political elite' utopia of socialist modernization, Jing Wang explains, led to the increased alienation of the intellectuals, which culminated with the crackdown of the students' democratic movement in 1989.[5] This context invites us to re-think the rise of the individual in post-Mao writings. The story of the substitution of the collective with the subjective oversimplifies the complex historical, cultural, and political horizon made up of deluded hopes, new future expectations, and competing interests. At stake is not simply whether collective narratives get lost after the Cultural Revolution, but what "collective" came to designate; how the individual self is constructed within a particular collective, and in relation to other groups.

[3] One of the "fevers" Jing Wang examines is the debate on the mini-series *Yellow River Elegy* (*Heshang* 河殇), which was written by Su Xiaokang 苏晓康 (1949 -) and broadcast on China's Central Television in 1988. The documentary on China presents the past and history as an obstacle to modernization and enlightenment. The final image of the river (symbolizing China) encountering the ocean (the West), seems to bring home the idea that the only path to development is to surrender or open itself to the West. The iconoclastic position of the documentary became soon the object of criticism. But Jing Wang reveals that behind the apparent iconoclastic vision lie feelings of nostalgia for the glorious dynastic past and a desire for power and hegemony. In its ideological ambiguity, the mini-series reveals the ambivalence and limits of the intellectuals' project of enlightenment and liberation, which remained grounded on nationalist sentiments. Ibid., 118-136.

[4] The difficulty of reconciling the anti-imperialist legacy of the Chinese revolution and the laws of capital market led to cycles of inflation and economic instability, which cast doubts on the socialist utopia of economic reform as an alternative to Western liberalism. Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever*, 3.

[5] Ibid., 2-3.

Wei Junyi's hitherto understudied memoir, *Recollections of Pain* (*Si tong lu* 思痛录, written between 1976 and 1989, and published in 1998), offers a unique case to explore articulations of the self and the collective in the post-Mao period.[6] The book made quite an impact on Chinese intellectuals, when it came out, but Wei Junyi has remained a marginal figure in Chinese literary history.[7] Even though she spent her entire life writing fiction, essays, and engaging in editorial work for well-established institutions such as China Youth (*Zhongguo qingnian* 中国青年) and The People's Literature Press (*Renmin wenxue chubanshe* 人民文学出版社), she is not famous in China—except among scholars—and is virtually unknown outside of China. And yet, as an intellectual worker in the politicized apparatus of cultural production throughout the socialist period, Wei Junyi supplies a different perspective on the life of a woman who never became a celebrity but was nonetheless close to established intellectual circles. Her memoir is especially interesting for the unpredictable ways in which it captures the experience of an "ordinary" woman writer and cadre. The attention to other people's stories in a text that sets out to critically examine the personal past in relation to the historical events that affected the nation raises interesting questions about mechanisms of memory and historical construction, personal and collective.

[6] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu* [Recollections of Pain] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2012). I want to thank Guo Juan 郭娟, the chief editor of *Xin wenxue shiliao* 新文学史料 [Historical Materials on New Literature], for drawing my attention to this text.

[7] When I met with Guo Juan at her office in Beijing in February 2015, she gave me a copy of the book and told me that the text has been widely read by intellectuals and scholars in China, even though research on *Recollections of Pain* remains scant. One can find references to Wei Junyi's memoir in Shang Changbao's *Zuojia jiantao yu wenxue zhuanxing* and other scholarly works on the years of campaigns and thought reform in China. The book has been studied in the context of post-Mao testimony and has often been compared to Ba Jin's *A Collection of Random Thoughts* (*Suixiang lu* 随想录, 1980), a five volume collection of critical essays on the Cultural Revolution. See for instance Kang Sufeng 康粟丰, "*Sitong lu* ji qi chanhui yishi—jian lun xin shiqi zizhuan wenxue dui lishi de fansi" 《思痛录》及其忏悔意识—兼论新时期自传文学对历史的反思 ["*Recollections of Pain* and Its Confessional Consciousness—and the Reflection on History in Autobiographical Literature of the New Era], *Journal of Liuzhou Teachers College* (*Liuzhou shizhuan xuebao* 柳州师专学报) 18, no. 4 (December 2003): 28-30.

The shaping of a collective identity in Wei's memoir is intimately tied to the text's critical agenda. The critical examination of the past, this chapter argues, builds on the socialist technique of self-criticism and participates in the introspective mode that characterized the post-revolutionary period. This critical effort, however, does not set in motion a coherent, self-absorbed narrative of individual mistakes. Rather, it catalyzes an incoherent account of the past. The incoherence of Wei's reminiscences, this chapter shows, is generated by Wei's aspiration to constitute a coherent collective self and overcome the contradictions and class divisions the revolution had left unresolved. If the failure of Wei's endeavor brings to the fore the limits of self-criticism as a tool to transcend oneself and re-establish unity, it also highlights the dynamic mechanism by which the socialist form is creatively reinvented in Wei's memoir. The surfacing of Wei's individualized experience of suffering, idiosyncratically refracted through the account of other people's plight, reminds us of the various possibilities of narrating life in and through self-criticism.

Recollections of Pain needs to be placed in the context of memoir writing after the Cultural Revolution. The proliferation of memoirs on the Cultural Revolution and earlier campaigns from the early 1970s through the late 1990s is a phenomenon that has not gone unnoticed. The emergence of narratives of survivors—intellectuals, ordinary people, and former Red Guards—is closely tied to the rise of "scar literature" or "literature of the wounds" (*shanghen wenxue* 伤痕文学). The latter refers to fiction written by former sent-down youth that reflects the authors' personal experience in the countryside and the Cultural Revolution in general. By definition, these texts highlight the wrongs many people suffered in the years of political campaigns and encourage a new reflection on the years gone by. As many have pointed

out, the production of this fiction was supported and even promoted by official organs.[8] The rise of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 and the shift away from class struggle policies to a political line that emphasized modernization and democracy made the reassessment of the Maoist era necessary.[9] The new government found legitimization in distancing itself from previous "excesses" and mistakes without disavowing the rationale that spurred the earlier campaigns. The Party's critical appraisal of the past coalesced in the "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," which was issued by the Central Committee in June 1981 to list the Party's achievements and mistakes since its founding in 1921.[10] By presenting an optimistic outlook on the new era, scar literature contributed to the legitimization of the new system and the critical reflection on the past that characterized contemporary intellectual, political, and social discourses. In the field of literary production, scar literature coexisted with the development of "literature of reflection" or "introspective literature" (*fansi wenxue* 反思文学).[11] While scar literature's retrospective outlook is primarily motivated by the desire to assert the present moment, a more profound engagement with the past seems to be at the heart of literature of reflection. Memoirs that purport to come to terms with the violent past deserve a place in the large body of literature known as "literature of reflection."

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[8] See Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature.* Tr. Michael M. Day (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 296, and Sabina Knight, "Scar Literature and the Memory of Trauma," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature,* ed. Kirk Denton et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 528.

[9] Alexander Cook's study of the 1980-1981 trial against the Gang of Four and other fallen exponents of the Cultural Revolution's most radical political faction illuminates some of the challenges that the new regime faced in trying to come to terms with past injustices and redefine the socialist project in terms of modernization and bureaucratic rationalization. Alexander Cook, *The Cultural Revolution on Trial: Mao and the Gang of Four* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1-34.

[10] "Guanyu jianguo yilai dang de ruogan lishi wenti de jueyi," http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64563/65374/4526448.html

[11] According to Hong Zicheng, literature of reflection appeared after scar literature. Subscribing to some of the insights He Xilai developed in his article "A Look Back at and Reconsideration of the Course of History," Hong Zicheng suggests think of introspective literature as "a deepening of scar literature." Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, 295-296.

Aesthetically, these memoirs differ greatly from one another, but they share a similar preoccupation with telling the "true" story of the past, refracted through personal experiences. The claim to truth and the intention to offer a counter-narrative to official history are common features of these personal accounts. Ideologically, however, the re-appraisal of the past oscillates between different degrees of criticism and opposition. Memoirs penned by intellectuals, for instance, seem to offer a fairly rosy portrayal of the socialist period and the Cultural Revolution in particular. In these texts, the experience of prison and labor camps is depicted as overall educative and doesn't seem to level a critique of the Party.[12] In other texts, instead, the re-evaluation of the past is inflected by the unequivocal condemnation of the Party and its earlier policies. Scholarship has been concerned with where a text can be located across the resistance/compliance spectrum.[13] Rather than the political stance of a text or the author, this chapter asks *how* life and the past are recorded in relation to the "reflective" agenda, and to what effects.

Thematically, the relation between post-socialist memoirs and history is central. Taking trauma and testimony as key interpretative frameworks many scholars have explored how these texts have responded to history. Yomi Braester, for instance, has read historical narratives allegorically. He examines a variety of modern Chinese texts that record past, traumatic events.

[12] This is how for instance "autobiographical camp literature" by writers such as Zhang Xianliang 张贤亮 (1936-2014), Wang Meng, and Cong Weixi 丛维熙 (1933-) has been assessed. These works have often been accused of "false realism." See Sebastian Veg, "Testimony, History and Ethics: From the Memory of Jiabiangou Prison Camp to a Reappraisal of the Anti-Rightist Movement in Present-Day China," *The China Quarterly*, 218 (June 2014): 519; Yenna Wu, "Surviving Traumatic Captivity, Arriving at Wisdom: An Aesthetics of Resistance in Chinese Prison Camp Memoir," in *Human Rights, Suffering, and Aesthetics in Political Prison Literature*, ed. Yenna Wu and Simona Livescu (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011), 66.

[13] Sebastian Veg, for one, thinks that the intellectuals' romanticized accounts of the socialist era are inadequate to counter the official narrative. Resistance, for him, can occur only at the grassroots level. See Sebastian Veg, "Testimony, History and Ethics," 531. Motivated by similar concerns, Yenna Wu's analysis of Zhang Xianliang's and Cong Weixi's memoirs tries to shed light on how those texts show resistance to the socialist policies in spite of their apparent mild description of violent episodes. See Yenna Wu's "Surviving Traumatic Captivity, Arriving at Wisdom: An Aesthetics of Resistance in Chinese Prison Camp Memoir," 47-86.

Rather than historicizing the texts and trying to reconstruct the facts they seem to document, Braester suggests reading them allegorically. Drawing on trauma studies, he notices how in these temporally dislocated testimonies "factual events are inaccessible to the present narrator and can be described only in terms of their aftermath"—that is "in parabolic form."[14] He emphasizes the limits of testimony as a symptom of the underlying critique of a universal forward-moving historical narrative, the lack of a real public sphere in China, and the limits pertaining to one's historical consciousness. In his words, "grand collective narratives give way to personal, subjective memory, and history is fashioned, not as a detective story with a clear resolution, but as a mystery tale."[15]

I am not convinced by Braester's suggestion that the limits of testimony are to be attributed to the limits of public discourse in China. Public discourse, even where a real public sphere exists, is never transparent. The relation between writing and the real is always mediated, whether by discourses or the very act of giving the real a narrative form.[16] More importantly, I think that his assumption that traumatic experiences (especially those linked to the socialist campaigns) automatically led to the demise of collective narratives and the rise of personal memory requires more thinking. The separation between the personal and the collective might have not happened so abruptly.

The inquiry into the survival of collective narratives within the larger framework of "literature of reflection" necessitates a deeper engagement with the notion and articulations of

[14] Yomi Braester, *Witness against History*, 9.
[15] Ibid., 25.
[16] In "Narrative, Ideology, Subjectivity: Defining a Subversive Discourse in Chinese Reportage," Yingjin Zhang makes a strong argument to challenge the fiction/history dichotomy. Whether in China or elsewhere, the real, in order to be accounted for, needs to be narrativized. Ironically, while narrativization is the only means we have to achieve knowledge of the real, "whenever we attempt to fix the real in narrative form, it is already receding into a distance (of time and space) from us" (216). I agree with Zhang's articulation of the problematic nature of clear-cut divisions between history and fiction. See Zhang Yingjin's "Narrative, Ideology, Subjectivity: Defining a Subversive Discourse in Chinese Reportage," in *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China*, ed. Liu Kang and Xiaobing Tang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 211-242.

