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### Abstract

#### ***A Lone Swan: Melancholia, Performance, and Subjectivity in 1910s Chinese Fiction***

The conventional dating of the emergence of modern literature in China around the time of the May Fourth Movement in 1919 has led to overlooking the amazing variety of early 1910s Chinese literature. In the attempt to begin filling this gap, this paper explores processes of subjectivity construction and self-creation in Su Manshu's (1884-1918) understudied novel *The Lone Swan* (1912). Departing from scholarship that has emphasized its autobiographical dimension, I turn to the theme of melancholia as a lens that helps us understand the ways in which the subject is constructed and performed *in* and *by* the text. In the first part of the paper, I address the overt self-expressive register of the narrative, manifest in its lyrical language, and its prominent confessional bent. In the second part, I engage with the intricate system of intertextualities and linguistic exchanges between characters in the novel. What this brings out is a series of fascinating instances of identification, on the part of the protagonist, with and through other figures by means of *self-introjections* and /or *self-projections*. Throughout, melancholia constitutes a key term, as it accounts for the split nature of the protagonist's subjectivity and the performative, recursive processes of self-fashioning. Ultimately, I concur that the striking resemblance between the character's the author's experience suggests an identification between the two. However, rather than reasserting a simplistic autobiographical interpretation, I suggest that we apply the model of melancholia and subjectivity construction laid out in the novel to the author himself. By inverting the relation between life and literature, I thus shed light on the ways in which writing contributed to Su Manshu's self-fashioning as a monk, poet, painter, translator, and national loyalist.