

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Not Yet Farewell:

Postsocialist Performance and Visual Art in Urban China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Theater and Performance Studies

by

Jiayun Zhuang

2009

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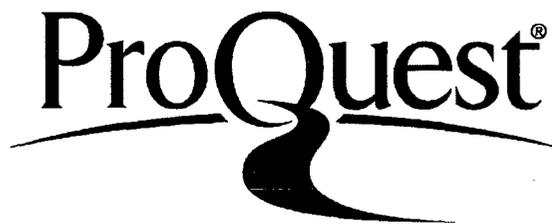
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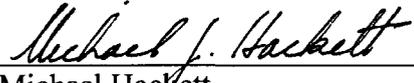
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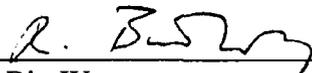
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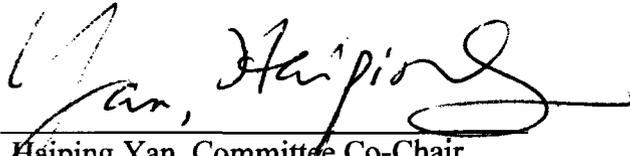
  
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Dedicated to,  
my dearest and most fascinating parents,  
who have always been supportive, encouraging, and inspirational,  
unconditionally,  
even when they were puzzled by what I was doing,  
and even though they once painted a rather different picture of my life.

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- . "Factory 798: the Site of Nostalgia and its Incontinent Dweller." *Extensions: The Online Journal of Embodiment and Technology*. Volume 5: Performing Space and Place, 2009.
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Not Yet Farewell:

Postsocialist Performance and Visual Art in Urban China

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Theater and Performance Studies

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This dissertation explores, in detail, a variety of postsocialist theater, performance, and visual art works that re-signify the country's revolutionary and socialist history. Taking a deep look at the somatic and semiotic practices of performative resignification, this dissertation examines the pieces that invent new ways to represent how prior socio-political and ideological codes continue to inform the culture of the postsocialist present. Overflowing with historically and ideologically-laden gestural and visual signs, these performative practices challenge the previously state-sanctioned ideologies in a cross-historical dialogue.

*Chapter 1*, as the introduction of this study, lays out the conceptual framework for the dissertation, probing the theoretical and historical ramifications of the postsocialist performance and visual art in the PRC, as well as engaging recent scholarship on the subject. *Chapter 2* focuses on two independent theater groups in urban China as well as their major performance productions: (1) the dance-theater group *Shenghuo wudao gongzuoshi* (The Living Dance Studio) (2) the dance-theater group *Zuhe niao* (The Niao Collective). This chapter explores the ways in which the dance-theater groups deliberately rework the normalized physical and linguistic signifiers in the socialist representation system, in order to detach their practices of *zhiti xiju* (physical theater) from *huaju* (spoken drama—the particular form of modern, western-style theater that first made its appearance at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). *Chapter 3* explores the new citadel of contemporary Chinese art—Factory 798 in Beijing, also called 798 Art District and Dashangzi Art District nowadays. This chapter, by examining a number of performance pieces enacted in Factory 798 in detail, tackles the question of post-socialist nostalgia, since a particular socialist history has been repeatedly compressed and resignified within this specific factory space. *Chapter 4* focuses on a large-scale collective art and social project launched in 2002, entitled *the Long March, A Walking Visual Display*, which echoed and responded to the historical Long March of the Communist-led Red Army in the mid-1930s. In this chapter, I examine a number of performance pieces enacted at the particular site along the journey: while some resignified the revolutionary signs that have been central to the Chinese revolutionary narratives or the model work of socialist realism, others performed certain bodily phenomenon, such as *repetition compulsion*, to

“act out” the failure of remembering the past occurrences or the resistance of entering into the ideologically-reconstructed past.

## Chapter 1

### An Introduction about “the Post”

In their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels depict a vivid and lingering image: “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism” (35).<sup>1</sup> The very same specter began to haunt the People’s Republic of China (PRC) several decades after the advent of *the Manifesto*, and has been haunting the nation ever since. Yet, the appearance of the ghost and its proximity have changed drastically over the past several decades.

In the winter of 2001, a theatrical production of *The Bedbug*, adapted from Vladimir Mayakovsky’s play of the same title, premiered in Beijing, directed by Meng Jinghui—one of the most important and popular theater directors. In one of the scenes, Meng—who also played a Brechtian narrator/commentator—stood in front of a blackboard, like a typical Chinese middle-school basic geometry teacher. He drew a sketch on the blackboard to illustrate the distance among the Earth, the Sun and Communism. Two spots were heavily drawn on the board, one representing the Earth, and the other the Sun. Then, Meng threw his chalk up in the air and made a beautiful parabola out of the flying path of the chalk. He then stated, solemnly and sarcastically: “Communism is there. Although it is far away, it is still there!” Apparently, the distance between Communism and the Earth is immensely larger than that which is between the Earth and the Sun, so large that it cannot be depicted on the blackboard. The audience members laughed out loud madly as if they wanted to show that nobody else on the Earth could laugh as loudly. What was most remarkable in the scene, not surprisingly, was that

a consensus was immediately reached in the collective in the theater house—now it seems that “we,” as the Chinese mainlanders, can *safely* and entertainingly talk about “farewell, communism.”

The story above illustrates the way in which an audience of Chinese urbanites experiences the representation of the socialist past and its ongoing repercussions in the present—at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the one hand, socialist institutions and the nominal-symbolic structure of socialism have never “really” left the PRC, and the socialist nation with its self-adjusting reform movements has been inevitably negotiating with the global domination of capitalist modernity. On the other hand, the genuine, “real” socialism with its built-in utopian ideal probably never “really” arrives. Therefore, the complicated sentiment shared by the audience, expressed in the joke about “farewell, communism,” not only reflects the society’s lived and experienced subordination and restriction by the traditional, “actually existing” socialist system, but also the society’s resentment of the fact that the socio-political structure of the nation is still evolved under the rubric of such a totalizing system. At the same time, as we can sense through the performance, that it is still unavoidable to deploy a metaphoric or humorous double-speak in order to acknowledge the gradual evaporation of the utopia, as the “failed” socialist institutions still function and have a continuing impact on the political, social, cultural, and civic life. What is revealed in the story signifies a particular historical time and space, a shifting economic and socio-political context, an intricate structure of feelings of the society, and a form of aesthetic practice that is bound to historical

conditions and social feelings; it also designates the subject of the dissertation—*postsocialism*, an ironic story about “not farewell yet.”

Through examining a number of performance and visual art practices, this dissertation aims to understand the ways in which Chinese postsocialism in the cultural and social arena intersects and interacts with the survival and failure of Chinese socialism.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that, this project, while focusing a “hyphenated construction”—Post-Socialism—by no means suggests a return to the peculiar ideologized time and space. As Ralph Litzinger astutely points out, “[...] any attempt to recuperate socialism, however embedded and responsive to global capital, and however ideologically overdetermined and marred by contradictions and utopian delusions, is a misguided adventure that will ultimately fail to speak back to the global present” (35). Therefore, this dissertation attempts to, in a new historical situation, develop a critical vision to examine a variety of post-Tiananmen performative practices, in order to bring about increased attention and innovative impetus to rethink the coexistence of multiple temporalities and modes of production, new aesthetic and political tactics for a postsocialist everyday practice, and the intricate dynamics between the collective and the individual, the particular and the universal, the ideal and the real, the signified and the signifier.<sup>3</sup>

### **Historicizing the Critical Frameworks of Postsocialism**

As socialism and its aftermath in the PRC become an inevitably important topic in contemporary Chinese studies, scholars both in and outside of China endeavor to offer

heuristic readings of postsocialism in order to comprehend the profound social uncertainty, ideological ambiguity, and the new sets of socioeconomic and cultural practices in response to a drastically shifting landscape.

Arif Dirlik, among the first group of scholars to examine the discursive and material aspects of postsocialism, uses postsocialism—a term that is intentionally *residual*—to denote “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Tackling the ideological contradiction and uncertainty of postsocialism in 1989—the watershed year in contemporary Chinese history—Dirlik sees that socialism has lost its coherence as a metatheory of politics, because of the attenuation of the socialist vision in its historical unfolding and the “vernacularization of socialism in its absorption into different national contexts” (Dirlik, 1989, 364). At the same time, he asserts that the end of Mao’s era by no means signifies a total compromise with, or embracing of, global capitalism. Rather, while postsocialism challenging the historical meta-narrative of socialism and renouncing socialism as an immanent meta-historical presupposition from where the force of socialism is derived,<sup>4</sup> it still envisions a future that is situated within the structural context of socialism. This historical conjuncture, as a result, indicates “a terrain of ideological contestation in which different actors were vying to assert their own versions of what had gone wrong with socialism and what was in store for China’s future” (Litzinger, 33). Emphasizing the historical premise of *actually existing socialism*, Dirlik’s theorization structures a positive vision by which Maoist revolutionary legacy and socialist practice can be reconceptualized and positioned into the context of global capitalist modernity in a strategic way. This revised and reconceptualized socialism, what Dirlik calls

postsocialism, admits the experience of capitalism into socialism, challenges the binary opposition of the two systems,<sup>5</sup> and yet still deploys a strategic resistance to the restoration of capitalism.

In his article on Chinese cinema in the 1980s, Paul Pickowicz locates postsocialism within the domain of public perception, near the end of the Cultural Revolution, when the society gradually felt a painful disillusionment and subsequent disbelief of the traditional socialist ideology.<sup>6</sup> This overwhelming, shared feeling in the postsocialist condition, according to Pickowicz, is “[...] the public awareness of the failure of the traditional socialist system and the absence of a socialist identity among ordinary people who live in or have lived in traditional socialist societies” (61). Defining postsocialism as “the ideological counterpart of postmodernism” (80), Pickowicz’s analysis also reveals a correlation between postmodernism that includes modernism and its aftermath, and postsocialism that contains “the vestiges of late imperial culture, the remnants of the modern or bourgeois culture of the Republican era, the residue of traditional socialist culture, and elements of both modernism and postmodernism” (60). However, his theorization of postsocialism in relation to the unfolding of the postmodern social and cultural milieu looks no further than the demonstration of the juxtaposition of multiple temporalities. From Pickowicz’s perspective, postsocialism primarily presents a social perception of a negative, dystopian reality.

If Dirlik’s analytic framework of postsocialism imagines the ways in which postsocialism, as a project of renewal and transformation, functions constructively for the shifting socio-economic and cultural practices based upon the experience and praxis of

socialism, Pickowicz's theorization presents a relatively pessimistic one. It documents a social reaction to the existing "socialist" system by which the "monopolistic power in the government, military, and public security sectors" penetrates the society deep down to the individual level.<sup>7</sup> Whereas the argument addresses an earlier historical moment—namely, the Post-Mao era—and its related social structure of feeling, it does highlight the way in which the post-Mao Chinese intellectuals and artists anticipated and were committed to the western liberal social-democratic tradition, which continued throughout the post-Mao era and into the postsocialist time.

The definition of "postsocialism" in the dissertation is both built on and expands the theorizations discussed above. The starting point of the era came into being during the late 1980s and early 1990s. More specifically, postsocialism, in this dissertation, if defined through a historical-cultural time framework, starts from the military crackdown of the student-led pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. The event stood out as a major watershed that divided the Deng regime. The society's enthusiasm for the imperative of political reform was beaten down after the movement. Some scholars argue that decentralized authoritarianism coupled with economic reform and development was perceived by China's Communist Party (CCP) as the exercise in social stabilization, and yet the political reform was indefinitely put on hold.<sup>8</sup>

During the postsocialist era, "the gradual quantitative reforms in the 1980s led to fundamental structural transformations" (Lu, 2007, 208), and, the fabrics of routine lives, cultural practices, and social relations also underwent and keep undergoing drastic

changes. On the one hand, the modernization process in the form of economic reforms and opening up to the world leads to a certain relaxing central control over the economic realm.<sup>9</sup> Globalization, or primarily the gradual and rapid integration into the capitalist world system, has brought in a massive influx of global capital and market forces that accelerated the modernization process of China. On the other hand, China's central political system remains quite in place even after it encountered the 1989 legitimacy crisis. The control in the political and ideological realm is still fundamentally dominated by the one-party rule. Some argue that the society has even undergone a tightening of political-ideological control while enjoying the relaxation in the economic arena.<sup>10</sup> While this sociopolitical and historical journey was often marked with its consistent economic growth and political stability, this historical conjuncture has also witnessed soaring social polarization, uneven development, the emergence of millions of laid-off urban workers and land-lost rural peasants,<sup>11</sup> and the fact that a huge number of corrupted bureaucrat-entrepreneurs abuse their positions of power and exploit their privileged access to public resources and services.