"reflection" in post-Maoist cultural production. The concept of "reflection" has been used in literary criticism as a taxonomic category (literature of reflection) that designates Chinese texts, fictional and non-fictional, that address and re-assess the traumatic socialist past. But "reflection" (or introspection, *fansi*) is not merely a convenient, descriptive category one can find in a textbook on post-Mao Chinese literature. "Reflection" represents the attitude toward the past that a variety of texts profess openly and consciously. Establishing a connection with confessional writings, this is how, for instance, Wei Junyi articulates the necessity to engage in (self)reflection:

> Rousseau's *Confessions* documents the shameful things he did during his life, the things that harmed his ethical integrity. I think that if we—Chinese intellectuals—want to write about the campaigns we made in those years in an article or some other text, we have to examine ourselves in the stillness of the night (*qing ye men xin* 清夜扪心) and won't be able to fall asleep.[17]

Regardless of the specificities and differences in the way reflection is undertaken, the self-conscious declaration of reflection—one that has consequences for the self and others—is a remarkable feature of many post-socialist memoirs and other kinds of autobiographical writings.

"Reflection" is indeed tied to the diffuse, urgent sentiment of grappling with the past in the "transitional" post-Mao period. The emphasis on the painful past—especially the Cultural Revolution—in memoirs and contemporary cultural discourses, has encouraged a variety of scholarly approaches that have often paralleled the Cultural Revolution to the Holocaust and tried to understand the role of national trauma in the shaping of memories, how memories are constructed, and how personal memory intersects with collective memory and official efforts to control what is remembered or forgotten.[18] The comparison with post-World War II and the

[17] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 152.
[18] See, for instance, Margo Gewurtz, "The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang's Cultural Revolution Memoir," in *ARIEL, Life Writing in International Contexts Issue* 39, no. 1 (Jan-April 2008): 29-45., Kam-yee Law, "Explanations for China's Revolution at its Peak," in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution Reconsidered*, ed. Kam-yee Law (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1-24; and Lowell Dittmer's "Learning from Trauma: The Cultural

Holocaust literature is apt and demonstrates how experiences of war and/or other kinds of national and collective trauma can spur exercises of literary reflection and the desire to attest to historical suffering. Transition and trauma theories are relevant but not thoroughly fitting. The emphasis in theories of trauma theories on the fragmentation of the self is not necessarily applicable to the texts I am interested in. Moreover, none of these theories can be exhaustive or all-encompassing, and should not restrain us from interrogating where "reflection" comes from and what its model(s) are.

Focusing on Wei Junyi's post-Mao testimony, this chapter argues that the critical outlook on the past can be better understood in light of the socialist genre of self-criticism. The 1981 "Resolution" embodied the spirit of self-criticism and rekindled a new public discourse on jiantao as the landmark of the Chinese Communist Party. Jiantao offered an important model of self-analysis, linguistically and formally. The structure of jiantao constitutes the scaffolding for Wei's reflective practice.

While the Party promoted self-criticism as a tool of self-analysis and correction, oftentimes, jiantao was not a spontaneous exercise bound to a personal and private space of introspection, but rather a response to external, collective criticism. The logic of self-criticism is summarized by the formula "unity-struggle-unity."[19] Mao deemed struggle within the community a necessary practice to prevent anti-revolutionary thoughts and attitudes from taking root and defying the revolutionary goals. Through criticism, the community could actively control its own members. Self-criticism was then the individual's response to external attacks; by recognizing the faults pointed out by the community and "sincerely" expressing the will to

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Revolution in Post-Mao Politics," in *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution* , ed. William A. Joseph, Christine P. W. Wong, and David Zweig (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1991), 19-40. Kam-yee Law, for instance, unabashedly claims that "that CR is to Chinese intellectuals what the Holocaust is to Jews" (Kam-yee Law, "Explanations," 5).

[19] Mao Zedong, "Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti."

change, the individual could (potentially) be reintegrated into the group. Wei Junyi's memoir, in its entirety, attempts to re-enact the formula. On trial is her and other people's deviation from the original project of eliminating privileges and building the people's democracy. Throughout, Wei Junyi looks into examples of the erroneous treatment of people (primarily intellectuals, but not exclusively) and the way she contributed to committing those mistakes. As in jiantao and life writings from the socialist period, Wei selects specific moments of her life that epitomize her stance vis-à-vis the Party and its policies, even though her ideological position is generally projected through the representation of other people's vicissitudes or her interpersonal relations. The trajectory she traces is one that starts at Yan'an, when she joined the revolution and was integrated into the community, and proceeds by highlighting the various campaigns that were undertaken thereafter. The way those campaigns were conducted represents, for her and the collective, a deviation from the original course, from what she believes is the "truth."

Unlike self-criticism, however, the final resolution—the pledge to reform oneself—is vaguely stated in Wei's memoir. This is complicated by the fact that she builds a collective identity in the text. In the self-criticism she tries to carry out, the "self" is not simply the individual self but a collective self. I will expand on the significance of the collective subjectivity of the text later in the chapter. What needs to be noted here is the struggle the memoir reveals to constitute a collective that transcends social divisions. Wei becomes a mouthpiece for a generation of intellectuals and defers to those out there—readers, the present and future generations—the task of reflecting on the disclosed wrongdoings, of avoiding repeating the same mistakes in future, and returning to the lost path of real democracy. Wei's understanding of "democracy" (*minzhu* 民主) in the 1980s, in the context of the democracy movements and student movements, might have been different from her earlier understanding of the "dictatorship

of the proletariat" (*wuchan jieji zhuanzheng* 无产阶级专政) in the socialist period. She nonetheless feels that the people's self-determination was never achieved and the campaigns strayed from the original vision. The failure to identify a proper path to resolve the contradictions handed down by history brings to the fore jiantao's capacity to produce, rather than eliminate, differences—class, gender, and experiential.

A final note on the formal characteristic of the text is in order. Wei Junyi's memoir is fundamentally incoherent. A salient feature of jiantao writings lies in the effort to tailor a coherent narrative of one's shortcomings and the historical, ideological or environmental factors that caused them. The breaking down of the narratives in points and subpoints, as well as the adoption of a precise lexicon to describe one's mistakes and their causes are manifestations of the importance attributed to clarity and accuracy in self-criticism. In spite of its intention to analyze the past, personal and collective, Wei Junyi's memoir falls short of expectations of linearity. This chapter dwells on the consequences of incoherence to reading practices and its relation to the construction of a coherent collective identity. *Recollections of Pain* stands out in the sea of memoirs that seem to emphasize the personal over the collective. The study of Wei's memoir from the perspective of how it creatively appropriates the architecture of jiantao encourages us to re-think the place of self-criticism within the broader context of cultural discourses and literary practices, and the possibilities it offered to narrate life.

Expanding the Self: the Construction of a Collective Identity

Recollections of Pain bridges different historical periods. The text, if one includes its history of production and publication, encompasses an extended time frame that spans from the early 1940s through the late 1990s. The collapse of clear-cut temporal boundaries is emphasized

in the text by compositional strategies that subvert linear conceptions of time and introduce events by virtue of their resemblance rather than according to their chronological occurrence. The fluidity of time this memoir embodies proves consistent with the text's construction of a collective identity and the project of reflection it carries out.

Wei Junyi started writing her memoir sometime in 1976, before the fall of the Gang of Four. At that time, Wei was working as the main editor of The People's Literature Press. She was very busy and was often sent out on business trips. From her daughter Yang Tuan's 杨团 recollections, we learn that Wei did not have much time to write and when she did, she would leave the drafts scattered all over the table.[20] But at some point, Yang Tuan remembers, something changed. Wei seemed more careful about her drafts. She would not leave her work on the table, unattended. Before leaving the house, she would place her work in the second drawer of her desk. Once, when Yang Tuan stretched her hand to grab the manuscript, Wei pushed her away. When Yang asked what the manuscript was about, Wei did not respond. This was the first time, according to Yang Tuan, that her mother acted so mysteriously about her work. It was only after the fall of the Gang of Four that Wei told Yang that she was working on a memoir covering the period from the 1942 Rectification Campaign to the end of the Cultural Revolution.[21]

Wei Junyi's secrecy is not surprising. It was a manifestation of self-protection at a time when the disclosure of past mistakes and suffering was still a sensitive practice.[22] But it might also be tied to contemporary expectations regarding the sanctioned form for historical re-

[20] Yang Tuan, "*Si tong lu* chengshu shimo"《思痛录》成书始末 [The Story of Publication of *Recollections of Pain*], in Wei Junyi's *Si tong lu*, 326.
[21] Ibid.
[22] While the process of acknowledging past injustices and reviewing wrong cases had already started in 1978, historical re-assessment was officially legitimized when the Central Committee adopted the "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" in 1981. See Christine Vidal, "The 1957-1958 Anti-Rightist Campaign in China: History and Memory (1978-2014)," *CCJ Occasional Papers*, no. 4 (April 2016): 4.

appraisal and testimony. In the early post-Mao years, fiction and reportage literature (*baogao wenxue* 报告文学) were the privileged literary forms to reflect on the past. The fictional form was often also a way to circumvent censorship.[23] It suffices to take a look at the history of publication of *Recollections of Pain* to have a sense of the restrictions pertaining to the publication of autobiographical writings examining the revolutionary era. Wei finished her memoir in the late 1980s. A few chapters were published in various journals in the 1980s, but the text came out in book form only in 1998. As Christine Vidal notices, while memoirs and autobiographical writings that offered a critical examination of the past (her focus is on texts that deal specifically with the 1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign) were produced in great number throughout the 1980s, most of them were published only in the mid-1990.[24]

The Cultural Revolution is generally the central event in most of post-Mao memoirs. Indeed, in some cases, the narrative and critical assessment goes back to the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957), which is often deemed as the prelude to the violence that erupted in later years.[25] Strikingly, the story *Recollections of Pain* narrates starts earlier, at the time of the Rectification Campaign that was launched in Yan'an in 1942. The choice is significant. The Rectification Campaign constitutes the first of a long series of campaigns that targeted

[23] The practice of deploying fiction as a strategy to describe sensitive topics and/or disclosing information can be found even in more recent publications on the Anti-Rightist movement. Illustrative is the case of Yang Xianhui's 杨显惠 (1946-) *Chronicles of Jiabiangou* (*Jiabiangou jishi* 夹边沟纪事, 2003), a collection of interviews with people who experienced labor camp in 1957, published as "fiction." In his article on Yang Xianhui, Sebastian Veg notes that Yang's decision to present the interviews as fiction was both a tactic for disguising information and a "specific way of interpreting and configuring the historical material from the survivors' interviews." See Sebastian Veg's "Testimony, History and Ethics," 519-520.

[24] Christine Vidal highlights that of the sixty or more testimonies addressing the year 1957 and published in the 1990s "half were published in 1998 and 1999." For her, the publication of these memoirs in the late 1990s is related to the liberal turn of the publishing industry. Whether or not we subscribe to her analysis, it remains a matter of fact that most of these texts were published later. Christine Vidal's "The 1957-1958 Anti-Rightist Campaign in China: History and Memory (1978-2014)," 9-10.

[25] The Anti-Rightist campaign is, for instance, the starting point of *The Heading into Chaos Trilogy*, Cong Weixi's memoir on prison camps. The first part of the memoir was published in 1989, but the longer version came out only in 1998. See Cong Weixi, *Zouxiang hundun sanbuqu* 走向混沌三部曲 [The Heading into Chaos Trilogy], (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1998).

intellectuals and party cadres. Even though people from different social and class background were affected by the various political movements, reforming intellectuals and party cadres was considered the main goal of many of these campaigns. The trajectory the memoir traces, which begins with the Rectification Campaign and unfolds through the main campaigns that were undertaken thereafter to mold intellectuals and cadres, imparts specific connotations onto Wei's recollections. It exposes the mechanism through which personal memories are bound to the political events that shaped the nation. More than that, it invites a specific interpretive angle that defines Wei as a member of a distinct community.

Wei Junyi belongs to the group of young intellectuals who responded to the call to join the revolution and moved to Yan'an in the early 1940s. Like many of her peers, she renounced the academic career to use her skills and knowledge to serve the Party and the revolutionary cause. Yan'an is the point of departure of Wei Junyi's narrative, and it is against the expectations and the motivations that informed her decision to be involved in the revolution that Wei measures the role(s) she played in the political events that impacted the life of many and the mistakes that were made in those years.