However, the majority of the performance and visual art practices discussed in this dissertation were produced in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after the euphoria produced by globalization and the free market economy had already abated into a host of new problems. For one thing, the nation has already stood out internationally as one of the most unequal societies. The term "socialism," nevertheless, is still oft-repeated, as China is, after all, a society under the authoritarian rule and power structure of the CCP. The official media still pays lip service to the state socialism and a sufficient

number of institutions of the “socialist” party-state that continue to operate. The officially-sanctioned and promoted revolutionary and socialist narratives have been persistently produced and disseminated. Nevertheless, in this historical moment, some issues that were noticeably absent in the post-Mao era characterize a postsocialist politics that functions paradoxically in relation to both the global order and the national policies. They include: the pronounced tendency toward de-politicization and de-ideologization in the PRC; the society’s disenchantment with many of the former universalistic assumptions of western liberal democracy and humanism in the wake of the critical awareness of different accounts of global history and various proposals of “alternative modernity;” the intricate interconnection between the residual power of the central state and consumer nationalism (or, nationalist consumerism); and the rise of fluid subjectivities and new conceptions of community based on the developed rhetoric and technologies of new media.

Equally amused and astonished by the rapid development of a new consumer-oriented and market-driven social reality of the PRC in the context of globalization, both scholars and the public have realized that the changing theories and practices of postsocialism should be constantly open to critical assessment. Postsocialism, discussed and explored in this project, is informed by the drastic yet interim process of the socio-political changes as well as the cultural and sensual psyche resonating with the society’s anxieties around unsettled socio-economic conditions and cultural contradictions, derived both from the rapid modernizing/globalizing process and an idiosyncratic experience of a past utopian totalitarianism.

### **The Peculiarities of Postsocialist Structure of Feeling**

From this new, widely-circulated proverb, one can easily sense the major socioeconomic transformations and historical ruptures—emerging in the Maoist period, Deng’s regime, and the China under Jiang Zemin’s rulership—through the deliberate use and repetition of three *xia* (off, lower, downwards).

When Chairman Mao waved his hands,  
the entire nation sent the urban youth down to the countryside (*xia xiang*);  
When Deng Xiaoping waved his hands,  
the entire nation jumped into the sea (*xia hai*: to engage in private business);  
When Jiang Zemin waved his hands,  
the entire nation stepped off their posts (*xia gang*: were laid off).<sup>12</sup>  
(Zhang, 2002, 312)

Here, the humor and nuance of the Chinese language vividly depicts three phases of Chinese socialism (and postsocialism) and links their profound impacts through the imagery of a downward direction—*xia*. Through repetition, this imagery juxtaposes the large-scale, top-down mass migration campaign before and during the Cultural Revolution, the party-sanctioned economic pragmatism and approach to activate people to enter entrepreneurial commerce and seek individual pursuits of profit, and the state orchestrated and endorsed practice to replace the surplus workers from the state-owned or urban collective enterprises. The imagery, on the one hand, indicates the ways in which the state power still dictates economic and social vitals of the PRC and how the extension of the unified giant institutional body can reach down to the most personal levels. On the other hand, the imagery also implies that the party-state, upon shifting from its politics-in-command socialism, relies heavily on economic performance to

maintain its political legitimacy and social stability since the Tiananmen incident, leading China to achieve astounding economic growth rates of the nation at the expense of social equality.<sup>13</sup>

When examining the contradictory representations of socialist ideology in post-Mao mass media, Lisa Rofel finds that the goals and desires of the state have been fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty. She writes, “[...] at one moment, productivity and the pursuit of wealth are lauded by party bureaucrats; in the next moment, “socialist morality” is applauded as the antidote to undue worship of money” (704). However, in a later historical period, it seems that the sense of ambiguity has rapidly faded away upon the further infiltration of market mechanisms. A number of scholars have pointed out that the CCP has gradually deviated from its original party line and Marxist theoretical basis, and aligned itself favorably with the newly-emerging urban middle class of businessmen, managers and high-level professionals from non-public and foreign enterprises, cultural elites, and high-technology personnel and experts, all of whom are now identified as the new builders of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the meantime, some argue that the party is ready to jettison Mao’s idea of the CCP to be the party of workers—the vanguard of the proletariat—and to serve the interests of the people;<sup>14</sup> and some argue that the CCP “looks more and more like the right-wing authoritarianism of a Suharto of Indonesia [...] than anything Marx might have dreamt up (Gilley, 19). These intellectual and social voices indicate a growing sense of betrayal of the Party against its own traditional working-class base, particularly considering the increased unequal distribution of wealth and power in the

society, as well as the ongoing abandonment of the workers and peasants who were once the core constituencies of the nation.

The parataxis above, besides leaving the semantic connections to be inferred from the context, also entails an opposite direction—moving up, including a progression of the economic reforms and the concurrent changes of the focal point in the political-ideological structure of the PRC. That is to say, today's China needs to digest and review not only what has been created or omitted, by the historical events and social feelings about “*xia*” (the going-downs), but also the ways in which the scenes of “*xia*” always mingle with the stimulant developing scenes (the going-ups) taking place in the new age. This multifaceted social-psychological complex of identities, beliefs, value systems, and attitudes, engendered in the historical context of postsocialism, is what this dissertation aims to investigate. For, it is such an intricate social structure of feeling that triggers certain creative sensibility and aesthetic experience, driving the postsocialist artistic subjects to retrospect and represent the epic and long-fought revolution and the national and social construction of the modern nation-state. And, these artistic practices come into being in a new historical moment when socialism is perceived as waning or eclipsing and yet nothing has yet arisen of its aftermath to take the place of the foregone.

The implications of “post” in this postsocialist project point to both a continuation and a rupture of conventional socialism; it can be read as both a socio-historical reality and a cultural imagery. On the one hand, *post* can be understood as a marker of “subsequent to,” “following,” or “because of,” indicating the current socio-

political condition only in which the representation pertinent to “leaving socialism” can be justifiable. On the other hand, the postsocialist turn arrives in the aftermath of several decades of socialism “deferred, interrupted, resumed and redefined.”<sup>15</sup> This Chinese postsocialist *différence*, in the Derridean sense of both differing and deferring, implies that the forms and structures of the modern (in this sense, socialism) have been and will be continually pursued and deferred; it also provides a “post” dialectic of appearance versus disappearance, and of unrelinquishable versus “mourning and melancholic;” the psyche of the latter recognizes or fails to admit the loss of the loved object.<sup>16</sup> As the past is constantly introjected into the present, among the postsocialist cultural retro practices, we will see that some of them performatively exhaust themselves in the attempt to approach *the real* where some commit to the dispersal of the socialist aura.

### **The Political Challenge of the Question of Post/Socialism**

In her article “What’s Happened to Ideology,” Lydia Liu considers that there is a need to study transnationalism and postsocialism as a simultaneous process.<sup>17</sup> In her view, theoretical articulations and assessments about socialism and postsocialism should be neither confined to former socialist countries, nor separated from the concept of transnational capitalism. The alternative histories of socialist revolution in non-western countries, by the same token, should be revisited through a cognitive and critical perspective. Liu’s political and critical stance is built on a commitment to the exploration of transnationalism and its critique, and she has been rather alerted to the remaking of an

official ideology on the historical meeting ground in the 1990s—namely, letting the negativity of the socialist history of class struggle too easily “slip into” the very ground for the postsocialist coauthorship of the ideology of entrepreneurship.<sup>18</sup>

Lydia Liu’s concern directly speaks to the postsocialist condition of the PRC as it inhabits a globalizing time and space. As globalization is interpreted as part of the nation’s modernization process, the party-state has steadily brought the nation into the system of global market relations, predominately ruled by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and has promoted new ideological guidelines that generate a national consensus on reunification and empowerment of the people to join the trend of globalization.<sup>19</sup> In a responsive manner, the Chinese intellectual circles, as Yan Yunxiang and others have shown, have been promoting an outreach attitude toward globalization; this has been functioning as the key forces in terms of processing cultural translation and localization for further globalization.<sup>20</sup> The efforts made by the state and certain social actors described above help the nation keep up with the globalization process, and in the meantime project the nation as the central and ultimate concern in the Chinese version of globalization.<sup>21</sup>

If we follow Lydia Liu’s assumption that China’s postsocialism is intrinsically entangled with transnational capitalism, and that disposal of the alternative histories of socialism results in the fact that “late capital and its ideological effect can be quickly absorbed into the language of global hegemony” (Liu, 1999, 766), it is then imperative to draw, if any, the critical sources from the socialist past, for the present. For, the critical value of postsocialism, to my understanding, lies in its potential to counteract

with the newly reinvented, self-legitimizing official discourse of the party-state in conformity to the status quo of global capitalism for the sake of its positive impact on national economic development.

Terry Eagleton shows his distrust of “ideological sloppiness” due to the existence of “a spectacular contradiction between a still highly authoritarian political superstructure and a progressively capitalized economic base” in contemporary (postsocialist) China (Eagleton, 1997, 5), from Mao leaping to McDonald’s, so to speak.<sup>22</sup> From his perspective, it seems that China’s development has not yet demonstrated enough evidence of self-reliance and defense against the ravages of global capital, and China’s revolutionary and socialist history cannot provide adequate critical leverage to the nation’s ongoing global practice and experience. Opposed to the disappointment depicted above, my understanding is that, the coexistence of, instead of a problematic leap between, “Mao” and “McDonald’s” is charged with profound social tensions, antagonisms, and collective crises of identity in postsocialist PRC. It is exactly the “spectacular contradiction” that would invent and develop postsocialist epistemological and aesthetic practices to critically, if not strugglingly, engage the history of socialism to review the issues of justice and equality in the current global economic order, and simultaneously distance themselves from the residual power of the state(s) and create a counter-hegemonic narrative about the intricacy of social consciousness and identity in the postsocialist context.

### **the Definition of Postsocialist Performance and Visual Art**

The so-called “postsocialist culture,” understood by Chris Berry in his examination of postsocialist cinema in the PRC as “a culture resulting from loss of faith in the socialist myth but in a society where many of the institutions of socialism continue to operate” (Berry, 2004, 155), has begun to be perceived and defined in the middle of the radical socio-political reconfiguration of the society. This period witnesses the permeation of the postsocialist/postmodern circumstances of globalization, high-tech commoditization, individual freedom, privatization and private ownership, moral and value plurality, and cultural diversity, all of which, I would argue, provoke both new inquiry into identity and its reconstruction as a consequence of a shifting historical landscape, and new aesthetic practices that explore the thresholds of representation to derail our accustomed cultural visions.

The critical concerns of the postsocialist performance and visual arts can be detected as follows, and merit attentions: (1) a valorization of communities, promoting a collective solidarity and a commitment to support one another; (2) negotiation with the irony of postmodern simulacra that engulf and resignify practice and lived experiences of the revolutionary and socialist past; and (3) the resistance to a universalistic notion of modernity and a desire for mapping a particular, collective past onto a global present via the legacy of revolution and socialist modernity.<sup>23</sup> The memories and imaginations of the past have therefore been repetitively invoked and resignified through the artistic practices of “the lost” and “the post,” which also simultaneously deconstruct the officially-sanctioned revolutionary and socialist myth of the PRC. The particular performance pieces will be elaborated in detail in the

dissertation chapters, including the multimedia dance-theater pieces staged in independent theater spaces of urban China, site-specific performance and visual practices enacted in Factory 798 in Beijing, and a collectively-engaged performative and visual display created to re-embodiment and re-explore the Red Army's Long March launched in 1934.

In this dissertation, the definition of postsocialist performance and visual art can be considered at two levels. In a broad sense, this category of artistic practice shares certain important characteristics. For instance, the artistic practices critically reflect the socialist practice associated with state control and invoke reconstructed memories and interpretations of the socialist past, even though the direct confrontation against the state's subordination only exists primarily as a "structuring absence"—the unarticulated element of the text that is nonetheless essential to its constitution.<sup>24</sup> Another example here would be that, under the officially sanctioned Socialist Realism and following Engels' formula of "typical characters under typical circumstances,"<sup>25</sup> any sense of the individual is required to link with her/his historically-determined situation and development. In the postsocialist performative and visual practices, nevertheless, the individual, subjective intention becomes not simply to be measured by the objective and collective existence. The self-initiated and experience-based narratives are sufficiently explored to concern the relationship between the individual and a wide range of factors emerging from the new socio-political and cultural environment.

Furthermore, in his analysis of the characteristics of postsocialism, Sheldon Lu considers that "'the return of the repressed' comes in the forms of affects, sentiments, and

feelings, which are expressed in cultural, literary, filmic and artistic creations” (Lu, 2007, 210). This argument interestingly provides sufficient space for its reader to ponder the categorization of the feeling for “the return of the repressed”—fear, yearning, anxiety, or the mixture of all of them. Indeed, another commonly shared characteristic of the postsocialist art can be found through its “performance” of a *perceived* mourning and melancholia for the impossibility of return to the revolutionary and socialist past. These distinctive traits will be carefully explored in the following section.

It is also important to note that the postsocialist performance and visual art practices discussed in this dissertation are categorized in a *narrower* sense. The dissertation primarily examines, in detail, a variety of post-Tiananmen theater, performance, and visual art works that re-signify and remember the country’s revolutionary and socialist past for the uneasy present, under the condition that state socialism has already lost its coherence and yet the state-endorsed official culture remains uncontested and in full force, and the state interference into the cultural arena and social space is by no means put to an end. My attention in this project is particularly directed toward the somatic and semiotic practices that invent new performative ways to both represent how prior socio-political codes continue to inform the culture of the postsocialist present, and to challenge the previously state-sanctioned ideologies in a cross-historical dialogue. In other words, what interests me the most in the context of this project is the way in which *hongse jingyan* (Red Experience)—namely, China’s revolutionary and socialist past—directly constitutes cognitive, cultural, and affective resources of the society in the postsocialist present.

Here I also need to point out that, if defined in a broader sense, the postsocialist, (post-Tiananmen) performance and visual art, created within this specific temporal dimension, should include a much larger range of artistic exercises. For instance, some artists, such as Qiu Anxiong and Chen Shaoxiong, experiment with digital media, animations, or reformed traditional ink paintings to comment on the rapid, if not violent, process of urbanization in China. Xiang Jing portrays the imperfect, intense, and self-indulgent female bodies and facial expressions through her sculptures, which emphasize the increasingly sensitized and sexualized urban environment in which more and more contemporary Chinese women are located. Liu Jianhua's artworks can be noted as the last example here. His most recent installation projects—*Chukou-Huowu Zhuangyun* (Export-Cargo Transit) and *Yiwu Diaocha* (Yiwu Investigation)<sup>26</sup>—exhibited tons of recyclable foreign waste, which arguably were the cheap goods made in China in the first place. The projects aimed to open up a public dialogue on the subjects of China's problematic role in the global manufacture and trade as well as the economic and cultural interactions between China and the developed world. The artworks described above, although not specifically considered by the dissertation project, should be carefully examined in the future, to enliven and enrich the narrative of postsocialism as it unfolds in an ever-changing and increasingly complicated global landscape.

In addition to stimulating the construction of a postsocialist cultural order more responsive and effective to the experiences and concerns of the public, this type of postsocialist cultural representation in the globalizing China is also forwardly engaging transnational participation and spectatorship. As the project will elaborate, the sensible

postsocialist cultural subjects wield their own modality of soft power, pursuing a course of action midway between the state-endowed systematic soft power strategy, and a conformity with a universalistic set of beliefs and practices taking globalization as the core element.

### **The Characteristics of Postsocialist Performance and Visual Art**

In this section, I will particularly examine two major characteristics shared among some of the postsocialist artistic practices discussed in the dissertation.

#### **(1) Practices and Effects of the Proliferation of Signs**

One of my major critical approaches to the performance subjects in this project is semiotics,<sup>27</sup> for, one of the salient features emerging from the postsocialist performance and visual art is the over-proliferation of revolutionary and socialist signs. The postmodern/postsocialist physical and visual recycling of socialist kitsch—certainly in combination with the traces of capitalist kitsch expressed through the ambiguous elevation of everyday consumerism and late capitalist mass culture, as what we recognize from some of Andy Warhol's visual images—effectively demystifies its transcendent and utopian function and effect.

To begin with, it is important to understand the crucial role of the sign system of socialism as it effectively creates a realistic imagery of a socio-political transformative reality of socialism based on a closed circle of signifiers. After 1949, in a time of nation-building of the PRC, the official master historical narrative, functioning as ideology,

provides the society with a coherent orientation toward a whole range of ideals about value system, social existence, and humanity. Ideology, in this sense, should be understood as a body of discursive, material, and semiotic practices that naturalize, legitimate, and disseminate its “unspoken but systematic logic.”<sup>28</sup> If following Terry Eagleton’s formulation of ideology, what the ideology-oriented artistic form does to ideology precisely reflects “what ideology does to history (makes it seem natural)” (Todd, 14). From Roland Barthes’s semiotic interpretation, ideology can also be understood as a myth constituted by the signifying effects that render the belief system natural and self-referential.<sup>29</sup>

What is interesting and pertinent here is the connection between ideological mystification and the economy and politics of sign systems. The socialist sign system as an explicit indoctrination, in the practice of what Barthes calls “signifying the real,” is always-already involved in the construction of “the signified other side”<sup>30</sup>—a model history.<sup>31</sup> This system insists on the existence and significance of certain historical truths and objectivity, functions as a form of the content of the historical text(s), and further asserts the essence, structure, and referentiality of the sign system through the representational practices, all of which facilitate the ideologically-charged cognitive and affective mobilizations of the society.

In the revolutionary narrative, for instance, key signs such as Yan’an,<sup>32</sup> Jinggang Mountains, red flags, and gestures of heroic sacrifice can be seen ubiquitously. In the narrative of the socialist modernization of the PRC,<sup>33</sup> a variety of signs are deployed to create a teleological and utopian dimension of the construction of the nation-state,

including the sunrises in the east, an energized and unified crowd of the masses, grand factories and well-organized machines, joyful working scenes, and harvests of the collective. These signs—visual, verbal, physical, architectural, or in other forms—have been present and distributed in public spaces through films, theater productions, propaganda posters, and other mediums and materials. Coalescing and competing, they once created and have been creating a symbolic order that bears the marks of the existing power structure, and an ideal and ultimate signifier—Socialism (in the PRC). Here, my argument is not that the practice and history of China’s socialism can be referred, ascribed, and reduced to a sign system or a mere phantasm. The purpose behind the exploration of the “phantasmatic” dimension of China’s socialism in this project lies in my continuing interest in (1) the sign system as a productive apparatus of ideology (in this specific case, the socialist ideology), and (2) the disruption and transfiguration of signifying exercises and effects, some of which are precisely embodied through the postsocialist artworks that will be discussed in this project.

The excessive semiotic deluge and overflowing *jouissance* emerged in the early and middle 1980s—the post-Mao era. In the Chinese avant-garde art movement—*qianwei yishu*—during this particular time, a large number of the artists looked back at the European avant-garde movements at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup> This was not the first time that Chinese artists grappled vigorously with modernity through adoption and translation of western-style visual texts and vocabularies. As a matter of fact, the Chinese modernist and avant-garde art movements appeared as early as the 1930s, when the artists and art groups were highly influenced by a wide range of avant-garde trends

(such as Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism), and attempted to integrate modern western visual language with Chinese subject matters to effectively insert a modernizing cultural force into the society.<sup>35</sup>

As a comparison, the avant-garde movement in the 1980s and the *85 meishu yundong* ('85 Movement) came into being during the post-Mao relaxation of control over the cultural and social sectors.<sup>36</sup> This new round of imitation and translation of western modern and contemporary art in the 1980s emerged right after the end of the campaign against *zichan jieji ziyouhua* (bourgeois liberalism campaign) in 1981 and the campaign against *jingshen wuran* (spiritual pollution) in 1983 and 1984—both of these CCP-conducted cultural campaigns in literature and art can be seen as conservative backlashes in opposition to the gradual social change after the Cultural Revolution. In parallel with the intellectual movements at the time, particularly *xin qimeng yundong* (the New Enlightenment Movement), the new artistic avant-garde clearly endeavored to detach from the ideologized social environment and the unidirectional, routinized life regulated by the authorial power and ideological hegemony.<sup>37</sup> Artists of the '85 *Movement*, for instance, claimed that art should directly function as the carrier of free and pluralistic expression of cultural and political sentiments.<sup>38</sup>

However, it is important to point that, unlike their predecessors in the 1930s, very few artists of the avant-garde movement in the 1980s personally traveled to the West for the education and practice of art. The so-called Western art was known and mirrored primarily through the mediocre reproductions of the time.<sup>39</sup> In such a form of “cultural translation,” based on limited source material and indirect knowledge transfer, the

conceptual framework and statement of certain artworks can be more intelligible and reproducible than the concrete artistic vocabulary and technique. In this manner, some Chinese modern (avant-garde) artworks of the 1980s were simplified, reinterpreted, and made abstract as concept-based and sign-oriented. To my understanding, one of the reasons behind the semiotic excess seen in the Chinese avant-garde art since the 1980s can be attributed to the fact that many Chinese artists perceived western-style visual art through a sign-centered dimension and reapplied the perceived sign systems into the artistic practices that directly addressed their own experience and concerns. Certainly, the continual sign proliferations embraced by the postmodern western art world as a cultural reflection of the hyper-real contemporary societies provided the avant-gardists in the PRC with another specific historical and cultural condition with which to tackle the political economy of the sign.

Another crucial driving force for the proliferation of the floating signifiers emerging in postsocialist artistic practices since the 1980s avant-garde movements also calls for critical assessment. That is, the semiotic maze is set upon both the breaking down of the continuum of *sign-object-interpretant*, and the overflowing of the historically and ideologically-laden visual and gestural signifiers. Here are some of the most well-known examples. Wu Shanzhuan, for instance, is one of the founders of the artistic group called *hongse youmo* (the Red Humor), established in 1986. He proposed to employ humor and irony to subvert the power of written symbols, characters, and scripts, the semiotic authority and immediacy of which played an overpowering, if not violent, role during the worker-peasant-soldier movements of the Cultural Revolution.

The artists in the group appropriated and represented *dazibao* (big-character posters)—a visually reminiscence of the Cultural Revolution. They re-contextualized the texts and interjected new literal signs and symbols borrowed from a variety of sources (such as commercials, commonly used colloquialisms, idioms, and slang) to create chaos in the written world, and a humorous and absurd effect that would devastate the very underlying political-ideological rationale behind the big characters. As the leading figure of *zhengzhi popu* (Political Pop)—one of the prominent visual genres in the early post-Tiananmen era—Wang Guangyi is highly influenced by American Pop. His visual practice shares some similarities with Wu Shanzhuan’s, in terms of appropriating and deconstructing the overriding imagery and iconography of the Cultural Revolution. His work arbitrarily juxtaposes the slogans and heroic images widely circulated through model operas, propaganda posters, and other visual media during the Cultural Revolution with the recognized commercial icons imported from abroad, such as Marlboro, Coca-Cola, and Kodak.<sup>40</sup> The combination of political and commercial symbols—double kitsch,<sup>41</sup> as Gao Minglu terms it, as it promotes both a political statement and commodity—creates a comical and absurd effect that “carries with it a biting satire of both the ideology of the Mao era and the blind craze for the Western consumer products prevalent in today’s China” (Jiang, 30).

Qiu Zhijie’s *Chongfu shuxie yiqianbian lantingxu* (Copying “The Preface to the Orchid Pavilion” One Thousand Times) can be seen as an example of the performative sign-making process, although the piece did not necessarily deal with over-proliferation of revolutionary and socialist signs. From 1986 to 1997, in a continuous performing

process, Qiu Zhijie copied “the Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection”—the premier work of the Sage of Calligraphy, Wang Xizhi (321-379; alt. 303-361)—on a piece of paper over a thousand times. Through the actions, the classic Chinese characters were overwritten to the point that the art and craft of calligraphy was turned into a sheet of black paper, with nothing legible, not to mention any calligraphic style. The artist also videotaped some of his writing sessions and juxtaposed the paper covered with dense, solid black ink with the videotape that documented his previous writing. In a way, the live, spontaneous, and ephemeral quality that can be perceived from the act of calligraphy was reduced to a mediatized, archival document of the laborious, mechanical process.<sup>42</sup> Qiu Zhijie’s long-term solo performance bridged the autonomy and the dilemma of the existentialist individual with a postmodern twist of repetition, accumulation, and meaninglessness. Moreover, the piece provided another example of an emotional and aesthetic expression transformed into a conceptual artistic inquiry, as well as a concrete object that has profound repercussions on our lived experience of reality realized in an abstract sign system.

To my understanding, the proliferation of signs constitutes both problems and promises for postsocialist aesthetic practices. On the one hand, it is indeed a postmodern syndrome of emptying out the meaning of the sign via referential plenitude, and of reducing the lived, albeit unspeakable, experience to a semiotic system of abstraction and equivocation of difference. On the other hand, one should not overlook the possibility of investing the “vortex of simulated nothingness” with the ability to engage the “old” sign systems in a historical dialectic, just the same way in which the politically motivated epic

theater always locates itself in performance vis-a-vis the historically placed temporalities, and resignifies the volatile historicity of signs to discern their cultural and historical situatedness.<sup>43</sup> Resignification, therefore, as it tackles the existing sign systems in a deconstructive mode, is an intentionally conceived choice and functions as a cognitive tool in this visual economy on two levels. On one level it becomes a performance practice—for instance, *zhiti xiju* (physical theater)—that reappropriates the preexisting signs and reactivates the volatile historicity of signs in society and on the stage. It is the purposely-arranged “subversive repetition.” At a deeper level, resignification functions as an episteme, a venue for political resistance and irony to the preexisting signification that has conditioned the very subject. Elin Diamond has reminded us,

[...] when performativity materializes as performance, in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations), between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique.

(Diamond, 1996, 5)

Through the “subversive repetition,” resignification invokes “cross-historical dialogues” among the conventional significations, and allows the potential for unpacking the performative in order to expose both the social scripts that prescribe our identity and the historicity of performative acts that might remain dissimulated.

As Emily Apter wonderfully puts it in her essay that discusses the enactment of Orientalist stereotypes, “the rehearsed cultural referentialism of the performed type, together with its excessive affect, function to create politically strategic points of semantic connectivity among the blurred procedures of *acting, outing, being, doing, passing, and meaning*” (31). I would also argue that the consciously-conducted

resignifying game—in other words, strategically using performance to examine performativity, or, performing performativity—practiced in *zhiti xiju* that I will examine in the next chapter, constitutes a form of *politically-charged aesthetics*. These aesthetic practices might not be able to change the identity script in real life, but will reveal to the audience both structures of power beyond the theater contexts and more visions of our possible identities.