Critically reflecting on the personal past and the major campaigns that affected all people is the agenda of the memoir. The connection between personal and collective history is established from the beginning. "History cannot be forgotten," Wei declares in "Genesis" (*Yuanqi* 缘起), the preface to *Recollections of Pain*, "in the past ten years, I have been remembering, reflecting on (*fansi*), and scrutinizing all the things we (*women zhe yi dai ren* 我们这一整代人) did, the things we lost and gained."[26] Aligning one's history with the history of the collective became very common in personal narratives from the socialist period. The

[26] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 6.

standardization of self-criticism and autobiographical narratives from the 1950s onward contributed to establishing a new way of narrating one's life in relation to major historical turning points and events that impacted society as a whole. Dates almost disappeared to be replaced by alternative temporal marks like "before Liberation" or "after Liberation" (to indicate the period before or after the birth of the People's Republic of China in 1949), "the anti-Hu Feng campaign" (1955), etc. Besides a few exceptions, dates are virtually absent in Wei Junyi's memoir. It suffices to take a quick look at the titles of the chapters comprised in *Recollections of Pain* to realize that Wei Junyi's personal reminiscences are inseparable from the memory of the events that characterized the nation and upset the life of many people. To name a few: "The Rescue Campaign" (*Qiangjiu shizuzhe* 抢救失足者), "I Originally Believed in the 'Anti-Hu Feng Movement'" (*Wo ceng xiangxin 'fan Hu Feng yundong'* 我曾相信'反胡风运动'), "The Anti-rightist Cataclysm as I Saw It" (*Wo suo jian de fanyou fengtao* 我所见的反右风涛), "'The Great Leap Forward' Will Change China" ('*Da yuejin' yao gaibian zhongguo mianmao* '大跃进'要改变中国面貌) or "The Tragedy of Contemporary People" (*Dangdai ren de beiju* 当代人的悲剧). The narrative is punctuated by references to campaigns or other historical and national events, as in typical jiantao writings.

Following a widely adopted formula, Wei intertwines the necessity of scrutinizing the past history with the analysis of her personal plight: "I wrote this book to narrate my personal story," she emphasizes in the preface. Re-reading history through the lens of personal suffering and vice versa is a common strategy in many post-Mao autobiographical writings. One would then expect the memoir to be filled with details regarding the moments of emotional breakdown when Wei became object of accusation, the hardships she faced when she was forced to do manual labor in the countryside, the years in the cadre school, or the consequences of those

events on her children and the entire family. Instead, even though personal details are documented in the memoir, these are revealed almost in passing in a narrative that gives plenty of space to the description of other people's stories and the events whose scope and impact far exceeded Wei's personal life. The result is a rather incoherent and difficult to navigate narrative. It is not easy to reconstruct Wei's personal story in the memoir. The account is not linear and is constantly interrupted by the stories of other people.

Wei Junyi's attention to others is remarkable. Throughout the memoir, she constantly refers to what happened to people more or less close to her. The sheer amount of people mentioned in the memoir is overwhelming. This short excerpt from the chapter "The Anti-Rightist Cataclysm as I Saw It" is illustrative:

> At that time, the units I was most familiar with were the Writers' Association, the Communist League, and Beijing Municipal Party. I described the situation of writers above. Even in the Communist League, a large number of those young cadres who had joined the liberated areas with great enthusiasm before Liberation were labeled rightists. Among them, Liu Binyan 刘宾雁, Li Ling 李凌, Ding Wang 丁望, Wang Yasheng 王亚生, Chen Ye 陈野… [sic] there were also student cadres like Chen Xuzong 陈绪宗, Chen Mo 陈模, and Li Geng 李庚. Liu Binyan was accused because of his article. I know that in his "Our Journal's News for Internal Circulation," the vice-editor who abandons the revolutionary spirit when he reaches middle age is in fact Cheng Xuzong. In the end, Chen Xuzong could not avoid being labeled a rightist. The reason, however, was that his wife had written an anonymous letter to attack a comrade working in the newspaper's office. Her attack was not right. They could have said that her action was wrong. How could her attack count as counter-revolutionary? And yet, she was labeled a "counter-revolutionary." For speaking in her defense, her husband Chen Xuzong became a rightist.[27]

This is followed by the stories of Chen Mo, Ding Wang, Li Ling and others. The accounts of other people's suffering goes on and on. The shift from personal experience to what happened outside the body might be indicative of the difficulty of translating personal (physical and psychological) suffering into narrative. It is curious that references to the bodily hardships or the

[27] Ibid., 45.

physical threats Wei experienced when, for instance, she worked in the countryside (she mentions building a latrine in the countryside) or when she was arrested and confined, are scattered and underemphasized, even though not absent. This might be because, as Roberta Culbertson explains in her article, experiences of bodily violations are difficult to narrate: they obey "the logic of dreams rather than of speech."[28] And yet, while I agree with Culbertson's idea that moving attention away from the body toward the outside in narratives of traumatic memories can be a symptom of the dissolution of the self after experiences of wound, I don't think that, in Wei Junyi's reminiscences, the focus on others can simply be read as a manifestation of the fragmentation of the self. Rather, it points to what I would call an "expansion" of the self; an outward extension that allows the speaking "I" (*wo* 我) to incorporate a larger group. From Wei's perspective, the vicissitudes those people suffered are not simply "theirs," they become "ours." In narrating their stories, the personal "I" expands to represent a collective "we" (*women* 我们). This expansion and the construction of a collective identity is a process that is built in the text and becomes increasingly palpable as the pronoun "I" becomes often interchangeable with "we."

It is interesting to observe the alternation between "I" and "we" precisely in those passages that are meant to be more "personal" as the account of Wei Junyi's experience at the beginning of Cultural Revolution shows. In 1966, Wei Junyi was in Anyang, Henan province, working in a team to carry out the "Four Cleanups," when the working unit in Beijing required the team to return to the capital: [29]

[28] Roberta Culbertson's "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-Establishing the Self," in "Narratives of Literature, the Arts, and Memory," special issue, *New Literary History* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 170.

[29] The "Four Cleanups Movement" (*siqing yundong* 四清运动) was first launched and tried in Hunan in 1962 to prevent revisionism in the countryside. Investigation teams were sent to rural areas to examine the work of cadres and officers to eliminate corruption and sweep away all the "ox-monsters and snake-demons who do damage to

> When the train arrived in Beijing, as I raised my eyes, I immediately saw that to "welcome" me it was not the same group of people who had come to pick me up when I came back during the winter holidays. There were only two officers. When they noticed that I was staring at them, without looking at me they shouted: "let's go!" None of them helped me with the suitcase. They did not come by car. They had a truck. We, old people, had no choice but to carry the suitcases by ourselves and jump on the truck.[30]
>
> […]
>
> As soon as we walked into the office, they squeezed us into the library in the back. We slept on the floor. Men stayed in the outer room. Women were in the inner room. Before entering the room, we were frisked for forbidden items. Only then could we enter the room. […] Our life consisted of coming out of the room in turns, every day, to be criticized. While waiting for our own turn, each of us was writing self-criticism leaning on a small desk. […] This strange life of struggle sessions was the same for everyone. I don't want to write in details, but there was a time when I suffered from psychiatric disorder (*jingshen shichang* 精神失常). When people asked me a question, I could not respond. I would only stare at them. [31]

Wei Junyi's bodily and psychological response to forced confinement and the coercive methods of extracting confessions surfaces in a narrative context that tries to minimize the singularity of her personal vicissitude to emphasize resemblances with other people's life and bodies.

For the most part, the people Wei talks about are colleagues working in the publishing sector, writers, teachers, and party cadres from intellectual background. They are, in other words, her peers, people she is mostly connected with. Embedded in the account of other people's plight, therefore, is the story of Wei Junyi's interpersonal relations and networking. These connections are related to Wei's commitment to both intellectual and political activities and her life-long involvement in editorial activities and the publishing industry in general. But the narrative of others, while being informed by Wei's professional identity, is also reminiscent of the practice of

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socialism." See Michael Schoenhals, "'Non-People' in the People's Republic of China: A Chronicle of Terminological Ambiguity," Indian East Asian Working Papers Series on Language and Politics in Modern China (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 18. See also Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 3: 336-337.

[30] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 92.

[31] Ibid., 93-94.

foregrounding personal affiliations in jiantao writings. By placing the individual in a context—familial, societal, and economic—the recollection of one's mistakes in self-criticism emphasized the relational nature of human life. Even though self-criticism was meant to uncover individual mistakes, this search, in fact, led the individual to scrutinize her background, origins, upbringing, and network of relations. Self-criticism showed how mistakes were not solely errors one had made but the consequences of the exposure to allegedly incorrect ideological attitudes and the affiliation with "wrong" people. In this way, self-criticism became a space where the social dimension of the individual's life was disclosed. Wei Junyi's attention to other people's stories evokes the compositional technique of socialist personal writings in which the story of the self is bound to the stories of others.

Professionalization and the possession of a distinct cultural capital seem to be the main qualifying factors of the group Wei is affiliated with, and intends to represent. But the memoir does more than merely characterizing the group by means of its expertise and knowledge. The connection between people, in the memoir, is also an experiential one. What I mean by "experiential" is that the text stresses the similarities between people's life experiences and, by doing this, it contributes to the construction of a collective "I." It is worth reading this passage from the chapter "Sidelights from the Cultural Revolution" (*'Wenhua da geming': shiling* 文化大革'命拾零)

> We, "capitalist roaders," were attacked for many years. It was always the same story: the reason was something related to work, but in fact it was basically arranged by higher-ups. Anti-"capitalist roaders," anti-what else? Anti-old opera, anti-ancient and -modern literature, anti-university…… [sic] normally, people could not really find crimes to attack us. Who would oppose the Communist Party? Most people had no choice. So they looked back at history to find those who had opposed the Party in the past. Basically, all those who had had any connection with the Nationalist Party were singled out and attacked. It was very interesting. Those whose history did not reveal any acquaintance with Nationalist people were "liberated" pretty early. Those whose

> history showed signs of connection with the Nationalists were accused endlessly to the point in which they were not simply accused of being "capitalist roaders," but were attacked, excitingly (*renao* 热闹), as "Nationalists" or "traitors. The one with the biggest crime, Liu Shaoqi, was said that during the Changsha period came out of prison as a traitor, holding the "four books."[32] It was also said that he betrayed many people in the Manchuria provincial Party Committee—of course, it was all nonsense. But this crime was criticized much more fiercely than his crimes as "feudalist, capitalist, and revisionist." Among the marshals, the one who suffered the most was He Long 贺龙. He was even refused drinking water. He had to drink the water drops falling from the eave. He was accused of secret correspondence with the Nationalist Party."[33]

In spite of their incoherent and episodic nature, the various biographies inserted in the memoir resemble one another. Wei provides brief accounts of how people were accused and the sufferings they endured. The stories as a whole exemplify a repetitive pattern: the finding of "evidence" of the offense, the accusation, and the superficially issued verdict. They all expose the system of summary judgments, the lack of proper legal proceedings, as well as the absurdity of some of those accusations.[34] The resemblance between the stories eclipses the specificities of individual experiences and distorts the temporalities of those occurrences. Facts are not recalled according to their chronological happening, but by means of their analogy. Their duration and specificities are subsumed within a formulable, "iterative" pattern.[35] Through a process of abstraction, the incoherence of the narrative translates into the creation of a coherent human network. It brings home the sense of shared suffering and emphasizes the interconnection

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[32] Liu Shaoqi joined the CCP in 1920. He was sent to the Soviet Union to study, but upon his return to China he was imprisoned by the Nationalist Party twice, in Changsha and in Shenyang. He managed to escape. In the 1950s he became vice president of the CCP. See Alfred Kuo-liang Ho, *China's Reforms and Reformers* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 62. The four books are classics of the Confucian tradition that were banned in the socialist period.

[33] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 102.

[34] Wei's sensibility to the illegality of many proceedings resonates with contemporary discourses on reasserting the rule of law over the rule of man. Law had been instrumentalized during the revolutionary period. Starting in the early 1980s, at the time of the historic trial against the Gang of Four, law became reaffirmed as an institution exceeding individual interests. See Alexander Cook's *The Cultural Revolution on Trial*, 21-28.

[35] Gérard Genette's theorization of the "iterative" narrative mode is well suited to conceptualize the pattern of resemblances in Wei's memoir: "The 'repetition' is in fact a mental construction, which eliminates from each occurrence everything belonging to it that is peculiar to itself, in order to preserve only what it shares with all the others of the same class, which is an abstraction." Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 113.

between human lives. By compiling multiple similar biographies of other people, whose stories showcase noticeable affinity and intimate the interrelation between people's lives and fate, Wei legitimizes her usage of the collective pronoun "we" and turns the act of reminiscing into an endeavor that is at once personal and collective.