## **(2) The Use and Abuse of the Individual Body**

Another prominent feature of the postsocialist (also read “contemporary”) performance and visual arts is the over-visible presence of the (Chinese) body. Since the *85’ Movement*, the avant-gardiests and the contemporary performance artists, the dwellers of Beijing’s East Village in particular, began to tackle and express the body more explicitly and viscerally, and use the body in direct reference to the individual. They often explored an existentialist being, estranged and alienated, driven by her/his own self-destruction, nullity, violence, and absurdity. Ma Liuming, for instance, created an androgynous alter-ego, Fen. Insisting on gender transgression, his performance pieces—such as *Fen-Ma Liuming zai changcheng xingzou* (Fen-Ma Liuming Walks on the Great Wall, 1998), and *Fen-Ma Liuming zai li’ang* (Fen-Ma Liuming in Lyon, 2001)—and other visual artworks underline the sensual and seductive queer body that hardly fits into any type of body discourse across different historical contexts. Masochism marks Zhang Huan’s displays of the body, which insists on self-incurred suffering, humiliation, and, in Wu Hung’s word, “simulated self-sacrifice” (Wu, 2008,

54). In those well-known performance pieces, such as *12 Pingmi* (12 Square Meters, 1994), and *65 Gongjin* (65 Kilograms, 1994), he offered his flesh and blood in some cases, and tried to approach death in other cases,<sup>44</sup> through which one can sense his attempt to link his carnal knowledge with a bigger socio-political context.

A number of other performance artists and their representative performance pieces can also be put into this category, including, for instance, Song Yongping and Song Yonghong's *1986 nian mouri tiyan* (A Scenic Personal Experience, 1986), Tang Guangming's *Yishi* (Ritual, 1986), and Wang Chuyu's *Baise henji* (Traces of White, 1996). These pieces demonstrated an obsession with the body politics of the socialist nation-state through performative bodily representation, and an urgency to individualize the human subject-body in postsocialist China.

In the very beginning of John Hay's "the Body Invisible in Chinese Art," he immediately raises an important question: "Why does the body seem to be almost invisible in a figurative tradition that flourished for over two thousand years in China" (42)? What the question regarding invisibility of the Chinese body in Chinese art actually boiled down to is a very different type of philosophy and representational principle of the body, by which the body is not necessarily the corporeal and the materialized (human) entity. The core of representation of a Chinese body in traditional art is never primarily based on mimesis,<sup>45</sup> but on a process of transformation, through which the bodies are animated, expressed, and integrated by flow of *qi* energy, and are also exchanged through the traveling of *qi*. Traditionally speaking, *Taihu Shi* (rocks from the bed of Lake Tai), "with its convoluted, foraminate, complexly textured form, might

well stand as a culturally quintessential Chinese body” (Hay, 68). Certainly, this body of rock is not what we encounter in the contemporary Chinese performance art.

Facing the imperialist invasion and the decline of traditional culture, the intellectuals in the early period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century painstakingly sought to regenerate the demoralized and devastated Chinese spirit and body through new forms of body aesthetics and practices.<sup>46</sup> Yan Fu, Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, and a number of others, created a continuous and vigorous intellectual current that upheld the reform of the Chinese body through their literary and artistic manifestations. This marked a new beginning of “discovery of the body” in a sense that the traditional Chinese body—the metaphorical, formless, and transformative body that is constantly in search of something beyond or external to the material existence—needed to be seriously “grounded,” materialized, and rebuilt by the aid of the Western discourse on the body.<sup>47</sup>

However, while the modern politics and aesthetics of the body were introduced into and applied to the Chinese context, there still existed some differences between Western and Chinese conceptions of the aesthetic and political body. Wang Ban posits that, in the West, “industrializations and modernization met with a strong romantic rebellion calling for the aesthetic reaffirmation of imagination, sentiment, and the integrity of the individual’s lived experience” (59). Also, following a Foucauldian perspective, the individual body was “invented” during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe. Knowledge was then constructed and functioned on each individual body, and discourses became individuated. Individualism highlighted the new principle of individual accountability, through which social control and regulation of the body can

be accomplished. After all, to Foucault, “the body is once and for all an individual body, bounded by its skin and congruent with an individual social person in the modern West” (Turner, 38). In the Chinese context, the body was activated and rebuilt as a site of resistance and liberation, not only for the individual self-fashioning, but for the nation as a whole. This is to say, the training, development, and strengthening of the individual body had everything to do with the construction of a much-needed collective body, a national unity against foreign aggressions. Even in one of the most important Chinese woodcut paintings, *Nuhouba Zhongguo* (Roar China)—by Li Hua,<sup>48</sup> first produced in the summer of 1930—where we only see a singular, blindfolded man bound tightly to a pole by ropes with his mouth wide open, the visual power of the painting suggests a silent and yet salient cry for awakening and solidarity of the nation. The struggle and resistance of the individual body foregrounds the body of a bigger entity.

Certainly, the very notion of the body interpreted in the framework of the materiality and effect of the collective continued to take effect in the socialist body culture. In post-1949 China, the ideologized, collective “bodily” movements can be found in almost every aspect of social lives, from sports, to work activities, and to social and political campaigns. While the people/the masses “were made to represent a collective embodiment of the party-state’s revolutionary will, [...] the individual body within that framework functioned as synecdoche” (Heinrich and Martin, 115). In other words, the individual bodies were made into the unassuming and docile political subjects under the unified voice of the people as one.

If the aesthetics of the body in the early twentieths were derived from China's encounter with the West at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the postsocialist body aesthetics should be viewed as derived from the social negotiation with and resistance against the discipline and regulation of the individual body by the state. Since the post-Mao period, one can witness a resurgence of interest in the self in Chinese literature and art. The ideological uniformity imposed by the state can no longer serve as the basis of the collective body after the death of Mao. On the one hand, what lies behind the over-use and over-abuse of the individual-oriented bodily representations in the postsocialist performance can be recognized as a politically-charged aesthetic response against the institutionalized manipulation and reduction of the most tangible and concrete individuality. Some artists, for instance, employed their "suffered" and "abused" body to signify the turbulent decade of the Cultural Revolution, pouring out bitterness and disillusionment of the Maoist past.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the performance artists began to realize that, in the postsocialist reality, being conditioned by the residual state's political-ideological control and submerged by the booming consumer-market oriented reality, they actually owned nothing except their own bodies. As the body became the only free material for individual expression, the postsocialist artists have begun to fully exploit the body and the representational forms of the body, reconstructing the individual body as the unit of measurement for productivity, pleasure, and endurance.

## **Chapter Summary**

*Chapter 1* (Introduction) lays out the conceptual framework for the dissertation, probing the theoretical and historical ramifications of the postsocialist performance and visual art in the PRC, as well as engaging recent scholarship on the subject. The artistic and socio-historical assessment attempts to place this particular form of art in the specific, albeit complicated, spectrums of socialist realism, contemporary body art, and postmodern kitsch and simulacra. I argue that the Chinese postsocialist performance and visual art galvanize the exploration of new artistic sensibilities, social concerns, and epistemological orientations in the new sociological context. Also, Chinese postmodernism and postsocialism cannot be adequately understood outside of this particular historically-charged retro project enacted through theater, performance, and visual art practices.

*Chapter 2* focuses on two independent theater groups in urban China as well as their major performance productions: (1) the dance-theater group *Shenghuo wudao gongzuoshi* (The Living Dance Studio) (2) the dance-theater group *Zuhe niao* (The Niao Collective). This chapter explores the ways in which the dance-theater groups deliberately rework the normalized physical and linguistic signifiers in the socialist representation system, in order to detach their practices of *zhiti xiju* (physical theater) from *huaju* (spoken drama—the particular form of modern, western-style theater that first made its appearance at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Whereas spoken drama has been the leading national performance genre since the founding of the PRC, and an important cultural and social expression that is actively engaged with or informed by the sociopolitical realities of the PRC, the aesthetically and politically motivated

performance practices by the postsocialist, contemporary dance-theater groups, through the bodily and linguistic resignifying experiments, give forth a critique about the ways in which spoken drama propagates certain social scripts to routinize and ideologize body and language.

*Chapter 3* explores the new citadel of contemporary Chinese art—Factory 798 in Beijing, also called 798 Art District and Dashangzi Art District nowadays. Once seen by Mao Zedong in the early 1950s as a model state-owned military-industrial enterprise for an advanced socialist state, the factory complex has attracted artists and entrepreneurs to create an international contemporary art circle since the later 1990s, and has since become the new star of the “Creative Culture Enterprises,” endorsed by the Beijing municipal government. This chapter examines specifically Dai Guangyu’s performance, entitled *Shijin* (Incontinence). Further, drawing on Geremie Barmé’s analysis of “totalitarian nostalgia,” and Susan Stewart’s theorization of the concept of nostalgia in a postmodern context, I argue that Factory 798 has become a well-legitimated medium for socialist nostalgia in the postsocialist and postmodern age, as it brings in both temporal and spatial dimensions for the homesick to remember or fetishize the disappearance of the past. By examining the performance and visual art practices in Factory 798, I further point out the ways in which the art pieces either criticize or join in the particular nostalgic atmosphere. I also point out that, while a variety of artistic practices enacted in Factory 798 embody a particular ideologized time period through the vibrant articulation of the physical, visual, and architectural signs, some intentionally create a failure of transcendence even in the nostalgic longing for sublimity and martyrdom, and some

transform themselves into the consumable spectacles that will safely take place in the ill-defined area of artistic expression, commercial success, and “political correctness” in Factory 798.

*Chapter 4* focuses on a large-scale collective art and social project launched in 2002, entitled *the Long March, A Walking Visual Display*, which echoed and responded to the historical Long March of the Communist-led Red Army in the mid-1930s. In this chapter, I examine a number of performance pieces enacted at the particular sites along the journey: while some resignified the revolutionary signs that have been central to the Chinese revolutionary narratives or the model work of socialist realism, others performed certain bodily phenomenon, such as *repetition compulsion*, to “act out” the failure of remembering the past occurrences or the resistance of entering into the ideologically-reconstructed past. I argue that the postsocialist revisit of the route of China’s “Red Revolution” has triggered cross-historical dialogues between the two “Marches,” allowing, if not celebrating, the simultaneous coexistence of a congeries of contradictory context, culture, human agency and contingency. It also attempted to invoke what has been misinterpreted or left out by the state-endorsed and commonly perceived narratives of the Long March. Further, I also argue that both the new Long March and the ongoing Long March projects have been strategically made into a global, mediatized spectacle of Red Classics (works about China’s “Red Revolution”) in the postsocialist era. Paradoxically, this form of resignification of the originally state-sanctioned revolutionary narrative transforms the particular Chinese revolutionary narratives into a new form of cultural capital and therefore anticipates transnational spectatorship and consumption; at

the same time, it can be read as a collective attempt from the local and the national to establish a “universalizable” ideological alternative and emotional discourse via China’s unique trajectory of revolutionary and socialist modernity.

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<sup>1</sup> See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. They write, “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies” (35).

<sup>2</sup> Here I am inspired by Zhang Xudong’s analysis of the 1990s. He recognizes that, the so-called postsocialist and postmodern Chinese circumstances actually embody the radicalization of modernization and developmentalist ideology. He argues that, what caused the complicated transformative Chinese context was the fact that “the survival or failure of Chinese socialism seems both to depend on this development and be the sociohistorical condition for it” (Zhang, 2008, 2-3).

<sup>3</sup> Also see Zhang Xudong’s *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*.

<sup>4</sup> When theorizing postsocialism, a number of scholars are inspired by an analogous term—Jean-Francois Lyotard’s notion of postmodernism. “Chinese postmodernity” has been consciously raised to tackle the new social and historical condition in the post-1989 era. See Xu Ben’s *Disenchanted Democracy*, Arif Dirlik and Zhang Xudong’s *Postmodernism & China*, and Yang Xiaobin’s *The Chinese Postmodern*.

<sup>5</sup> Dirlik writes, the term postsocialism allows “taking Chinese socialism seriously without sweeping under the rug the problems created by its articulation to capitalism, or forcing an inevitably ideological choice between its own self-image (socialism) or an image of it that denies validity to its self-image (the discourse of capitalism)” (364).

<sup>6</sup> See Paul Pickowicz, “Huang Jianxin and the Notion of Postsocialism” in *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*. In Paul Pickowicz’s analysis of the postsocialist filmic productions, he examines representations of self-destructiveness through social and psychological behaviors, which indicates the massive loss of faith and damage of the socialist system. Such a “post” condition has prevailed not only in the PRC but in all late socialist societies.

<sup>7</sup> Also see Pickowicz’s “Huang Jianxin and the Notion of Postsocialism.”

<sup>8</sup> See *The Chinese Debate on the New Authoritarianism*. See also, *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: the Communist Party’s Control of Local Elites in the Post-Mao Era*.

<sup>9</sup> The party-state leadership of the PRC declared its goal of modernization at the Third Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee in December, 1978. The nation then shifted its focus from class struggle toward development of economy, industry, agriculture, science and technology, and etc.

<sup>10</sup> See Ralph Litzinger, “Theorizing Postsocialism: Reflections on the Politics of Marginality in Contemporary China.” Also see Li Zhang’s “Spatiality and Urban Citizenship in Late Socialist China.”

<sup>11</sup> From 1995 to 2004, about 36.9 million people were laid off from China’s state-owned enterprises (SOE). At the end of 2004, 2.7 million laid-off workers still had not found employment. See *Enhancing China’s Competitiveness through Lifelong Learning*.

<sup>12</sup> The English translation is borrowed from Li Zhang’s “Spatiality and Urban Citizenship in Late Socialist China.”

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<sup>13</sup> The mission of Jiang Zemin's CCP has turned to represent "the development trend of advanced social productive forces, the progressive course of advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people in China. See "Three Represents" formulated by Jiang and his followers in early 2000. Also see Jiang's speech at the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, Dorothy Solinger's response to the new mission of the central government states that, "the posture of the Party in its prior incarnation as the vanguard of the proletariat is to be jettisoned, replaced by a brand new visage, the Party as a conglomeration fit to command and speak for a competitive, modern and sophisticated constituency, prepared to merge into and contend with superior members of the global economy," 952. Hung-yok Ip argues that, while observers indicate that Russians seem to have lost confidence not only in grand theories such as Marxism but also in notions such as democracy and the market, the Chinese scholars "point out that marching toward the market is a goal shared by many, ranging from intellectuals and state leaders to bureaucrats and Chinese citizens" (213). See Dorothy Solinger's "State and Society in Urban China in the Wake of the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress," Guo Dingping's *Democratic Developments and Changing Values in China*, and Hung-yok Ip's *Intellectuals in Revolutionary China, 1921-1949*.

<sup>15</sup> Here I also borrow Sheldon Lu's theorization of *China's Postmodernism in China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity*, 68.

<sup>16</sup> In *Mourning and Melancholy*, Sigmund Freud examines two ways of expressing grief which share with the same origin in the loss of a love object. He considers that "the task of withdrawing from mourning and accepting the new reality has been proved to be rather difficult, whereas the existence of the "dead loved object" is continued in the mind. While mourning is considered as the "normal" process by which one will eventually give up *inhibiting* the acceptance of the substitution offered by the reality, Freud considers melancholia "morbid pathological", in that in the case of Melancholia, the self loses the love object yet fails to acknowledge it, as "the patient [...] cannot consciously perceive what it is he has lost" (Freud 155). Instead, the self incorporates the fantasmic image of lost love-object into psyche of the self so that "the loss of the object became transformed into a loss in the ego" (Freud, 153, 159). See Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia."

<sup>17</sup> Liu writes "[...] postsocialism produces transnationalism just as much as transnationalism produces postsocialism. These mutually embedded processes cannot but present a major challenge to the future study of ideology in transnational studies and cultural studies." See Lydia Liu's "What's Happened to Ideology, Transnationalism, Postsocialism, and the Study of Global Media Culture." *Duke Working Papers in Asian/Pacific Studies*, 65. Also see her later publication based on the revision of the working paper, titled "Beijing Sojourners in New York: Postsocialism and the Question of Ideology in Global Media Culture."

<sup>18</sup> Also see Lydia Liu's "What's Happened to Ideology, Transnationalism, Postsocialism, and the Study of Global Media Culture."

<sup>19</sup> See *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China*.

<sup>20</sup> See Yunxiang Yan, "Managed Globalization: State Power and Cultural Transition in China".

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> See Eagleton's "The Contradictions of Postmodernism." Also see Rey Chow's "Can One Say No to China?"

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<sup>23</sup> Also see Zhang Xudong's "Introduction: The Cultural Politics of Postsocialism" in *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> In his "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus," Althusser uses "structuring absence" to examine the dynamic of historical oblivion that underlies the continuous presence of ideology.

<sup>25</sup> In responding to a young socialist Margaret Harkness and criticizing a novel entitled "City Girl," Engels writes "Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances. Now your characters are typical enough, to the extent that you portray them. But the same cannot be said of the circumstances surrounding them and out of which their action arises." See *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> The city of Yiwu is well-known for its small commodity wholesale market. It is one of the largest commodity producer and exporter in China.

<sup>27</sup> Semiotics—study of signs—is a form of hermeneutics that provides an epistemological tool to examine not only performances beyond the text-dominated system but also politics and constructs of the system of representation.

<sup>28</sup> The term is borrowed from Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Roland Barthes posits that "historical discourse [...] can do no more than signify the real, constantly repeating that *it happened*, without this assertion amounting to anything but the signified 'other side' of the whole process of historical narration." See "The Discourse of History," in *The Postmodern History Reader*, 122.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> To understand the problematic aspects of model history and ideal signification, also see Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Foucault Reader*. In this essay, in addition to his rejection of "the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies", Foucault borrows Nietzsche's sense of History from the *Untimely Mediations* and proposes three uses (parodic, dissociative, and sacrificial) of history that oppose and correspond to the Platonic modalities of history, as well as the essentialist pursuit of origin and truth.

<sup>32</sup> Yan'an is small town located in the northern border area of Shaanxi Province. It is the symbol of the Chinese Revolution. The CCP's Red Army eventually ended the epic Long March and located in Yan'an. During the Yan'an period (1936-1947), the CCP and Mao Zedong's leadership were consolidated, and the mass line was developed.

<sup>33</sup> The hammer and the sickle, the prime Communist symbol, can be often found in the works of many post-soviet, late socialist artists. See *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*.

<sup>34</sup> Due to the coexistence of socio-economic and cultural conditions of an agricultural society, an industrial society, and a post-industrial society, Chinese modern art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (especially the late 20<sup>th</sup> century) does not follow the succession of periods and styles developed in western art. "Avant-garde" in the Chinese context becomes an umbrella term that includes modernism, avant-garde, and postmodernism. Partly influenced by the ethos and experiments of the European avant-garde at the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese avant-garde clearly rejects textual sovereignty and authorial power. However, the term "Chinese avant-garde" is often used as a synonym for "radical and experimental subculture," or "unofficial and underground art." Most of the avant-garde performance practices inside China during the 1980s and early 1990s, for instance, took place in illegitimate and underground venues.

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<sup>35</sup> Pang Xunqin (1906-1985), for instance, studied art in Paris between 1925 and 1930. Ni Yide (1901-1970) studied in Japan. After returning to China, they established an avant-garde art group *Juelan She* (Storm Society), the goal of which was to “change traditional ideology with a brand-new genre of art, fighting against imitation and literal visual explanation.” See Kuiyi Shen’s *Modernist Movements in Pre-War China*,” (a paper for a symposium on Urban Cultural Institutions in Early Twentieth Century China), <http://mlc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/institutions/shen.htm>. Shen also argues that, “when the Anti-Japanese War loomed large, and Chinese politics and society in general were in chaos, the greatest concern of Chinese intellectuals was how to directly guide and help the Chinese people. As a result modernism with its strong focus on the individual imagination became a luxury to the Chinese people.”

<sup>36</sup> Highly inspired by the spirit of the New Enlightenment, artists, art critics, and curators of the '85 Movement contributed enormously to the development of Chinese avant-garde art. During 1985-1987, the avant-garde artists established more than 80 unofficial groups across the country. Nevertheless, many of the avant-garde artists were not intended to communicate political and social concerns to a broad audience, and some of their artworks were not adequately intelligible and engaging with the majority of society.

<sup>37</sup> See Gao Minglu’s “Toward a Transnational Modernity: An Overview of Inside Out: New Chinese Art” in *Inside/Out: New Chinese Art*.

<sup>38</sup> The manifesto of the North Art Group (one of the influential group in '85 movement), for instance, stated that “our painting is not art anymore but a part of our complete new thought.” See Gao Minglu’s *Inside/Out: New Chinese Art*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Martina Köppel-Yang astutely points out that: “The artists’ physical and intellectual distance from Western modern art, and the fact that Western art was known mainly through mediocre reproductions, drove artists beyond simple imitations, and led them to substitute choices guided by the concerns of the artistic situation in China at that time. Vagueness and misunderstanding are crucial factors in the creation of an autochthonous Chinese tradition of a modern and contemporary art and culture.” See *Semiotic Warfare: a Semiotic Analysis, the Chinese Avant-garde, 1979-1989*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> The works described here are from Wang Guangyi’s *Great Denunciation Series*. Alexander Kosolapov’s *Lenin and Coca-Cola* and *The Project of Advertisement for Times Square* can be considered as the similar examples derived from the post-Soviet Sots Art—the art form that also parallels American pop art.

<sup>41</sup> See *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition*, 253.

<sup>42</sup> In 2001, Qiu Zhijie had his first solo show in the US, titled “Invisibility: Qiu Zhijie,” held at Ethan Cohen Fine Arts. In the show, he did a similar piece, a video and calligraphy installation, titled *Tangshi shishou* (Ten Tang Poems). In this piece, the artist first videotaped some of his writing sessions of the poems of Tang dynasty, and made the tape playing backward, by which it seemed that the performer was erasing the Chinese characters that embodied the quintessential cultural identity.

<sup>43</sup> See Sarah Bryant-Bertrail’s “Introduction: Spatio-temporality as Sign in Epic Theater” in *Space and Time in Epic Theater: The Brechtian legacy*.

<sup>44</sup> Also see *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art*.

<sup>45</sup> The late Ming texts reflected a huge artistic interest in the realistic and mimetic portrayals of the subject. But these portrayals are not so much about creating the living bodies of the Chinese ancestors as situating them as part of the ritual objects. See Hay’s “The Body Invisible in Chinese Art.”

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<sup>46</sup> Wang Guowei was influenced by western philosophical and aesthetic categories and concepts, and his concern for western culture was marked by a passionate desire to promote German idealism. Also see Liu Kang's "Aesthetics, Modernity, and Alternative Modernity: The Case of China" in *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries*.

<sup>47</sup> Wang Ban argues, "In their culturally driven notion of the aesthetic, [Chinese] thinkers at the turn of the century saw in this Western discourse heartening possibilities for rebuilding Chinese culture, 59. See *The Sublime Figure of History*.

<sup>48</sup> Under the influence of Lu Xun, Li Hua founded the pioneering *Modern Woodcut Society* in Guangzhou in 1934. Li Hua studied Western oil painting in Guangzhou and Japan. Returning to China in 1932, he taught at the Guangdong Art Academy. He was inspired to capture the turbulent political and social changes in modern China and to explore a new artistic territory. Later on, he found woodcut as the groundbreaking art form that can best depict human suffering and social struggle at the time. Having a strong claim to realistic representation, Li Hua and his fellow artists consciously avoided abstract visual vocabularies that would be associated with a variety of modernist schools. The woodcut movement not only led to the art of resistance in Nationalist regions after 1937, but was also well-regarded in the liberated zones that by the end of the war.

<sup>49</sup> Also see Gao Minglu's *The Wall*.

## Chapter 2

### Resignifying the Ideologized Bodies through *Zhiti Xiju*

This chapter primarily examines the practice of *Zhiti xiju* (roughly translated as body theater, or physical theater) by two independent theater groups, both of which emerged from the mid 1990s in the PRC: (1) *Shenghuo wudao gongzuoshi* (the Living Dance Studio), a dance-theater group led by Wen Hui and Wu Wenguang;<sup>1</sup> and (2) *Zuhe niao* (the Niao Collective), a dance-theater group led by Zhang Xian.<sup>2</sup> Wu Wenguang, one of the founders of the Living Dance Studio and an accomplished independent documentary filmmaker,<sup>3</sup> is fascinated by the polyvalence and the historicity of the body presented through *xianchang yishu* (live art). Turning his experienced, documentarian eye to the live bodily movement, Wu argues that the body-focused onstage/live exploration helps materialize our quotidian life in the here-and-now, and demonstrates the body as a socially and historically constituted record.<sup>4</sup> Zhang Xian also points out that the experiments of *zhiti xiju* by the Niao Collective, which deliberately distinguishes itself from the well-established text-based *huaju* (spoken drama),<sup>5</sup> politically and dramaturgically enable the group member to demonstrate the body that is always-already loaded with ideologized identity, memory, and social practice.<sup>6</sup>

Both theater groups, when unfolding narratives through bodily enactments, tackle the coded representation of the social and physical body to further detect and depict tensions and battles between ideological effects and individual agencies.<sup>7</sup> Their performance pieces, as I will explore in this chapter, through a conscious move toward the physical and the non-verbal, reflect a desire for exploring the embodied history and

identity formations that are predominantly structured by the socialist ideology. In the meantime, the exercise of *zhiti xiju* also registers the very spirit of avant-garde anti-establishment, which aims at refiguring the body “as a principal site of theatrical and political intervention, [and] establishing in the process a body politic rooted in the individual’s sentient presence” (Sánchez-Colberg, 22).<sup>8</sup>