Expertise and the analogy of experience are not the only defining elements of the collective the memoir represents. The constellation of people the memoir portrays is a gendered one. Except for a few exceptions, Wei Junyi mostly narrates stories of male colleagues, cadres, editors, and intellectuals. As a woman, Wei Junyi's urge to focus on men's plight and identify herself with them demands attention. Wei Junyi was not unaware of the challenges women had to face to succeed, as women, in the public sphere. In her 1940 article, "What Happens after the New Noras Leave Home?," whose title is reminiscent of Lu Xun's famous 1923 speech "What Happens after Nora Leaves Home," Wei Junyi had forcefully articulated the problems "liberated" women encounter after leaving the domestic space.[36] When she wrote the article, Wei Junyi had already joined the CCP's soviet in Yan'an. In the article, she develops a critique of the incompleteness of women's emancipation and how it reflected in the relation between women and men; the difficulty women met in trying to solve the clash between work, on the one hand, and responsibility toward the family and children, on the other; the conflicting relation between women and their parents; and the question of equality between women and men. She observes that the lack of facilities, such as canteens or kindergartens, often pushes ambitious women to avoid getting married and having children altogether. Some women cut off their contacts with their parents who don't accept their daughters' decision to take up "male" jobs in the army or other sectors. These women, Wei Junyi observes, wrongly come to despise their own female sex,

[36] Wei Junyi, "Xin Nuolamen zou hou zenyang" 新诺拉们走后怎样 [What Happens after the New Noras Leave Home], in *Wei Junyi wenji* 韦君宜文集 [Collected Works of Wei Junyi] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2013), 5: 295-303. The article was published in *China Youth* on March 1, 1940.

thinking that in order to overcome their limits—biological and/or culturally determined— they have to prove to be able to do what men can do and act *like* men. The result, Wei Junyi says, is that women rejects their female identity and, by turning themselves into "fake men" (*jia nanzi* 假男子), they risk jeopardizing the very project of women's solidarity and liberation.[37] As society needs to create the conditions, economic and otherwise, that can allow women to reconcile their family responsibilities and professional development, Wei Junyi adamantly calls women to strive to achieve real emancipation and gender equality as women rather than fake men.

About forty years later, the call for women to act like women rather than men seems to be contradicted by Wei Junyi's self-representation as a member of a collective of male intellectuals. Or maybe there is no real contradiction between the two narratives. It is impossible not to read, in Wei's construction of a male collective subject, Wei Junyi's anxiety as a woman writer and her desire to legitimize her identity as a writer, editor, and intellectual in the male-dominated sphere of cultural production. The apparent invisibility of a discernible female narrative in the text gives voice to the marginalized position of women in the literary world, and in the public space in general. By asking to be seen as a member of the established community of male intellectuals, Wei Junyi indirectly draws attention to the enduring disparity between men and women that the socialist experiment failed to erase. This gender inequality adds a further dimension to the narrative of personal and collective pain.

So far, the recollection of personal and collective experience has proved to be a narrative of suffering and victimization. The incorporation of similar stories reinforces the narrative of collective pain. At the same time, the intersection of personal and collective memories, as well as the construction of a collective subject allows Wei to weave a narrative of responsibility and

[37] Ibid., 302.

mistakes—again, personal and collective—into and parallel to the one of victimization. Identifying mistakes confers on the reflective agenda a distinct critical attitude that, I argue, is indebted to the socialist practice of self-criticism, even though this appropriation does not happen without transformations. To this legacy and the narrative of responsibility in Wei's memoir I now turn.

Clumsy Democracy

It was around the time of the Three-anti (*san fan* 三反 1951) and the Five-anti (*wu fan* 五反 1952) Campaigns that Ding Panshi 丁磐石, a young editor of *China Youth*, was accused of corruption.[38] Ding had written an essay entitled "Thought Reform Cannot Be Rushed" but when he turned in the piece, he forgot to bring his Party dues and wrote his name on the five cents someone else had submitted. As vice-editor of the journal, Wei Junyi had to explain to Ding Panshi that his was a case of corruption and forced him to confess. It was in that moment, Wei remembers, "that from the one undergoing rectification, I became the one who rectifies other people; I inherited that vicious 'for the sake of the Party's interest' attitude that considers correct those who rectify others. This is something I should repent (*chanhui* 忏悔) for, so I'll write it here."[39]

Wei Junyi does not shy away from acknowledging her share in the perpetration of violence. In the memoir, she recalls many occasions in which she played an active role in denouncing other people and writing accusations. But the question of responsibility is not easily

[38] The Three Anti Campaign was launched in 1951 to fight corruption, waste, and obstructionist bureaucracy. The Five Anti Campaign was launched in 1952 against "bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing state economic information." See Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 536.
[39] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 24.

settled in these moments of contrition. Admittedly, Wei Junyi struggles throughout the memoir to come to terms with past wrongdoings and locate culpability. The narrative of responsibility surfaces in the text in different moments and in a variety of ways that are often mutually contradictory and incoherent. If the story of Ding Panshi foregrounds Wei's role as persecutor—undoubtedly enhanced by Wei's privileged position as a senior editor in the working unit—the memory of writing a critical article against her friend and colleague Huang Qiuyun 黄秋云 seems to soften Wei's responsibility by emphasizing her helplessness and sense of guilt. Using a language that is all too reminiscent of socialist self-critical essays, Wei Junyi introduces the episode: "During the 'Anti-Rightist' Campaign, I too did things that betrayed my conscience and the Party spirit."[40] In spite of their friendship—"when we were accused, we used to look for each other and share with each other the feelings of resentment and dejection that we could not express to other people"—Wei did write an article to accuse her friend. [41] "How could I write that article?!," she regretfully asks herself years later. [42] The question is a rhetorical one. Everyone in the working unit was supposed to take a clear stance toward Huang Qiuyun. Even though questionable from a human and moral perspective, writing criticism against Huang was Wei Junyi's safest choice.

In a context in which everyone's position had become vulnerable to accusations of rightism or affiliation with counter-revolutionary cliques, complying with the authorities' directives and reporting alleged "criminals" was felt as both an obligation and a potential means to save one's own skin. "Could I have not criticized other people?" Wei Junyi asks somewhere else in the memoir. "No, I couldn't. I had to criticize other people," she responds.[43] In these

[40] Ibid., 44.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 42.

instances, Wei seems to relieve herself of responsibility, which is indirectly deferred to the authoritarian regime that deeply upset human relations and turned people into subjugated, guilty subjects.

If Wei's critical reflection on the question of responsibility was limited to these manifestations of helplessness and guilt, *Recollections of Pain* would corroborate Lee Haiyan's suggestion that "in reckoning the ethical fallout of the Mao era, we need to speak not of individual moral infirmity but of the systemic smothering of the moral instinct."[44] But Wei Junyi is not content with deferring responsibility to the system or to specific people, like the Gang of Four during the Cultural Revolution. Nor does she find admissions of guilt, whether individual or collective, a satisfactory response to the question of coming to terms with past mistakes. She does express deep grief and sense of guilt when, for instance, she remembers the accusations of rightism that the editorial board leveled against her former co-worker Li Xinghua 李兴华 and her own inability to oppose the decision of the leaders of the working unit. Out of fear and cowardice, Wei recalls, she accepted to communicate the verdict to Li Xinghua. The scene is remembered with touching details: "I didn't dare to look at his face. While I was announcing the decision, my eyes were staring at his feet. I noticed that he was wearing a pair of yellow leather shoes and a pair of grey nylon socks. Those shoes and socks remained in my memory for a long time."[45] Whether Li Xinghua was truly wearing a pair of grey nylon socks or not, the details dramatize Wei Junyi's lasting sense of guilt and shame. The chapter, entirely dedicated to Li

[44] Lee Haiyan points out that the conversion and invention of enemies during the socialist era was crucial to the construction of an imaginary unified Nation. Under such a regime, everyone could be a potential enemy, for the concept of class was depoliticized. In this culture of suspicion and perpetual struggle against enemy, nobody's position was ever guaranteed. To be a perpetrator today did not spare him or her from being accused as a traitor tomorrow. According to Lee, in a situation in which people's sociality is so affected by a political apparatus that paradoxically presents the nation as both the home of all and an uninhabitable place for many, it is difficult to attribute responsibility for the horrors that happened in those years (especially during the CR) to specific individuals and the notion of responsibility itself becomes uncertain. Lee Haiyan, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2014), 28.
[45] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 80.

Xinghua, is a kind of confession of guilt, but "confession alone" (*guang chanhui* 光忏悔), Wei emphatically states a few pages later in the same chapter, "is not enough; we need to reflect deeply (*shensi* 深思) and seriously on the causes (*genyuan* 根源) that led to the tragedy." The acknowledgment of guilt is deemed insufficient to understand the past.

This moment yields important insights into the complexity of Wei's approach to responsibility. Post-socialist discourse on responsibility over past mistakes was primarily divided between those who claimed that confession is necessary in order to grapple with the past and those who deemed admissions of guilt counterproductive and rather called for the revitalization of Chinese civilization as a more proper response to past wrongdoings.[46] Wei's text, I argue, does not fit into either side of the debate. If admissions of guilt do not exhaust Wei's critical reflection on the past, then, what other form(s) do reflection and the self-critical agenda take in the memoir? Are these forms related to jiantao and how?

Recollections of Pain makes manifest Wei Junyi's effort—even though not always felicitous—to engage with the various facets pertaining to the fluid boundary between culpability and victimhood. By presenting responsibility from a variety of perspectives that tie the individual to both the sphere of private relations and the collective realm of political action, the memoir overcomes the simplistic victim/perpetrator dichotomy and offers a more nuanced approach to

[46] I am much indebted to Li Jie's examination of the discourse of responsibility in post-revolutionary China. Her discussion centers on what is now remembered as one of the most controversial debates on the question of responsibility. What sparked the controversy was an article essayist Yu Jie wrote to accuse writer Yu Qiuyu of having written in support of the Gang of Four during the CR. In this article, Yu Jie argues that it is crucial for Yu Qiuyu to confess and repent for his former propagandistic writings. In response, Yu Qiuyu wrote an autobiography in which he asserts that confession can only repeat the past and the only way to properly grapple with mistakes is to rejuvenate the greatness of Chinese civilization. According to Li Jie, either side of the debate fails to adequately come to terms with the past. Yu Jie's emphasis on admissions of guilt re-enacts the logic of earlier purges. It is concerned with the production of guilt and victimization, personal and collective. On the other hand, Yu Qiuyu's cultural nationalism, by attributing the errors of the CR to what he calls "grave robbers"—petty, opportunistic people—reduces the CR to another "ugly chapter" of Chinese history. By doing this, Li Jie observes, Yu Qiuyu "omits the roles of China's top leadership, revolutionary ideology, and complex social conflicts during the CR" (122). See Li Jie's chapter "'Yu Qiuyu, Why Don't You Repent?' A Genealogy of Maoist and Post Maoist Confessions," in Li Jie, "The Past Is Not Like Smoke: A Memory Museum of the Maoist Era (1949-1976)," 83-134.

past mistakes and responsibility. It is the construction of a group identity that deepens, at the same time as it limits, the experience of reflection and takes the rhetoric of self-criticism to a level that differs from the mere acknowledgment of personal mistakes and confession of guilt.

The distinction between expressing guilt and the effort to attend to a more complex understanding of responsibility is palpable when, for example, Wei documents the experience of the famine that followed the launching of the Great Leap Forward Campaign.[47] Food shortage affected everyone, but the authorities implemented a special program of food provisions for party cadres. Provisions varied according to one's rank. Wei Junyi remembers that her family received almost seven pounds of meat per month. It was not much to feed eight people, but a lot at a time when many people were dying from starvation. The unequal food supply exposes structures of power and discrimination that divided the privileged class of party cadres from the starving masses. The result, Wei notices, was that the people (*laobaixing* 老百姓) grew resentful and developed feelings of animosity toward high-rank cadres. And yet, for Wei, "it was not a crime to eat those seven pounds of meat; the crime was to make the masses starve."[48]

This passage emphasizes the contrast between "us" who could eat and those who starved to death. Wei's awareness of her privileged condition, however, does not develop into shame or a sense of guilt. Instead, this awareness pushes Wei to reformulate the problem of responsibility in terms of a crime that "we" did to the "people." Even though the pronoun "we" does not appear in the sentence ("it was not a crime to eat those seven pounds of meat…), the subject behind the crime is unequivocally a collective one. Moreover, in this sentence, the transitive action needs to

[47] The Great Leap Forward Campaign was launched in the fall of 1957 as a program of rapid economic development. It included fast industrialization, massive production of steel, the building of infrastructures such as dams and irrigation systems, as well as the transformation of rural collectives into communes and the establishment of public canteens. The Campaign was meant to give a final push to the building of the communist society and the abolition of class differences and differences between manual and intellectual labor. For a review of scholarship on the Great Leap Forward and the subsequent famine, see the "Introduction" to *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine*, ed. Felix Wemheuer and Kimberley Ens Manning (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).
[48] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 75.

be underscored. Wei uses the causative verb "to make" (*rang* 让), which lends agency to the collective subject and turns the intransitive clause (people starved) into a transitive one (to make the people starve). The absence of guilt here enhances, rather than curtail, the sense of collective, political responsibility.

In this passage, there is yet another layer to responsibility, which is subtly thematized at the level of word choice. Wei uses the term "laobaixing" (literally, the "old hundred names") to denote ordinary people. The term, which refers to people as common folks—the group that was supposed to overcome its condition of subordination through the socialist revolution—confers a distinct class dimension on the contrast between those who could eat and those who starved. This contrast captures a major failure of the entire revolutionary project: in spite of all the campaigns meant to erase classes and privileges, new classes and privileges were constituted.[49] At this level, reflection bears the marks of self-criticism as it was originally formulated. The rationale behind self-criticism was to constantly monitor one's self (the self being both individual and collective) to rectify mistakes and contradictions.[50] Self-criticism was initially supposed to help identify wrong behaviors *within* the community (the Party and its members) and operate as a tool of (self-)correction that could guarantee the successful construction of a communist society. At stake in

[49] Joel Andreas's *Rise of the Red Engineers* helps understand the social dynamics during the socialist and post-socialist period. In this book, Andreas charts the tensions and conflicts between competing groups during the socialist period. He shows how, in spite of the communist politics and efforts to level class distinctions and prevent any group from emerging over the others, a new privileged class that included elements of both the old and new elites emerged after the Cultural Revolution. Intellectuals and cadres from an intellectual background constituted the old elite, while the new elite were primarily composed by cadres of peasant origins. According to Andreas, the conditions for the rise of the Red experts—an elitist group that possessed both cultural and political capital—in the post-Mao era are to be found in the revolutionary years. See Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[50] The institutionalization of self-criticism as a means to correct and re-educate intellectuals and the new political elite started at the time of the Rectification Campaign in the early 1940s. Quoting Frederick Teiwes, Kirk Denton explains that rectification "emerges from the ideological notion of contradiction (*maodun*) at the heart of the Maoist philosophy." Criticism and self-criticism then represent the moments of struggle to overcome contradictions and mistakes. They need to be understood in relation to the rectification drive and the idea of contradiction as inevitable at every historical stage. See Kirk Denton, "Rectification: Party Discipline, Intellectual Remolding, and the Formation of a Political Community," in *Words and Theirs Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*, ed. Ban Wang (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 60. See also Mao Zedong, "On Contradiction."

the "crime" Wei mentions is the collective departure from the project of creating an equal society. Here, responsibility—which entails agency and political action, rather than mere shame and guilt—is captured from a collective point of view.[51]

The question of collective political responsibility and its intersection with the failure to build a classless society is a recurring theme in the memoir. Toward the end of the text, it resurfaces powerfully in Wei's account of the post-Cultural Revolution climate. After the fall of the Gang of Four, many unjust cases were readdressed and some of the people who had been wrongly accused of rightism or other faults were rehabilitated. Filing a lawsuit to have one's case reassessed became common, not just among cadres and writers, but also among the lower strata of society. Wei took a special interest in the peasants and asked to be sent to the countryside, not as a writer but as a cadre and journalist, to conduct investigations on some wrong cases and learn about the overall conditions of the peasants:

> I didn't go down to the countryside as a writer who wanted to experience life (*tiyan shenghuo* 体验生活), but as a party cadre (over the past years, "cadres" have been those who have ruled real life) who wanted to live diligently one more time, like when we went to the countryside to reform the land before liberation. […] I demanded to be sent down as a member of the working group primarily to see the consequences of all the labeling and the campaigns we forced on the people (*laobaixing*) in the past years. […] I wanted to see what we actually did to people

[51]I have in mind Hannah Arendt's distinction between individual guilt, which is moral or legal, and collective responsibility, which is always political. For Arendt, imputing individual guilt, which comes with blame, runs the risk of diverting attention from actions and individual agency to individual shame. When everyone is guilty, then a certain course of events seems almost inevitable; "where all is guilty none is," she emphatically states. On the other hand, emphasizing collective responsibility means to call the individual to respond to what has happened and take on political responsibility. As Andrew Schaap puts it, "Arendt's ideal citizen publicly engages with diverse others to disclose a common reality from a plurality of perspectives, to disclose her unique identity through public speech and action and to accord dignity to other citizens through mutual recognition of each other as members of a common world." See Andrew Schaap, "Guilty Subjects and Political Responsibility: Arendt, Jaspers and the Resonance of the 'German Question' in Politics of Reconciliation," *Political Studies* 49, no. 4 (2001): 753. See also Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in *Amor Mundi: explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. James William Bernauer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 43-50.

> and think about how to correct our habits, how to reverse the way we used to treat the people (*laobaixing*).[52]

There might be some nostalgia in the reference to the 1940s land reform movement. But the reminiscence does more than intimate nostalgia; it stands for a project, an idea of collective liberation and freedom that motivated many to participate in the revolution. For Wei, that project constitutes the criterion by which mistakes should be measured and corrected. Again, responsibility is articulated in terms of action, of what "we did to people" and how "we" derailed from the original vision. What matters here is not personal redemption out of confession, but rather the acquisition, via reflection, of personal and collective awareness in order to make a real change in the future and build a more equal society. Tucked away in this reflection that brings together past and future is the unrealized project of a real democracy.

Wei Junyi wrote her memoir in the 1980s (the epilogue is dated 1989) in the backdrop of discourses of democracy and student movements. The beginning of the democracy movement in post-CR China goes back to the fall of 1978 when a large crowd of young people started gathering in an alley close to Tian'anmen Square and the buildings housing the main Party's offices to hang posters on a wall. In these posters they sought redress of past wrong cases, aired grievances, exposed the wrongdoings of Party officials, and initiated a complex debate on democracy. "The Fifth Modernization," a piece Wei Jingsheng 魏京生 (1950-)—a prominent figure in the Democracy Wall Movement— wrote to demand democracy and assert democracy as a right of the people, was among the pieces that appeared on the wall. The piece and the discussions this group of people launched on the importance of democracy to allow China to overcome its backwardness constituted an important intervention in the contemporary discourse on reforms and change. Deng Xiaoping had started a program of political reforms that aimed at

[52] Ibid., 167.

achieving China's "four modernizations" that included the development of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense. People wanted democracy to be at the center of political reforms. The movement did not last long. But democracy remained a central concern throughout the 1980s and spurred numerous movements and forms of activism that saw the involvement of students, workers, and former officials. [53]

This context informs Wei's approach to the past and articulation of reflection. By looking back, Wei does not aim at settling accounts with the past to draw a dividing line between past, present, and future. She does not try to disavow the past to assert the present (or the other way around). Instead, she establishes a dialogue between different temporalities and historical contexts in order to revive the collective project of democracy and find the causes that hindered its full realization. Wei's notion of democracy is far from clear; what I however find compelling is the effort to establish a dialogue between the earlier period, the present moment, and future goals. As Wei explains in the prologue, reflecting on the past is "necessary to the future survival of the master of our country (the people)."[54] The term "renmin" (人民) for "people" contrasts with the earlier "laobaixing." Unlike the moments in which the usage of the term "laobaixing" exposes unsolved questions of discrimination and class distinction, here "renmin" denotes a collective that, beyond class distinctions, should lay claim to its role as a political subject and its right to participate in democratic decision-making processes.

The contrast between the terms "laobaixing" and "renmin" is meaningful. Through their oppositional relation, the terms, as Wei uses them, mutually qualify and transform each other. On the one hand, "renmin" uncovers the system of discrimination underlying the term "laobaixing." On the other hand, "laobaixing" exposes the incompleteness of the democratic project embedded

[53] See Andrew Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).
[54] "想一想这些，是这个国家的主人（人民）今后生存下去的需要." Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 3.

in “renmin.” The distinction between renmin and laobaixing differs from the opposition between people (renmin) and non-people (*fei-renmin* 非人民) that Michael Schoenhals discusses in his article.[55] While it was always unclear who was part of which group and each group’s definition was subject to changes as more and new people fell into the category of non-people—imperialists, nationalists, capitalist-roaders, reactionaries, and counter-revolutionaries, to name a few—over the course of various campaigns, the distinction between renmin and fei-renmin rests on the division between friends and enemies of the revolution and socialism. Laobaixing are technically members of the “people” (renmin), but the contrast the memoir establishes between them enacts entrenched societal divisions that are not always or solely defined by political criteria. The distribution of the terms is not consistent. The memoir does not delineate a developmental narrative that moves from a stage of social inequalities, captured by the term laobaixing, to the realization of a democratic, equal collective defined by renmin. Rather, by constantly blending the two terms, the text emphasizes their disconnection to show that the project of democracy is not a finished product but a process that needs to be perpetually revived.

In the spring of 1989, when Wei finished the memoir, democracy was still a far cry from ideals of freedom of speech and people’s sovereignty. The crackdown on the student movement in the spring of 1989, which led to what is remembered as the bloody June-Fourth Incident, seemed to push further into the future the realization of the democratic project. And yet, Wei Junyi’s final word is a word of hope. Even though there is still a lot to be done, “a clumsy democracy (*zhuoben de minzhu* 拙笨的民主) is way better than the canniest dictatorship (*zui gaoming de ducai* 最高明的独裁). [..] I think that even though our country is not doing well,

[55] Michael Schoenhals, “‘Non-People’ in the People’s Republic of China.”

things can get better."[56] For her, the key to economic, social, and political progress is democracy. "I will welcome a clumsy democracy that can make decisions!" is Wei's concluding line in the memoir.[57]

The narrative comes to a full circle from the initial agenda that sees reflection on past mistakes as a strategy to understand shortcomings and retrieve the lost path toward democracy to the final hope that democracy can be achieved in the future. The memoir as a whole, then, incarnates a complex instantiation of self-criticism in which the self is a collective self. This collective self, however, does not coincide with renmin as the master of democracy. The failure of the memoir to resolve social divisions and structures of discrimination—social and gender—undercuts Wei Junyi's effort to constitute the inclusive collective that the idealized notion of renmin seems to suggest. Wei Junyi does not overcome herself; the memoir seeks to assert her identity as a member of a specific collective—one made of male intellectuals. It is not the "nationalist complex" that undermines Wei's self-critical endeavor—as Wang Jing suggests in her analysis of the failure of the intellectual's self-reflectivity and their enlightenment project in the post-Mao era—but her desire, as a woman writer and editor, to be recognized as a legitimate member of the male elite.[58] And yet, it is the collective subjectivity that pushes reflection beyond mere admissions of moral guilt and toward the assumption of political responsibility. For the building of a real democracy is and must be a collective enterprise, the narrative does not land on a final resolution, as in typical jiantao writings. Envisioning strategies to effect a real change is an enterprise that involves everybody. By leaving open the structure of self-criticism, the memoir's appropriation of the architecture of jiantao proves dynamic and productive. While showing the limits of jiantao as a class- and gender- equalizing technique, the memoir illustrates

[56] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 183.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever*, 136.

how jiantao could offer opportunities of analysis and life narration that are not restricted to the passive repetition of normative discourses that annihilate individualized experience. It is interesting that in the memoir Wei often recalls the practice of writing jiantao in the socialist period. She remembers how people struggled to come up with a narrative of mistakes, which would normally end up being a shallow and coercive exercise of dropping labels on oneself, one's relatives and friends.[59] Consciously or not, it is the very technique she criticizes that allows Wei Junyi to weave, in *Recollections of Pain*, a creative and original narrative of personal and collective reflection.