The multimedia *Baogao xilie* (report series) by Wen Hui and Wu Wenguang constantly stages the transformation of the body and language under critical social conditions. *Shengyu baogao* (Report on Giving Birth), for instance, depicts how Chinese women as individuals and as a group, while designated by both the old Chinese child-birth tradition and the newly-established “socialist birth culture,” experience the particular biological process and social construction of pregnancy and birth.<sup>9</sup> *Shenti baogao* (Report on the Body)—the second production in the report series—represents a chain of theatrically intimidating and stimulating spectacles to portray the ways in which the modern individual body is animated as well as devoured by an increasingly individualistic, monetized, and materialistic society. Capturing the critical moment of the eruption of the SARS epidemic (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003, *Wendu baogao* (Temperature Report) (the third production in the report series) demonstrates the abnormal everyday life when both the large-scale spread of the epidemic and the government’s inept handling of the crisis instilled a high level of physical and psychological fear among the Chinese people. Zhang Xian’s theatrical productions—such as *Shetou dui jiayuan de jiyi* (Tongue’s Memory of Home) and *14 hao bingfang* (Ward No.14) mainly expose the un/conscious performance of the ideologized body of

the individuals, and explore the possibility of liberating the individual bodies that have been recruited and assembled by the state. The liberating process staged in the performance also shows a continual state of struggling when the bodies shift back and forth between being the Althusserian “material existence of ideology in its practices,”<sup>10</sup> and being, albeit occasionally, the visceral disruptive force to the functioning of ideology.<sup>11</sup>

This chapter examines the way in which *zhiti xiju* appropriates and resignifies the ideologically-charged existing signs through the body. Aesthetically and politically motivated, the performative bodily and linguistic experiments *digress* the stage from the supposedly truthful representation of life and move away from a doctrine guided by socialist realist methods. That doctrine, continuously forced to function as one of the most important artistic and critical standards of literature and arts in the PRC, demands Chinese modern *huaju* to not only reflect but also propel “reality,” thereby systematizing the visions and understandings of the audience. Carrying out a resignifying game, *zhiti xiju* works astutely to expose or critique the apparatus of the socialist realist scripting in which the routinized and ideologized body and language take shape; it nuances “the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances” through the somatic and semiotic interruption of the body norm.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Report on Giving Birth***

*Report on Giving Birth*, created by Wen Hui and Wu Wenguang’s the Living Dance Studio, is the first one among the “report series.” The multi-media staging of the

play brings together theater, dance, video, and installations to strategically *represent a represented* panorama of the last several decades of motherhood and womanhood in the society of the PRC.<sup>13</sup> In this Chapter, I will examine how the performance, by resignifying the “marked” body of “the mother” and strategically simulating the interview process on stage, exposes and questions the process of biological and cultural naturalization of motherhood/womanhood in the socialist China, when the private was institutionally regulated and when the state ideology and dominant culture relegated mothers to particular political and social role. Installed by the state, the hegemonic and homogenizing discourse defines mothers as the subject of the revolution and socialist construction, a subject that is always constructed into, and represented as, a uniform asexual and heterosexual *figure*, a productive and reproductive force. In a sense, “giving birth” should also be understood as a trope, an unpredictable and vulnerable moment at which a female “opens wide,” her language negotiating with her body, and her body turned inside out. It is a crucial stage of assigning the role of mother to a woman, and for that reason, (and, in the specific context of the PRC), bringing her into another layer of the ideologically-charged social script.

The stage of *Report on Giving Birth* is intentionally made simple and is divided unevenly into several sections. There is a typical Chinese wooden square table that seats four, which looks a bit run-down. A strange, if not grotesque, installation is built based on a full-size bed, on the top of which a washbasin and a toilet are imbedded respectively. Four low desks, standing about 1.5 feet high, are linked and made into one piece, painted white. There is another platform placed on the stage, around 6 feet long and 6 feet wide,

covered with a cotton sheet with the typical Chinese floral design. A projection screen hangs down from the ceiling, behind all the stage props and furniture. A quick glimpse would tell the audience that the setting is constituted by the most basic geometrical forms and the most common materials from everyday life. Those abstracted and exaggerated points, lines, and planes, over-simplified and over-collaged, *allegorize* the standardized urban living space of the Chinese women. It becomes rather intriguing to see how the space accommodates, routinizes, and enables the female body. The production does not arrange an audience area; neither does it draw a clear boundary between the performing area and the audience. As a result, the audience can come and go at will. All the mothers represented within the settings are the women who struggle with the process of giving birth and other sectors of their ordinary lives. They are compelled to deal with tensions and forces both within and outside of their bodies. What is more, as the interviewees, they have to constantly negotiate with the (male) interviewer on the stage, which I will examine later.

*Report on Giving Birth* does not aim to depict a triumphant story about maternal self-sacrifice, nor does it strive to represent physical and psychological pain of giving birth in a spectacular or sentimental manner. Since the theater group was co-founded in 1994 by Wen Hui, a dancer and choreographer, and Wu Wenguang, a documentary filmmaker, the report series is made into a joint theater-video project in which the live presentation deliberately collaborates with the well-documented, technology-mediated interviews. In fact, the teamwork behind the production began as early as 1995, when the major participants of this play embarked on a series of interviews in Beijing and other

urban cities in mainland China. The more than 30 interviewees are all female who had the experience of giving birth, who came from different occupations and social backgrounds, and whose ages ranged from 21 to 93.<sup>14</sup>

Based on the interviews conducted, the play tells a story about how women are cultivated by the dominant representations of giving birth and encountering their own, if not entirely different, experiences. Through the performance, the question is raised about how the obligation of giving birth to and raising the new generation is imposed by (Chinese) society upon women. Besides representing such a special psychological and emotional process, the four female performers in the play, who act particularly as themselves sometimes and portray characters at other times, also depict triviality and the everyday humdrum routine of a female domestic world, a world in which they have to shoulder the responsibility of conceiving, delivering, and rearing children. “[W]e wanted to capture the things women struggle with, whether that includes having children or dealing with other social pressures. Women in China, women all over the world, are still not equal; we still struggle [...],” says the choreographer and performer Wen Hui in a post-production interview.<sup>15</sup> Responding to what Wen Hui has stated, I also want to point out that *Report on Giving Birth* uses “giving birth” to link different phases of the life of (Chinese) women, during which each individual female encounters a range of social customs, conventions, and pressures.

In presenting such a dramatic and critical moment, the play rejects conventional linear structure or any central narrative. As an alternative, it is constituted by fragments and juxtapositions that center on “being a woman”/“becoming a mother.” The

performance has the documentary/report genre with a tendency to factuality on the one hand, and the live presentation on the other; this creates an inherently dynamic dialectic, which constantly hints at the law of representation and plays with the link between representation and “truth.” We actually find the play deliberately oscillates between realistic representation and acts of “the performative”: the former is based on the mimetic principle and the truth claim generally issued and “guaranteed” by the documentary genre, and it displays the regulated and documented acts; the latter one, through the over-legible resignification of body and language that are always-already immersed in ideology and marked by signs, projects “a doing,” the very foundational site of the reiteration of a set of norms. The application of the reflexive mode of presenting the documentary also reveals and questions the apparatus of truth-telling and truth-making. As a matter of fact, as a (female) audience, one would identify with a virtuous, tolerant, and affectionate Chinese mother for one second, yet loses that character and identification very soon. I would also argue that, instead of dealing with the real historical mother-subjects, *Report on Giving Birth* attempts to, by triggering resignifying practices, expose the problematic aspects of maternal representation determined by the patriarchal system of male dominance, and *denaturalize* the mother discourse that has been installed and naturalized in both the Confucian tradition and the CCP’s socialist ideology.

### **Play of Interpretants**

Perhaps one of the most noticeable features of *Report on Giving Birth* is how the piece, by demonstrating and problematizing the routinized bodily movements in everyday

life of modern women in Chinese society, exposes the gendered identity of mother as simultaneously individual and regulated, biological and socially inscribed. For instance, in one scene, the four women performers sit in a line in front of the linked short desks, facing the audience. They look as if they are fixed in their seats or on a factory assembly line. Following a certain inner rhythm, with few props and little scenery, they mutely begin to conduct typical types of domestic works with their hyperbolic but similar, if not identical, movements, such as washing clothes and putting things in order. At some point, the latex household gloves in their hands are lifted high and spun skillfully, then dropped heavily on the desks and rubbed as if the gloves are some dirty clothes.

The scene of “washing clothes” makes use of the handkerchief trick that is popular in many Chinese folk dances,<sup>16</sup> which immediately reminds the audience of the old way by which strong rural women wash clothes along the riverbank by beating them on a rock with a wooden stick—a popular image signifying prosperity and solidarity that has been showcased in Chinese farmers’ paintings. The composition of cleaning clothes is suddenly changed into that of cleaning noses. They vigorously and unabashedly blow their noses with paper towels as if they have absolutely no scruples whatsoever. This indicates that each of them actually has a certain degree of privacy. In doing the actions, the performers carefully keep in step with each other sometimes, as if they are aware of themselves being involved within one system and one space; at other times, they calculatedly interrupt the synchronous move as if each of them sits in a private environment. The actions of cleaning continue with a steady sound effect once the grating sound of the gloves is heard. At the end of the series of “cleaning,” the sound of

*jinghu* (the two-stringed high-register Chinese fiddle) comes through. A typical melody which is perfect for depicting lives of Beijing idlers is inserted into the labor scene of those busy women, who nevertheless interestingly look like *tie guniang* (iron maidens)—the heroic-styled and almost masculine *Mao's daughters*, once massively mobilized to enter the labor force as “manpower,” who are able to hold up half of the sky and work for the people as well as the entire country. The staging manages a way to move in between the performance and the performative, and between the conventionally materialized representation and the effect of the citational. It applies dramatic and patterned movements to represent everyday events as both psychological projections and social constructs.

In another scene, a performer turns the representation of having a difficult delivery into an overly long choreography of bodily struggle. She places the center of gravity of her body on a wooden chair, slowly and restrictedly pushing herself to survive the physical pain and danger. She sometimes sits down in the chair with her legs on the back of the chair and her back on the seat, her head downward. The distorted and upside-down body of the mother somewhat implicates what is inside the body—the position and movement of the fetus in the uterus. As her body is twisting back and forth, she tells the audience that she has been suffering in the hospital for five days and four nights, but the hospital still does not administer any medication. Her narration reveals not only the physical pain from the deep recess of her body, but also the psychological trauma from different women who happen to encounter the same process—giving birth. At one moment, when maximizing her bodily movement, the performer tells a story about how a

pair of parents tries hard to convince their daughter not to give birth to the “bastard” child. The visceral labor contractions of one woman doubles and echoes the psychological resistance of another one, who is not allowed to have the bastard kid even though she will be in labor soon. Not far away from this performer, another performer is shampooing her long hair, while the others are brushing teeth, eating oranges, and combing hair. In a way, the intensity of the pain of labor and birth and the length of time labor lasts are simply symbolized and categorized along with everyday life. As a matter of fact, displaying and dramatizing the pain of labor and birth has become such a conventional and often-used approach to represent this particular biological process, as well as to indicate the women’s capacity for endurance. However, what I wish to point out here is that, throughout the entire play, the bodily movements of the represented “laboring” is carefully designed to intersect with the routinized everyday life in which (female) “laboring” is everywhere.

The triadic construct of *sign-object-interpretant* by the logician and philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, can be quite illuminating at this point. Peirce’s semiotic model proposes three structural elements in dynamic relation to one another, which encompasses the sign (sign/representamen), the represented and referred reality (object), and the *effect* of the sign/representamen on the sign reader (interpretant, or, another sign). He defines the whole game of signification as follows:

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen.

(Peirce, 1934, 228)

With the tendency of endlessly representing, the semiosis always generates more signifying processes, in which the sign gives rise to meaning in the reader's mind, and the interpretant functions as the next sign that awaits further interpretation.<sup>17</sup> That is to say, each component of the trinity, by means of the interpretative development of the sign reader, has the recursive capacity to engender another sign(s). Each interpretant results in the formation of a new sign. As both phenomenological and ontological, Peirce's semiotic trichotomy supplements the Saussurean neat, transcendental, and dualistic signifier-signified model, and allows the readers to channel forms of human intellection and affectedness into the meaning of signs.

The comprehensive and flexible nature of Peirce's semiotic model enables one to read signs outside propositional, semantico-referential language, like signs in theater, dance, and music.<sup>18</sup> The semiotic system in theater and performance is inherently open and *situational*. I propose to read *Report on Giving Birth* through a representation-signification-resignification paradigm, by which the imaginative concatenation of interpretants comes into being. One of the ways that we recognize signs of the performance is through their reference to other signs which are also historically specific and context bound. What is more, given the Peircean semiotic paradigm, the signs in the performance, no matter how they are grafted and reiterated in new context(s), are made active only when interpreters participate in the reading. As such, the interpretant is a mental representation. The chain significations, generated by the thinking mind as it places the sign in relation to some object with respect to some particular ground, are

possibly never-ending. And, every thinking mind is also formed based on social dynamics and cultural life. Through the plays that I examined in this chapter, we see how the resignifying game stimulates the thinking mind of the audience members to assemble and associate the interpretants. On the one hand, this process of resignification solicits the audience members to conduct a distancing and a critical reading of the performance rather than identifying themselves with the character(s). On the other hand, the resignifying process, which provides powerful sensory stimuli such as gestures and movements, also invites the spectators to use their knowledge, experience, and body memory to freely activate the signs, and to move the signs out of any unambiguous realm of the indexical and the symbolic. The phenomenological aspect of the process allows the new meaning of the signs to establish the relationship between those signs and their placement in our lives.