Confession of an Editor

Wei Junyi's appropriation of self-criticism has proved creative and original. In the memoir, self-criticism is revised, re-adapted, and transformed. The result is something that is and is not jiantao. This work of revision, I want to suggest, is connected to Wei Junyi's role as editor. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Wei Junyi spent most of her life working as an editor for various journals and publications. In this section I want to think more about how her editorial experience is reflected in the memoir and how it complicates understandings of authorship and literary production.

The figure of the editor is easy to fall into a stereotypical image that is construed as marginal to the production of a text; the latter deemed as the product of the talent of a single author. *Recollections of Pain* problematizes this stereotype and the relation between editor and author by bringing to visibility the invisible, yet active, work of the editor. Wei's identity as editor emerges conspicuously throughout the text, not simply in the memory of colleagues and

[59] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 97-98.

people that the editorial profession connected her with, but also in the many instances in which she recalls details of her life in editorial offices.

Especially interesting is Wei's account of her experience at People's Literature Press in the last years of the Cultural Revolution. Wei Junyi left the cadre school in 1973 to resume her work as editor for *People's Literature* in Beijing. Remarkably, the scant memories of the years at the cadre school contrast with the extended reminiscences of her life in the publishing office. In these passages, the editorial office is portrayed as a space where friendships and connections were formed, but also and primarily as a stage for competing interests, ideas, and forms of power. Personnel were recruited according to one's individual history and the office was managed by military representatives who were in charge of enforcing top-down literary directives. Divergent ideas on what deserved to be published often led to harsh conflicts and debates between editors and military representatives.[60] That was the time in which, Wei remembers, the guidelines for editors were summarized by the expression "take the 'seeds' sowed by the 'higher-ups' and shape them into vegetables."[61] The "seeds" refer to the literary experiments by workers, peasants and soldiers, promoted by the Party.[62] Workers, peasants, and soldiers had become the preeminent literary subject during the socialist period. But they were not simply the favorite subject matter of plays, poetry and fiction; they became authors themselves and started writing their own works.

Since workers, peasants, and soldiers often fell short of literary skills and knowledge, the role of editors in turning worker-peasant-solider writers' works into publishable texts was

[60] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 143.
[61] "拿着'上级'发下的'菜籽'来捏咕成菜," Ibid.
[62] The origins of the concept of "worker-peasant-soldier" literature, which dominated the literary scene throughout the socialist period, goes back to a talk on literature and arts that Mao Zedong delivered at Yan'an in 1942. In this speech he called writers and artists to take in the perspective of the masses and integrate their work in the revolutionary project. See Chen Xiaomei, "Worker-Peasant-Soldier Literature," in *Words and Their Stories,* 65.

paramount. As Wei explains in the memoir, the editor was supposed to communicate with the author at every stage of the writing process and help her create an "ideologically correct" plot centered on class struggle, in compliance with the prescribed directives. The job of the editor also entailed securing the work's realistic engagement with life. Wei remembers, for instance, how she helped a writer—a worker, perhaps—composing the novel *Thousand Waves* (*Qianzhong lang* 千重浪). The plot of the novel was very simple: it described a "capitalist roader" whose inappropriate effort to "mechanize" labor in the countryside encounters the opposition of local peasants, who assemble their own tractor. The story, Wei says, wasn't realistic enough, but the main problem was that class struggle was not sufficiently emphasized. The ideological contrast between the two classes involved needed to be portrayed more sharply. The writer thought of adding a character to the novel, a class enemy who destroys the tractor. Still, how does a tractor get destroyed? Since the writer knew nothing about tractors, Wei Junyi accompanied the writer to the countryside to interview a tractor team leader: "We asked him to explain to us how a tractor can be damaged, in this way I helped the writer get deep into 'life.'"[63]

In spite of the additions and the revisions, the outcome left a lot to be desired, according to Wei Junyi. The story of the production of *Thousand Waves* is inserted in the chapter "Confession of an Editor," where Wei describes her collaboration with various peasant and worker writers. She recalls her frustrations in dealing with poorly written texts and the efforts to turn absurd plots into credible stories. The results were generally rather disappointing. It is hard not to detect condescension in Wei Junyi's attitude toward worker-peasant-soldier literature. The value judgment is grounded on ideas of competence and expertise that seem to re-create in the text another instance of class distinction and discrimination in which workers, peasants, and

[63] Ibid., 154.

soldiers are "othered" (we could think of them as laobaixing rather than renmin). This distinction however is less based on class divisions as it is on entrenched ideas of training.[64] Notions of professionalization remained strong throughout the Maoist period and are reflected in Wei's approach to the Party-promoted phenomenon of worker-peasant-soldier literature. And yet, Wei does not figure as an external observant who judges "their" literature. That literature continues to be "our" literature and she presents herself as a contributor to the realization of those works that reenacted the dynamics of victimization that people experienced in real life. The possession of, or lack thereof, expertise is then only tangentially related to more complicated issues that, again, pertain to agency and responsibility.

The stories that unfolded in these literary works, Wei notes, resembled one another: "one after the other, it was always the same plot: a talented Mongolian engineer had to be portrayed as conservative, only the technician from a working class background could be the one who can really create things; a university professor in Beijing, an academic authority, used to be a spy and is now conducting the destruction of an ore mine."[65] The same process of abstraction we encountered earlier in the recollection of other people's stories is at work here as Wei conflates the myriad of plots into standardized patterns that repeat the same formula: the finding of a villain, the inquiry into his/her thought origins (*sixiang genyuan* 思想根源), and the final resolution which figures the punishment of the villain and the triumph of the working class. The parallel between the life of literary characters and the life of real people is striking. These literary characters constitute a coherent collective that is reminiscent of the expanded self Wei Junyi builds in the memoir. Indeed, victimizing a literary character seems different from wronging a person in real life but is not without consequences either.

[64] In spite of the efforts to level class distinctions, concerns about the possession of cultural capital and professionalization were central throughout the socialist period. See Joel Andreas's *Rise of the Red Engineers*.
[65] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu*, 157-158.

Wei Junyi considers her contribution to the creation of these texts regrettable and a true crime against literature: “as editor, I constructed those lies, made false charges against my fellow students, friends and comrades; I made helping writers writing nonsense my ‘task.’ I examine myself, can I not feel shame? Can I not repent (*chanhui*)?[66] What Wei’s confession makes manifest is the acknowledgment of the active role of editors in the production of literary texts. In the episodes she recalls, the task of the editor is s not relegated to proofreading; the editor is an active participant in the production of ideas and the overall construction of the text. This makes the editor a kind of co-author. As a result, a clear-cut division between author and editor becomes untenable. The collaborative nature of literary production expands the horizon of responsibility from issues of expertise and/or individual mistakes to underscore individual *and* collective agency.

The chapter presents the production of a literary text as a process involving multiple parties. Literature is understood as a collaborative enterprise, “a collective creation” (*jiti chuangzuo* 集体创作) to use Wei Junyi’s words.[67] In this way, writing is not conceived of as an act of self-expression, but rather as an exercise that connects individuals, inside and outside of the text. Literature becomes a space of liability; a place that reflects “the fundamental attitude of human beings toward other human beings” (*ren dui ren de jiben taidu* 人对人的基本态度).[68]

This idea helps us understand Wei’s discomfort toward the mistreatment of literary characters. It is not a matter of literary taste or sophistication but a matter of responsibility. The latter being something that is played out in the literary text deemed as both a collective process and a finished product involving interpersonal relations and dynamics of sociality.

[66] Ibid., 159.
[67] Ibid., 157.
[68] Ibid., 159.

Wei makes an important intervention in a context in which the return to realism is steeped in an increasing interest in "the exploration of 'individual' into human existence."[69] Her vision of literature as a collective enterprise and a space where human relations are probed pushes the definition of realism beyond the mere "reflection" of the real. Even though, by anchoring her self to a distinct community, Wei recreates the troubling division between "us" and "them," literature emerges as a space where agency can be exercised and choices be made. As Wei Junyi puts it at the end of "Confession of an Editor," "some people say that at that time they were 'pulling the cart but could not recognize the road' (*la che bu ren lu* 拉车不认路). Really? Could we really not see the road? Let us think that that dark road had two sides (*an lu liang pang* 暗路两旁)."[70] Indeed. If the road was one, two sides run along it. It was a matter of choosing a side over the other.

In all its contradictions and incoherence, *Recollections of Pain* reflects Wei Junyi's editorial experience and her understanding of literature as a form of agency. In the text's idiosyncratic adaptation of the rhetoric and structure of self-criticism and the construction of a collective identity are embodied Wei's double role as editor and author, as well as her effort to pursue a responsible reflection on the past. This reflection had, for Wei Junyi, to be at once personal and collective.

Conclusions

I have to confess that when I started reading Wei Junyi's memoir I was uncertain about what to make of a text that was proving difficult to approach from a reader's perspective. I was overwhelmed with names of people, disjointed episodes, and fragments of memory that, at first

[69] Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, 271.
[70] Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu,* 160.

sight, seemed to hinder any attempt to trace a coherent narrative. The problem, I later realized, lied in my preconceived association of memoir with the expression of an individual self. The search for a coherent personal narrative was limiting my reading and it was only when I abandoned that line of inquiry that I started seeing coherence where there seems to be none. The incoherence of other people's stories became key to identifying the coherence of a collective subject in the text.

The study of *Recollections of Pain* from the perspective of how it builds a group identity, the kind of collective the memoir constructs, as well as the significance of the particular group vis-à-vis her identity as a woman, has revealed Wei Junyi's creative appropriation of the architecture of jiantao and its relation to the text's reflective agenda. Crucial to this reading is the fact that the self in the self-criticism Wei Junyi carries out is not the individual self, but a collective self. This expanded subject allows Wei to intertwine a narrative of victimization with a multifaceted narrative of responsibility. On trial is the individual and collective departure from the path toward democracy and the realization of gender equality. However loosely defined, democracy becomes the measure through which Wei Junyi gauges past mistakes. By tracing the origins of the democratic project in the socialist experiments, the memoir establishes a dialogue between the past, the present, and the future that defies hard periodizations. Embedded in this national narrative is the story of a woman—and many other women—who continued to strive to assert the value of their labor.

Wei's idiosyncratic adaptation of jiantao and the building of a collective identity, this chapter ultimately argues, are related to Wei's lifelong career as editor. The text destabilizes clear-cut divisions between author and editor and emphasizes the collaborative nature of the production of the literary text. For Wei, the literary text defines a space of personal and

collective liability. *Recollections of Pain* reminds us that literature is also about responsible choices that can be made individually and collectively.

Coda

Ideals of collectivity in socialist China did not impede articulations of the individual self. The study of self-criticism and its relation to life writings has unveiled a history of narratives of the self that has been obscured by the vision that representations of the self were restrained and/or manipulated to serve national and collective interests. Indeed, the popularization of self-criticism contributed to establishing normative models of life writing. A myriad of handbooks and guidelines circulated in the early 1950s to teach people how to examine their thoughts and life experience using the dialectical method of jiantao, and how to transfer this technique into diaries and other forms of life narratives. Diaries, autobiographies, and work summaries became alternative spaces to conduct the work of self-examination that was deemed necessary to overcome one's shortcomings and raise one's political consciousness. Self-criticism and other personal narratives sustained the CCP's thought reform agenda of transforming the people into new socialist beings. The thought reform context however does not answer the question of how people worked out their unique, personal experience within the normative models that were available to them. This project has drawn attention not so much to how people tried to comply with, or depart from, the norm, as to how individuals inhabited the norm; how they reconciled the specificities of their bodily experience with the formulae laid out by the Party.

By showing how self-criticism was at once a source of suffering and a space where experiences of pain—bodily and otherwise—could be variously represented and grappled with has revealed an embodied history of self-criticism that challenges the idea that jiantao was solely a tool of thought reform and surveillance that politicized and standardized representations of human life experience. While the political remained an important backdrop against which individuals assessed their life experience, the political did not necessarily displace or replace the

personal in practices of self-narration. Feminist scholarship has taught us that the personal is always already political. Without intending to revise this insightful thought, this study has shown that the politicization of the personal can be accompanied by the "personalization" of the political. In the life writings I examined, the political is not a homogeneously defined concept. Focusing on the work of women committed to a political project has helped tease out the ambiguities pertaining to understandings of the political. In these women's life narratives, political ideals intersect with individual hopes, desires, ambitions, and interests. The outcome is the redefinition, in and through writing, of both the political and the personal—which underscores the body of the writer as the agent of such an operation.

Yet, this study has done more than complementing histories of thought reform and the disciplinary system in socialist China. Examining how revolutionary women writers creatively repurposed self-criticism in their personal writings has helped bring to relief the possibilities for autobiographical construction inherent to jiantao, and its limits as a political genre of writing that was to be kept outside the sphere of literary production. Jiantao gave these women the opportunity to voice in a new language and form their personal experience. As a result, the inquiry into self-criticism and its intersection with genres of life writing has developed into a broader discussion on gender dynamics and the lived body in socialist China. If genre constitutes the structural and organizing principle of the project as a whole, within each chapter, the generic thread intertwines thematically with the categories of gender and the lived body. Genre, gender, and the lived body constitute the fundamental themes and the analytical categories that inform my approach to texts and the context that produced them.

The figure of the woman writer, who is also a cadre, a bureaucrat, a mother, and a wife, is central to the encounter of questions of genre, gender, and the body. The authors I focused on are

women who actively participated in the revolution serving the CCP as organizers, bureaucrats, or editors. In their self-critical instantiations and other personal narratives, these women address in a new language and form the challenges they had to face to reconcile their multiple identities and assert themselves in a context where gender bias continued to pose a barrier to women's advancement in the workplace.

Women's liberation and gender equality were part of the revolutionary program that aimed at establishing a classless society by empowering the proletariat and erasing all forms of oppression and discrimination. Mao's notorious formulation "women hold up half the sky" seemed to acknowledge and restore the importance of women's role in the construction of the new China. The idea that women can do what men can do greatly expanded women's opportunities for professional development in the socialist years. And yet, a thorough gender revolution was never entirely accomplished. Gender disparity was especially pronounced in the male-dominated fields of politics and cultural production. By showing how Ding Ling, Yang Mo, and Wei Junyi creatively negotiated their identities and recast their gendered, bodily experience as women writers and cadres in the seemingly gender-neutral language of jiantao, this project has opened a new line of inquiry into women's experience and how life was written in revolutionary China.

Without being representative of the variety of women's life writings in the socialist period, the three case studies force us to rethink the relation between the political and the personal, the mind and the body, the literary and the non-literary in writing practices that were de facto promoted by the political authorities. I intentionally avoided placing these texts on either side of the complicity/resistance spectrum. Trying to find in these self-representations the desire to oppose the constraints imposed upon them by prescriptive models of life writing simplifies the

complexity of these texts. What I tried to emphasize instead is the potential of writing itself as a medium to narrate life and a space that makes clear-cut divisions between literary and non-literary genres untenable.

Focusing on questions of genre, gender, and the lived body has however not exhausted the possibilities for rethinking self-criticism. Another direction of research, for instance, lies in the expectations of sincerity implied in jiantao and genres of life writing. The notion of sincerity emphasized in the 1950s handbooks and collections of self-criticism seems to presuppose the existence, in the individual, of a truth that can be fully grasped and manifested outwardly in language and behavior. This conceptualization of sincerity rests on the fundamental opposition between sincerity and insincerity that resonates with traditional ideas of sincerity in other parts of the world. In his monograph on sincerity, Lionel Trilling defines sincerity as "the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one's own self."[1]

The opposition between sincerity and insincerity, in the context of self-criticism, is however complicated by the fact that what people had to find was not an authentic, pure self, but rather shortcomings and defects that needed to be corrected. Sincerity, in theorizations of self-criticism, does not apply much to the nature of the self—that needed to be reformed—as to the attitude toward oneself and one's mistakes. Concealing one's shortcomings—and therefore showing insincerity—or wrongly analyzing the mistakes made self-criticism ineffective. Insofar as people had to adopt a prescriptive language and structure to analyze their mistakes, self-criticism highlights the paradoxical relation between the imposition of normative models of self-

[1] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 5. Trilling shows how the term applied to human beings acquired popularity in sixteenth century England when the rise of theatre and a culture of performance generated a widespread fear of dissimulation and feigning (13). Contemporary approaches to the self as fragmentary or constructed have helped break and de-naturalize the bond between sincerity and subjectivity, and have pushed the question of sincerity away from what it *is* to what it *does*. See Ernst van Alphen et al., *The Rhetoric of Sincerity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1-16.

narration and the assumption that sincerity could nonetheless be materialized in the body and the words of the individual. In repeating a formula, how can the individual show sincerity? is one of the questions that I raised in the introduction. In this coda, I want to return to this question by exploring how the tension between sincerity and insincerity is addressed in fictional representations of self-criticism. In shifting attention away from genres of life writing to novels, I want to offer another perspective to discuss self-criticism within the larger context of literary practices in modern China.

Self-criticism features prominently in Chinese literature of the revolutionary period. Since Mao's "Talks" in 1942, the artistic world had been mobilized to assist the political revolution by portraying the struggles that people underwent to reform themselves in the process that led to the building of a socialist order.[2] Cultural workers were called to find in people's real experience the sources for artistic creation, but this raw material needed to be abstracted in typified representations that served as educational models of transformation. In this way, revolutionary literature stemmed from the people and returned to the people as a means that registered and helped promote socialist progress. Thus, as a practice that pervaded the realm of social relations and embodied the conflicts that characterized clashes between different groups in the real, jiantao became a recurrent topic in novels and poems of the socialist era. Representations of self-criticism can be found, for example, in Ding Ling's *The Sun Shines over*

[2] The following passage from the "Talks" well illustrates one of the main goals of revolutionary art and literature: "Shortcomings exist even among the people: many members of the proletariat still retain petty bourgeois ways of thinking, and both peasants and petty bourgeoisie have backward ways of thinking which hamper them in their struggle. We must educate them patiently over a long period of time helping them to cast off this burden from their backs so that they can advance with rapid strides. They have ether reformed themselves or are in the process of reforming themselves in the struggle, and our literature and art should describe this process of their reform instead of ridiculing them in a very narrow-minded and mistaken way, or even regarding them as some kind of enemy. What we write should help them to unite, to make progress and to struggle forward in complete solidarity, discarding their backward qualities and developing their revolutionary qualities." In *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, ed. Bonnie McDougall (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies; University of Michigan, 1980), 59.

the Sanggan River, Zhao Shuli's 赵树理 (1906-1970) *Sanliwan Village* (三里湾, 1955), Liu Binyan's 刘宾雁 (1925-2005) short story "The Inside News of the Newspaper" ("*Benbao neibu xiaoxi*" 本报内部消息, 1956), as well as in the 1950s poetry of Guo Xiaochuan and Shao Yanxiang 邵燕祥 (1933-).

The end of the Cultural Revolution did not interrupt fiction's engagement with self-criticism. A new body of literature that attempts to reflect on self-criticism and its effects emerged in the 1980s, when the practice of jiantao was revived but also approached critically to assess the years gone by. It is precisely because this literature is infused with a distinct desire to probe the possibilities and/or limits of jiantao in a critical way that I have decided to focus on a text from the 1980s: Wei Junyi's novella "Baptism." While the positive representation of self-criticism in this novella cannot account for the variety of narrative modes that have emerged within jiantao-centered fiction, the text offers a productive perspective on the issue of sincerity. "Baptism" invites us to refrain from searching for either sincerity or insincerity in self-criticism, because sincerity and insincerity are always already mutually implicated in self-critical acts.[3]

"Baptism": A Melodrama of Sincerity

Published in *Contemporary* (*Dangdai* 当代), in 1982, Wei Junyi's "Baptism" belongs to the early 1980s introspective literature that Hong Zicheng defines as "problem fiction."[4] This

[3] I have been inspired by the approach to sincerity that Alison Young adopts in her comparative reading of *9/11 Report*, the Final Report of the National Commission of Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, and *11' 09"01- 11 September, a* film by Mexican filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu. See Alison Young's "Documenting September 11: Trauma and The (Im)possibility of Sincerity," in Ernst van Alphen et al., *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*, 230-246.

[4] Zicheng Hong, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, 299. As an example of "problem fiction," Wei Junyi's "Baptism" is put beside works such as Zong Pu's 宗璞 (1928-) "Who Am I" (*Wo shi shei* 我是谁), Shen Rong's 谌容 (1936-) "At Middle Age" (*Ren dao zhongnian* 人到中年), and Zhang Xianliang's "Descendants of the

fiction is thematically constructed around the investigation into "who or what bore responsibility for the occurrence of the 'Cultural Revolution' and the nature and origins of current social problems."[5] Even though these stories invariably tie the vicissitudes of the characters to the events that affected the nation, Hong Zicheng notes, they "strive to avoid sinking into the old syllogistic ways of contemporary times."[6] If the search for accountability constitutes the motive of this fiction, the variety of narrative strategies that these texts adopt to conduct such an investigation cannot be subsumed under one single narrative paradigm. In "Baptism," self-criticism (jiantao) is crucial to the story's plotline and narrative effects.

"Baptism" gives an account of the plight of Party members who underwent thought reform in cadre schools during the Cultural Revolution. The protagonist, Wang Huifan, is a Communist cadre who falls under accusations of rightism and is sent to a cadre school to reform himself through physical labor and enforced practices of self-criticism. The exploration of the psychological mechanisms catalyzed by self-criticism and the dilemmas of the impeached cadre gives shape to a dramatic tale of personal redemption and transformation. The story of personal salvation unfolds in a world divided by opposing forces and values. The polarization of values and behaviors lends the novella a distinct melodramatic character, if we subscribe to Peter Brook's conceptualization of melodrama as a narrative mode that by means of excessive and parabolic representations produces a vision "where everything is charged with the conflict between light and darkness, salvation and damnation."[7] In the universe of the novella, a conflict

River" (*He de zisun* 河的子孙). This fiction is part of the more vast literature of reflection I discussed in the final chapter.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 5.

between good and evil is played out. This conflict is refracted, at the level of the individual, in Wang Huifan's inner struggle to correct himself.

And yet, on a closer analysis, Wang's final transformation does not represent the victory of good over evil. Contradiction and ambivalence persist in his consciousness even after he becomes a "new person" (*chongxin zuoren* 重新做人).[8] These contradictions and ambiguities destabilize the seemingly totalizing ethical framework of the narrative, providing, perhaps, a more nuanced response to the issue of responsibility articulated in "problem fiction." These ambiguities emerge more poignantly in the space of self-criticism where Wang Huifan's "sincere" effort to find a justification for his past mistakes makes his self-examination at once sincere and insincere.

The novella begins in medias res by bringing the readers straight into the scene of the drama. Liu Liwen 刘丽文, Wang Huifan's ex-wife, is at home, alone, immersed in her thoughts, when someone suddenly knocks at the door. Before we know who is behind the door, the narrator intervenes to comment on the contemporary climate of terror that is undermining relationships and is forcing people to hide their most profound thoughts and feelings in the depth of their heart. Liu Liwen is still suffering for the loss of Qi Yuan 祁原, a journalist she married after getting a divorce from Wang Huifan in 1960. Qi Yuan mysteriously disappeared during a trip he had made to gather material for an article he had been commissioned to write. Members of the "rebel faction" (*zaofanpai* 造反派) told Liu Liwen that Qi Yuan had accidentally fallen into the sea waters and died by drowning. While the circumstances of Qi Yuan's death sounded suspicious, Liu Liwen's pain for the loss of her lover was so intense that for some time "she

[8] Wei Junyi, "Xili" 洗礼 [Baptism], in *Wei Junyi wenji*, 3: 370.

almost thought of ending her own life."[9] But with the passing of time, she starts coming to her senses. Alone, in the room, she thinks:

> after all, this is not just my own tragedy; everyone is going through it. […] We're living a historical moment without precedents! […] I don't want to die. I should live and see how far the strange events of this unprecedented moment will get.