In the light of the Peircean semiotic approach, it is easy to recognize the open and dialogical interaction between the spectators and the materialized/mediatized objects in *Report on Giving Birth*, by which the “unlimited semiosis” comes into play. To a degree, the play employs a non-fiction, first-person documentary type genre to exhibit segments of everyday life, and to project factuality through “representation of presence,” by which the audience members might easily locate the resemblance between the representation and the represented object. However, the piece is by no means simply postulated as an equivalent for and a product of reality, even though the representational relationship in some parts of the performance remains referential and is constructed in accordance with a prior model or models, be they realities or representational realities. In fact, I want to

point out that the piece intentionally exposes and even undermines the historically-charged representational principle of socialist realism. Semiotically and aesthetically, the repositioned significations in the work duplicate, inflect, and destabilize the conventional bodily and visual signs, which gradually developed from the past ideological narratives.

For instance, the performance explicitly juxtaposes two bodily signs on one set of movements: “cleaning clothes and noses” and “acting in unison and in an organized fashion.” Each sign creates the effect of the sign—the interpretant, so to speak, the audience’s interpretive mind promoted by the purposefully-staged signs, which picks up on the reference to the object made by the sign(s).<sup>19</sup> In this case, the analytic efficacy of the interpretant allows for multiple interpretations of a single sign—the established and popular female body icon of the formalized representation under the socialist culture.

One of the interpretations might see the performance bring together and make connections between the new interpretants—the normalized gendered body and identity in different and yet correlative contexts—through the juxtaposition of (1) the cooperative gendered domesticity conducted in the private realm and (2) the collective, trained, and almost mechanical female labor mobilized by the state. Certainly, the interpreters, who are simultaneously individual and social, and particular and situated as part of the sign—have the potential to address more variable aspects of the sign. The practice of resignification invites the audience members to understand their interpretation as a necessarily generative process of signification and to *read out* the new sign(s) of a higher order relationship. This resignifying process certainly requires the previous familiarity the audience has had with the forms of life by which the signs are coded, and therefore

prompts a deeper look at both historicity and the effect of the ideologized representation of the reality, and at that prevailing representational rule.

### **Where Does the Body Go?**

Let us go back to the scene in which the presentation of women doing household work performatively intertextualizes with women's collective working. The former sign activates the audience's cognitive understanding about *nü zhu nei* (women tending the inside/domestic). That is to say, a female is imposed upon to perform a role of family caretaker by the Confucian patriarchal culture,<sup>20</sup> a role made into a traditional norm which has nonetheless survived the Maoist era in the private realm.<sup>21</sup> The gestual sign of working collectively and institutionally becomes a stimulus responsible for triggering the perception of those disciplined movements and manners of modern Chinese women, who have been normalized and mobilized as social laborers especially for the socialist construction.

Here I want to bring in Gail Hershatter's analysis of Chinese women's history through the concepts "private" and "public" that directly speak to my reading of the performance.<sup>22</sup> Hershatter points out that, whereas in imperial China women's role in household production was associated to a wider public world so there was not an absolute dichotomy separating the domestic from the public sphere,<sup>23</sup> the revolutionary China after 1949 set up a clear divide between the private and the public, and made the domestic (private) realm disappear from the revolutionary vision. As Chinese women were interpellated as the revolutionary subjects by political campaigns, they were mobilized to

work, *visibly*, at the public sites for socialist construction. In so doing, “in revolutionary parlance, there was no such thing as domestic labor” (Hershatter, 273), although domestic labor actually existed. *Laodong* (labor) was thus not used to define the gendered domestic tasks, although *laodong* has been everywhere. Hershatter’s work astutely exemplifies a Chinese women’s history of labor in the socialist PRC through a particular lens: while the value of female labor in private/domestic sector has been undermined, types of female labor conducted in the private sphere were either made invisible or re-categorized by the revolutionary and socialist narratives. Here, to make the invisible visible again, the resignifying process effectively reveals the demands of social and political campaigns on Chinese women in the post-1949 era, so to speak, the “politicization of domesticity” as well as the transformation from “a family person” to “a person of society.” Moreover, based on the main objective of the post-Mao population policy, even the fertility decisions of the individual and the family are regulated by the state. Women have the right to child-bearing and birth in conformity to the framework of the national population policy and its underlying ideology that promotes the welfare of the population and economy, even though the population-related human rights have yet to be established.

Therefore, if continuing to look through Peirce’s model, we would find that the perceptual incorporation brings firstness(es) and secondness(es) together and evokes the third, by which we recognize that the gendered contribution of women to the *productive* and *reproductive* process has been carefully prescribed in different time periods and by different ideologies. By virtue of the juxtaposition of the seemingly incompatible, if not

polarized, concepts exemplified through the same body—private versus public, female versus desexualized, domestic versus collective, apolitical versus political—our reading of the scene in fact outlines a vertical axis that connects one text to other texts.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, the scene described above also subtly and performatively aligns different connotative definitions of “labor” through the bodily presentation, namely, the unremunerated domestic/household work and the physical efforts of giving birth. In reality, both forms of labor are performed by women at their home and on the body, the meaning and experience of which are nevertheless poorly recognized in the society (of the PRC). In reflecting ideological expectations and biological imperatives through the interpretation of labor on stage, the connection of the external and internal demands imposed on a gendered role is exposed. Such a process of reading involves not only the vertical axis, but also the horizontal axis that connects the author and the reader. In that way, the movements of interpretants in relation to forms of human experience, knowledge and affection, are emphasized.

The representation of the “laboring body” described above seems to exemplify a mimesis, or a coded reconstruction of reality. Perhaps the occidental tradition of representation inherently creates a trap, which is its promise to reveal something beneath or beyond the representation. Or, as Derrida posits, philosophically, the representation exemplifies the commitment of Western art and thought to a *metaphysics of presence*.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the theory of representation will always presuppose the metaphysics of presence. The signs always point to the external of them, the meaning of them. Even though in the performance, the body not only conveys meanings by referring to its object,<sup>26</sup> but also has

its embodiment refer to nothing but the qualitative immediacy—we seek what the body stands for. That is one of the reasons why the dance theorist Randy Martin states that in the process of representation, *the body disappears*. He writes:

[...] the analytic tools semiotics has employed for grasping human existence have turned the flesh and blood of the body into something cold and inert, something constitutionally opposed to human agency, something dysfunctional to the sort of rationality thought necessary for the identification of a subject.

(Martin, 15)

While Randy Martin envisions to locate the trace of the *body-subject* in relation to “the non-represented aspects of the social experience that constitutes the dimension of culture not captured by the sign” (Martin, 16), I specifically aim to explore a widespread sign system functioning as a producing apparatus for the social-ideological status of socialist China. In other words, whereas there might be the body that the sign cannot veil and the social life fails to repress, my project looks at the body that stays within the cultural mechanism but might function as the political and epistemic site. This body is always-already marked because it is read and experienced as a body, and it is an effect of representation. In this way, by using the body and its movements as the nexus, the resignifying practice is able to deliberately guide the interpreters to understand that why/how the body undergoes the continuous self-erasure and always-already stands for something else in the representational economies. The strategic exposure of the performativity of “the body as *marked*” through the performance hardly attempts to de-symbolize language or to recuperate the body prior to its being marked.<sup>27</sup>

In *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text*, Susan Melrose uses a notion of body semiotics to elaborate *somatic incursion* that can “awkwardly” and “triumphantly”

disturb the symbolic order and challenge the traditional occidental theories of representation. Melrose hesitates to take body semiotic as the *inarticulate other* of the linguistic symbolic, namely, a simply *pre-symbolic*, as Kristeva has termed it.<sup>28</sup> Then, how do we make use of the politics and economy of somatic semiotic? In her intriguing analysis of the Japanese puppetry theater *bunraku*, Melrose notices that the puppeteer weeps at the same time as the puppet weeps. Supposedly, the site of visible character-signs should be the puppet-work rather than that of the puppeteer. However, the puppeteer's weeping—"through a sympathetic muscular contractual relationship between voice pitch and throat muscles (Melrose, 118)"—interestingly signals an "inappropriateness" of the representation of the puppet's weeping, and therefore exposes the prescribed representational scheme by putting together the *troubled and doubled* interiority of the weeping sign(s).

I have mentioned in *Chapter 1* that after the victory of the socialist revolution of China in 1949, in a time of nation-building for the PRC, the revolutionary and socialist mythical narratives have been continuously combining with bodily and visual signs, to produce an *ultimate* system of signs.<sup>29</sup> A performance like *Report on Giving Birth*, by the resignifying practice, not only illuminates the mirroring process of our identity constructions, but epistemologically opens up a space between our perception and the representation of the operation of social-cultural codes upon the "re/productively enabled and disciplined women." The production constantly resignifies a female body that has been normalized and universalized as the ideal signifier in the socialist representation system, by which we see the *marked* body and the critically re-marking of the body. The

goal of re-marking is to play with the simulated reproduction of that body and to expose the performativity of the ideologically-inscribed and always-performing body. While strategically *reading out* the socio-ideological and historical *situatedness* of the recognizable signs, the production lodges defamiliarization inside the conventional signification and challenges the very concept of representation.

### **The End of Language**

While the meaning can be conveyed by the words in theater, the mouth that shapes the words can also subvert them; of course, the linguistic forms may also be affected by other forms of presentation on the same stage. I would like to bring attention to the experiment of theater language in *Report on Giving Birth*, in which linguistic sign—i.e. one of the most arbitrary and stable, as well as most prioritized and hierarchized, sign systems—is relativized as it is placed in relation with other sign systems on stage. In the play, the self-referential and dominant position of language—as it has always been the primary human sign system—encounters a deconstructive and performative intervention.

At the very beginning of the play, a woman in a black dress sits down in front of the square table, alone. On the dark stage, there is a small spotlight on her face. By this, one can tell that she seems to have a conversation with someone. But there is no sound and there are no people around. A couple of minutes later, three other women approach from different corners of the performance space, and congregate at the table, joining the mutely-speaking woman. The composition of four women sitting around a square table

immediately conjures up the stereotypical images of them either gossiping about trivial matters to kill time, or playing the four-player game Mahjong as a leisure activity. As soon as the three women sit down, the woman in black turns her “pantomimic talk” into murmuring. She mumbles to herself about her beloved son Ba Dun, who is just old enough to go to kindergarten. It soon becomes obvious that her story told in the form of an extended monologue does not make sense: the boy wanted to take a day off from kindergarten to meet his new friend in a New Year fair, held in the public park of the Temple of Earth; the mother therefore took a day off from her work and took Ba Dun to the fair, but his new friend, a little girl who lives inside the park, did not show up. In the end the woman wraps up her story by quoting her husband, who laughed at her, “it would never work if a mother accompanies her son to his date.” As soon as the words are out of her mouth, thousands of dried melon seeds are poured down onto the table from a device that has been hung up.<sup>30</sup> Immediately, the overdone speech is overwhelmed by the rain of melon seeds.

In fact, as soon as the “rain of dried melon seeds” falls, all the women performers begin to munch on the melon seeds and simultaneously speak out loud in different Chinese dialects. Such a cacophony is certainly made into an exaggerated stereotypical representation of women as gossipmongers, obsessed with trivia. And, as Jane Gallop vividly states, they are “never considered to be actually nonspeaking” and “their speech, not conforming to male rules of logic, clarity, consistency, [is] deemed nonsense” (71). At high decibels, the women are completely immersed in their utterances. The actions of the utterances which are always enacted by the performers, at the same time reject the

paradigmatic use of language to convey its intended meaning and logic. At one point, a woman in a green dress even begins to sing a folk song. Her sharp voice sails above the utterances of the other women again and again. Noticeably, these speech acts constantly cause the women to modify their uttering positions. All of a sudden, at one of the most brazenly clamorous moments, a male voice is heard, although the speaker—Wu Wenguang—is unseen on the stage. Speaking into a microphone, he rumbles in his Yunnan dialect, “...be quiet...how many times have I told you this? ... I have told you (women) over a hundred times! ...” His low voice forcefully suppresses the female heteroglossia and his “disappearance” from the stage warrants him the myth of male self-sufficiency and wholeness.