Interrupting her thoughts, knocking at the door is her son, Xiao Hui 小辉. Since the divorce, Xiao Hui has been living with Wang Huifan and his step-mother, Jia Yi 贾漪. Even though he is used to calling Jia Yi "mom," he often looks for his natural mother to spend time with her. But today's visit is different. Before Liu Liwen can reach the door, Xiao Hui is already inside; his face covered with mud and tears. Shouting, he tells Liu Liwen: "They don't let dad come home! Mom [Jia Yi] doesn't want us anymore!"[10]

Liu Liwen quickly realizes what has happened: Wang Huifan has been captured by extreme leftist groups and Jia Yi, to gain distance from Wang Huifan and avoid being dragged into the investigations, has abandoned both Xiao Hui and Xiao Ming 小明, the son she has had from Wang Huifan. Looking after the children and helping Wang Huifan become Liu Liwen's responsibilities; a situation that puts her in a very awkward position. A flashback brings to her mind the memory of how her relationship with Wang Huifan ended in the years following the launching of the Great Leap Forward. The disasters caused by the high production demand and the endless ideological purges had awakened Liu Liwen to the failure of the Party's policies. That was the beginning of her fights with Wang Huifan, who, at that time, was the director of the provincial planning committee. During one of these fights, when Liu Liwen accuses Wang of

[9] Ibid., 286.
[10] Ibid.

having contributed to the death of Song 宋, a Party member who had committed suicide after being labeled rightist, Wang Huifan bursts out:

> "When did I force him to death?" […] "What does this have to do with me? Did I do this?" […] Angrily, she responded: "It is not you who killed him, but the campaign unit that you lead. Is this how you treat a human person? He was an old comrade. Even though you were not close to him, he came out of the same army troop. You knew him. Why did you not try to protect him?"

In the flashback, the positive characterization of Liu Liwen as a courageous and defying woman who is willing to speak up and eventually destroy her marriage for the sake of living up to her ethical standards contrasts with the unsympathetic portrayal of Wang, who refuses to recognize his responsibilities and complicity. The division between them establishes a distinct gender dynamics that makes the female body the repository of truth and justice. In the opposition between Liu Liwen and Wang Huifan are mirrored the novella's larger divisions between good and bad characters, positive and negative values. These polarizations intensify the significance of the choices Wang Huifan makes after the arrest. From the moment he is incarcerated, what moves the narrative forward is Wang's journey to enlightenment.

After one year in the detention center, Wang Huifan is moved to a cadre school. Many Party members joined cadre schools by the end of 1969, but the life for convicted people like Wang Huifan was especially hard. Besides enduring heavy physical labor, Wang is subjected to harsh struggle sessions as part of the process of re-education. Self-criticism was obviously an important component of the re-education program. Wang has to recognize his faults in struggle sessions, write self-criticism, and show with his conduct and words that he is becoming a better person. But his self-criticism is not accepted. Speaking to Liu Liwen, who has also joined the cadre school, Wang Huifan says:

> "In the beginning, they criticized me for being an extreme rightist. With sincerity (*chengxin chengyi* 诚心诚意), I strived to examine myself. Since Chairman Mao has said that people like me are rightist, then moving further to the left has to be the correct way. With all of my energies I looked for my rightist aspects. I wrote more than one million characters in self-criticism, but I couldn't find the rightist points." "Was your search not deep or thorough enough?" she asks guessing the answer. Wang Huifang lets out a sigh, then earnestly responds: "I sincerely (*zhenxin* 真心) raised my search to the level of principle that they set for me (*wang tamen gei wo ding de gangshang qu shang* 往他们给我定的纲上去上); I thought that it represented the will of the Party. But later, even the fact that during the three/five anti campaigns I created a list of law-abiding people, following the directives of the higher-ups, has become a rightist attitude. […] If I keep searching like this, I will have to say that everything I did to carry out the thought reform movement according to the Party's directives is what capitalists do.[11]

The passage registers the frustration Wang experiences in performing the analysis of his behavior in the terms established by the Party. Frustration is intensified by Wang's incessant declaration of sincerity. The reiteration of sincerity brings to the fore the tension between "being sincere" and "performing sincerity." Doing self-criticism, sincerely (performing sincerity), as he is asked to do, does not yield knowledge of his true mistakes and/or his authentic soul. And yet, the production of insincerity in sincerity acts does not make sincerity outright insincere. It rather points to a contradiction inherent to the genre's expectations of sincerity. Wang sincerely strives to find his mistakes and this effort justifies his frustration. But frustration does not equate with innocence. At this stage, Wang has not yet been able to see his real faults. The insincerity implied in sincerity reminds us that the lesson Liu Liwen had tried to teach him when they were married is one that Wang Huifan has yet to learn. Wang's transformation occurs when he performs jiantao in his own way: when he expands the narrow perspective that restricts the search for mistakes within the confines of rightist ideology. Interestingly, this transition is documented in the diary that Wang keeps to record the outcome of his self-critical efforts.

[11] Ibid., 316.

The novella is interspersed with passages from Wang's diary. These fragments occur at the end of each section of the novella, conferring on the story a systematic narrative pattern and structure. Since diaries became a common alternative vehicle for self-examination in the socialist period, it does not surprise that Wei Junyi chose to insert this genre into the novella to document Wang's transformation and give the readers access to his thoughts and self-analysis. The diary entry in the middle of the story represents the watershed that marks the moment when Wang's thoughts begin to change:

> Now I start looking at my mistakes from a different perspective. Before, I strived to examine my rightist attitude following the directions of the Red Guards and the rebel factions. Nothing. There was nothing to dig out. And yet, does it mean that I did not make mistakes? Now I think that not only did I make mistakes, but also these mistakes are really serious.
> […]
> As a person who has suffered from torture, now I realize that in the past I was the one who was torturing other people. It's not about whipping or burning marks into people's bodies. But a word of mine could make people homeless and cause them physical harm. […] I am thinking of the work I did in the past years. Before Liberation, I was extremely thoughtful and considerate. I used to treat people below me as though they were family people. […] But later, I was only a leader. Leaders only care about leading, issuing directives, passing information to other people, making arrangements. The people below me were only people below me. They could only take orders from me. All I cared about was giving them a political standing, a political characterization. I ordered them to do this or that. I never cared about them for who they were (*tamen benshen* 他们本身). It makes a great difference. I was concerned about politics but I seldom thought about those who were affected by the implementation of certain policies. I acted in this way toward both cadres and peasants. I looked at them as though I had nothing to do with them, just like "the Qin people were uninterested in the Yue people" (*qin ren shi yue ren feiji* 秦人视越人肥瘠).[12]

This is the moment of recognition, when Wang Huifan's bodily experience of suffering breaks through the political surface that for years had made him blind to the harm he was causing. His faults come down to the inability to overcome his privileged status and the consequent betrayal

[12] Ibid., 329-330.

of the ideal of equality underlying the revolutionary project. His mistakes are political and ethical. The two dimensions cannot be separated. In treating people as entities to be grouped into general political categories rather than as specific individuals, Wang has contributed to dehumanize and deceive the revolution that aimed at erasing discrimination and oppression.

Wang brings this newly acquired awareness into his daily practice. In the cadre school, he develops deep bonds with people who have been ostracized and/or people to whom he would have never got too close in the past because of their lower rank. The scene of the dinner with Old Bai 老白 and Old Lang 老郎, fellow inmates who have also been accused of rightism, well illustrates the change Wang is undergoing. As they toast to their friendship, Wang remarks:

> Before, in my eyes, the word Old Lang only meant a person who cannot think and who does not have feelings. Now, Old Lang is my friend; he is a courageous man, a good comrade. I want to toast to my rediscovery of Old Lang![13]

Wang's rediscovery of people as human beings with feelings and thoughts seems to give a positive spin on self-criticism. Rather than being only a coercive form of punishment, jiantao offers Wang an occasion to deeply reflect on his behavior, shed his identity as a bureaucrat, and reassert his independent thinking and ethical values. On the surface it seems that the inner struggle is resolved when his responsibilities as a human being supersede his responsibilities as a cadre. At the end of the novella Wang feels he has truly become a "new person." Not only is he rehabilitated but he has also been able to restore his relationship with Liu Liwen. His transformation rekindles Liu Liwen's love for him and they remarry.

With the resolution of personal and interpersonal conflicts, the morality and romantic melodrama comes to a happy ending. It seems that in the novella Wei Junyi tried to accomplish what she was not able to achieve in the memoir: showing how deep and sincere self-criticism can

[13] Ibid., 347.

lead to self-awareness and can enable change in society and human relationships. The happy ending is however unsatisfactory. It raises more questions than it answers. What has made self-examination effective? Is Wang's transformation the effect of a more sincere attitude in the performance of jiantao? Has he really become a new person? The diary entry at the end of the novella is the place where these questions arise more forcefully:

> As for the bad things I did, even though I disapprove of them, I know that could not do things otherwise. In doing those things, at best I could try to maintain some propriety but I could not oppose them. At stake was the imperative of discipline coupled with the general situation that prevented me from speaking up. And yet, things are not entirely like this. It wasn't because I was concerned with my reputation or money that I intentionally did those things. […] I cared about my life (shengping 生平); rank and wealth were not that important for me. And yet this was still not my main problem. […] The problem is that I did not think that what we were doing in 1957 or 1958 was completely wrong. I thought it was right. I thought that doing inappropriate things to make the country leap forward after centuries of backwardness was forgivable.[14]

As the passage above shows, Wang's transformation is not as thorough as the happy ending wants us to believe. By claiming that his past mistakes were almost inevitable and that he could not have behaved differently in his position as a high-rank cadre, Wang proves to be unable to entirely condemn his wrong behavior and thoughts. Is his self-examination more sincere now than it was when he was coerced to do it? A defensive strategy is at work when he thinks that in the past he committed mistakes because he was fulfilling a task. His effort to reconcile, by looking for justifications, his seemingly new self with the old one bears an element of insincerity that is however necessary for him to accept his past and continue to live in the present and the future. The play of sincerity and insincerity creates ambiguity over how responsibility can be assessed. This ambiguity blurs the clear-cut separation between good and evil, ethical and

[14] Ibid., 372-373.

unethical behavior on which the entire novella is built, and shows how insincerity and sincerity do not necessarily rule each other out in self-critical acts.

There is yet another level of sincerity in the novella. The story of Wang Huifan and the other fictional characters is woven into the background of recognizable historical events, references to real people and facts. This historically grounded framework impresses on the novella a sense of reality and truth, which is enhanced by the realistic portrayal of the life of the characters. At a meta-level, the novella as a whole seems to make its own claims of sincerity by pushing fiction to its limits to reach the fiber of truth. The "resemblance effect" that Wei Junyi achieves in the memoir is replicated here in the novella with the result of activating a complex dialogue between the fictional and the real world. In "My Reading of 'Baptism,'" Ding Ling notes how Wei Junyi's novella has made her think of old friends and comrades. She writes:

> Gao Dajun 高大钧, Wang Guilin 王桂林! You were great people. Maybe you had defects and made mistakes, but throughout you remolded yourselves. You were Communist through and through. You raised the spirit of our people; you gave hope to our country! When I think of you, I want to write about you, but before I took up the pen, comrade Wei Junyi depicted you. Of course, she did not write about you, she wrote about other people, but the subject of her writing are Communist people; people who following the Party embarked on a difficult project, still following the Party ended up making great mistakes. She has portrayed real (*zhenzheng* 真正), flesh and blood Communists.[15]

Ding Ling's remark testifies to the ability of the novella to trespass the confines of fiction to enable a dialogue with the real world. Not entirely fictional, nor entirely real, "Baptism" stays in between, in the space where sincerity and insincerity mutually involve and sustain each other. Regardless of whether the characters in the novella truly resemble Ding Ling's old friends, Ding Ling and Wei Junyi certainly agreed on one thing: "diligently examining one's self,

[15] Ding Ling, "Wo du 'Xili'" 我读《洗礼》 [My Reading of "Baptism"], in *Ding Ling quanji*, 9: 284.

reviewing one's experience, and learning to discern what is true from what is wrong"—jiantao—is what makes a Communist thrive.[16]

What I hope this dissertation has shown is that jiantao deserves to be treated as a literary genre whose connection with other life writings can expand our understanding of the position of the self vis-à-vis the collective in Communist experiments and of the various ways in which life was narrated in modern China. The cases this dissertation has explored are neither inclusive nor representative of the heterogeneity of jiantao and women's personal writings. In their uniqueness and singularity, they have nonetheless convinced me of the urgency of bringing jiantao into the study of modern Chinese literature. The analysis of Wei Junyi's novella at the end of this dissertation has further revealed the importance of self-criticism to reconstruct and apprehend the backdrop of contemporary writing practices in China, and has made a case for the value of self-criticism not only as a genre connected to life writings, but also as a productive tool of literary analysis in and of itself.

[16] Ibid., 288-289.

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