Here I would also like to call attention to the gendered personae that the performers hold. The woman in black narrates her story in a woeful manner, although the story by definition is not tragic at all. Using the past tense in her narration, she tells the story with a steadfast yet somehow mournful tone fraught with uneasiness and anxiety. In a way, she becomes quite analogous to Sister Xianglin, a famous tragic female character in Lu Xun’s short story “*Zhu Fu*” (The New Year’s Sacrifice). While repeatedly murmuring her unfortunate life experiences, among which there is the death of her underage son, Sister Xianglin, living as a beggar, asks for an answer to her question, rather than food—“after a person dies, will he turn into a ghost?” Nevertheless she receives an inadequate response from the male narrator of the novel.<sup>31</sup> The staging of this pseudo-Sister Xianglin-like woman magnifies a mother’s instinctive love and obsession for her child, presenting a type of nearly pathological but also common motherhood in

Chinese society today. It seems that her consciousness loses control over her language, and her words about her lived experiences as a mother are established only in her habitus. But more importantly, the parodic-like presentation of her “monotonous and redundant” narration deliberately presupposes an absent, or an invisible, listener, her husband, who has told her “*it would never succeed like that.*”

In the production, different strategies are employed to open up new sets of propositions and possibilities for (theater) language, and to divorce language from logocentricity that might continue to sustain in the dramatic text. Two correlative goals of the language experiment conducted in *Report on Giving Birth* can be recognized as follows. (1) By inserting bodily / visual sign(s) into linguistic sign(s), the performance creates a certain form of semiotic rupture to expose the effect of absolutes and totalized visions presupposed by language, as well as to “fail” the role of language taken as an autonomous and self-enclosed system.<sup>32</sup> The “pouring” of those watermelon seeds as a visual / material interruption, for instance, visualizes and activates the speech cacophony, and destroys the linguistic reasoning process, by which the stage is made to potentially signify the women’s unrepresented/unrepresentable experience. In other words, the “watermelon intrusion” triggers a series of failures or accidents of speech acts and dialogues, which is not so much about challenging the quotidian use of language as about detecting the symbolic order or negotiating it with other alternative order(s). (2) The *onstage performance* also uses resignifying practice applied to language to demonstrate *the social performance* by which a subject is brought into being by entering into the normativity and performativity of language.<sup>33</sup> This is especially interesting considering

the exposure of the apparatus of interviewing, which shows that it is through language—through the women’s answering of the questions imposed upon them by the (male) interviewer in particular—the concept and experience of womanhood and motherhood is represented and transmitted. Based on the fact that *Report on Giving Birth* is a combination of a live presentation joined with documentary footage of real interviews, the language experiment in the performance carefully demonstrates how the mediatized, autobiographical narrative of the interviewees is intersected with and interrupted by the off-screen, not-necessarily-imitative live representation, part of which is about conducting interviews. And in so doing, the performance exposes, borrowing Butler’s words, “the historicity of the language which includes a past and future that exceeds that of the speaking subject” (Butler, 1997, 28).<sup>34</sup>

The language, used as an experiment in the performance, is not so much about how “the feminine presents itself as an amorphous semiotic force coming from outside the male order” (Wang, 2000, 57),<sup>35</sup> since the pre-linguistic and pre-symbolic realm, posited by Kristina as the site of subversion, still locates outside of culture and that, suggested by Butler, would negate its political potential. Rather, the performance intentionally invokes and signifies an “invisible guest,” as Laura Mulvey has put it, who “puts him[self] squarely in the phantasy position” (31). Not only enjoying his scopophilic/fetishistic visual pleasure and protecting the phallic integrity, this invisible, unmarked male subject in *Report on Giving Birth* is also the camera man, the reporter. Sharing material time and space with the women, he always desires a little more action, if not violence, enacted upon the female objects. And to this, I will return.

In fact, both the monologue of a “fake tragic female” who has no one to talk to, and the vocal cacophonous ensemble in which no meaning could be reliably given are the language practices that fail or almost fail to constitute meaning. The solo speech act of the woman in black might point to the concrete objects (for instance, the story of Ba Dun), but her utterance also renounces the typical methods for a conversation. The present-tense nonverbal signs in her speech—for instance, the paralinguistic, mimical, gestic and proxemic signs<sup>36</sup>—constantly modify, if not alter, the meaning of the past-tense verbal signs, and therefore enable the audience to reach more ambiguous interpretations of the speech. Moreover, the way in which she presents the monologue grippingly calls for attention not to what the speech act tells, but how she represents it. The slightly hyperbolic gendered stereotype, on the stage, evokes “a sign of a role” instead of an assured identity. Within the cacophonous utterance, the verbal signs do not point to other signs, nor to any concrete objects outside the reality of language, but to one another. While the verbal signs in the cacophony might bring to mind the intuitive section of our lives, they actually represent the reality of their own and make the meaning of language inadequately intelligible.

In both the language experimentations, we see that the women performers conduct provoking or inciting speech acts yet at the same time they endure an anticipatory mourning of themselves as being always-already subjugated. The speech acts on the one hand create the failure in the meaning-making process (i.e. the mode of linguistic signifying), and on the other hand evoke the audience’s visualization of the pseudo-neutral and invisible male subject—the participant on the other side of the dialogue—to

whom the meaning is “entrusted.” In a way, the performance raises an aporetic function by staging the absence of the “object” while simultaneously confirming that he is never absent and his voice always haunts. This staging act deliberately calls forth the audience’s recognition of the hidden imposition of the mandatory motherhood and compulsory heterosexuality coming from the dominant culture. It also symbolizes that the female subject as predetermined by the prescriptive language of the patriarchal norm. At this point, the failure in terms of ineffective signification of the verbal signs, has the very intention to pinpoint the effect of the strategic erasure of “that man,” which has been critical to the endurance of his gendered supremacy and the functioning of ideology.

Another interesting scene takes place on the strange installation that I mentioned earlier, an installation on which the effect and experience of a crude and embarrassing living space in reality is dramatically condensed. In this setting, a form of complex mother-daughter dialectic is displayed through voyeurism and exhibitionism. What is projected on the big screen comes from a camera mounted inside the toilet, by which we vaguely recognize that something is moving. If that toilet, as a hole in the bed, implicates a hidden space under the bed, *a womb* in the metaphorical sense, the screen is then made to bear a resemblance to the monitor of an ultrasound scan. Accordingly, the performer (a woman dressed in red) who suddenly shows up from the inside the toilet, indicates the moment and the movement of being born into the world. As soon as the head of the woman in red emerges from the toilet, she starts to sing “xiao guai guai” (little darling), a song of the antiphonal folksong genre *cai diao* (melody of a guessing game), with her sharp and high-pitch voice.<sup>37</sup> She always begins with the first line of the song—“little

darling, little darling, let me tell you the riddles and you give me the answers.”<sup>38</sup> A woman dressed in blue sits on the bed with her legs wild open, in the middle of which is the toilet. She stares at the pop-out singing head in a rather curious manner; she observes, ponders and then all of a sudden kicks the head back into the toilet. Simultaneously, the singing ceases and the screen turns blank. The beauty of the guessing game is believed to be conveyed via the interesting question-answer mode, by which the parallel tones, the antiphonal exchanges of singing lines, and the vivid content of the lines are presented. In a way, the singing person can also be understood as not only a new-born baby, but a mother-figure, a mother who tries hard to solicit any dialogic response from the “little darling,” and yet nothing comes. Instead, her melody is harshly interrupted by the “kick” of the woman in blue. When the “little darling” intervenes, the movement and voice of the “mother” correspondingly breaks off and ends, repeatedly.

It is noticeable that the language experiment in the scene above guides the performance to bypass the pitfalls of the conventional verbocentric representation in which normalized language is taken as the authorial figure. The performance employs not only acoustic or phonetic modes of presentation to vary the original signification of the articulated words, but also the intervention of bodily movement, by which a supposedly melodic speech is made into “another flesh” that grounds in or nuance with the sensorial experience and embodied existence. One might even argue that such a scene elucidates the dialectical foundationalism between the body and language and demonstrates that the perception of the gestural expressivity in others can make an intersubjective dimension possible, in which human beings communicate and empathize

with each other. I would also add that, perhaps the experimentation of language at this point is made not so much to verify the phenomenological domain of language by displaying how language always entangles with expressions of the body, but rather to show a visceral and “pre-linguistic” struggle of a maternal body, a body that while it projects its reproductive power, undergoes the violent act of expulsion. To be more specific, what is presented on the stage can be seen as a semiotic and pre-linguistic phase brought to our attention by the process of “giving birth”—a complicated process by which, as Kristeva adequately puts it, “the woman enters into contact with her mother, *she becomes, she is her own mother, they are the same continuity differentiating itself*” (Kristeva, 1980, 239).

In this carefully arranged juxtaposition, “how a woman gives birth to her child” is simultaneously “how a woman reacts to her mother,” by which we come to understand “abjection,” defined by the separation of and confrontation between the “I” and the other—“[i]t is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself [...] Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us” (Kristeva, 1982, 4). The significance of the abject, in other words, the ambiguous and uncertain force that may be excluded/expelled from the body, tightly relates to the formation of the self. The psychoanalytic theory argues that it is through abjection of the maternal body, that a subject is constituted as a defense against maternal power. Butler further argues that the formation of the subject demands the ones “who are not yet subjects, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject” (Butler, 1993, 3). In fact, here the performance in/of the installation signifies the very

maternity and materiality that a (female) “subject” must exclude and repress, and it intentionally stages a dead end of the female subject who, while inhabiting both the margin and the center of society, culture, and patriarchy, “becomes the victim of her own capacity to procreate” (Sjöholm, 84), as well as takes on the norm of motherhood that remains uncontested.

On the one hand, the deviant, projecting, and opening-up body (of the woman in red) delineates a non-subject, an abject being. The body emerges from the site of the grotesque setting, from the corporeal orifice, i.e. the womb, and it traverses the inside/outside. The subject—the “mother”—who has internalized the negative gendered identity formed within regulatory heterosexual practices, conducts and bears witness to her own gendered self-hatred and self-destructive behavior. Her perception of humiliation and vulnerability, at the moment of giving birth, is implicated through her kicking of the excessive and popped-out body, a body that oddly refuses invisibility. It is a violent act of expulsion, as Kristeva notes, by which the mother attempts to “clean” the maternal body because a body that represents the symbolic order has to be unmarked.<sup>39</sup> It is, therefore, the act in which the mother suffocates the abjected and tries to clean the improper and contaminated body that is able to disturb identification and destabilize system. On the other hand, the language still works at the level of the body, nevertheless. This semiotic stage, if borrowing Kristeva’s account, is supposedly the real and pre-oedipal period of jouissance in which no identity is yet to form; it is an idealized feminine enclave and a site where the resistance against the paternal symbolic might locate. As a result, in order to enter into the symbolic, this semiotic has to be abandoned: that is why

the nascent body tries hard to kick and to tear itself away from the maternal matrix.<sup>40</sup>

The failure of dialoging in the scene signifies a refusal of a woman to identify with her mother, although she, ironically, tries to *enter language*; and yet, she still cannot quite give up the maternal entity, either.

The performance indeed produces a paradoxical position between the semiotic and the symbolic.<sup>41</sup> It stages the possibility of semiotic rupture, in which the bodily/visual aspect of language that has not been integrated into its signification leads to failure and chaos. It is the phase at which the symbolic might be disrupted by the semiotic and one has not the capacity to signify. However, the scene also shows the desire of a subject to enter into the symbolic by which the paternal law will be nevertheless reproduced. Language is made into an end and it ends the female subject.

### **The Meta-theatrical Report**

As I mentioned earlier, *Report on Giving Birth* strategically deals with the genre of “report” (baogao), a genre as a particular variant of documentary form and a genre that is allegedly to hold the aura of truth. Nevertheless, report in this performance is presented through a reflexive manner. While showing the documented interviews onscreen, the performance also “simulates” some interviewing processes to emphasize the ways in which factuality about giving birth is sought and conveyed. In juxtaposing the interview footages with interview-like actions, the legitimacy of report is rendered quite ambiguous, for, the onstage actions reveal the “question and answer” communicative model as a truth-making method. In doing so, a presentation of “truth” is

made into a meta-theatrical and self-reflexive mode, by which the audience is driven to both recognize that the conventional documentation/documentary exclusively relates visuals from the perspective of behind-the-camera, and to present that “reporter” as the source and authority of truth.

Let us bring back the figure/character of Wu Wenguang, at this point. Although sometimes absent physically, Wu Wenguang is the omnipresent everyman in *Report on Giving Birth*. He is the authoritarian male who uses the disembodied voice as exemplary for his subjectivity sometimes, and is the aggressively intruding, always-behind-the-camera documentarian at other times. Obviously, he does not participate emotionally. Once in a while, he suddenly interferes in a scene, carrying his camera to approach the women performers and projecting, if not exaggerating, their bodies and sensations on the screen. While using the camera to “sweep” his objects one by one from head to toe in a rather rude manner, his recorded questions about the details and experience of giving birth are played through the speaker. Interestingly, those questions, which may or may not be the exact questions asked in the real life interviews, are broadcast vaguely and discontinuously, as if the reporter is not so much concerned with the articulation of the answers as the action of his questioning. At one moment, Wu further presses the women by his camera-shooting so they simply have nowhere to go but hide themselves behind the screen. He follows them to the back of the screen and keeps shooting mercilessly. The stage in front of the audience is subsequently left empty, and yet from the screen the audience can watch how the “interviews” are continued regardless. The interviewing process transforms the live bodies on the stage directly into the mediatized and offstage

“close-ups” on the screen. Through such a process, the audience members might recognize the hierarchized circumstance in the interviewing apparatus and at the same time experience the voyeuristic vantage point from where they see the fearful and anxious faces of the women performers.

As a documentary film director, Wu Wenguang’s debut film *liulang Beijing* (*Bumming in Beijing*) in 1990 was hailed as one of the pioneer works of the New Documentary Movement in China,<sup>42</sup> and was reviewed as “not afraid of showing nothing” since the “void” plays a unique role in the film.<sup>43</sup> Continuing to confront the conventional ethics and practice of “documenting” and “truth-making,” Wu later began with experiments of inserting his own persona into the films, and his “talking head” and interruptive body have been increasingly present in his documentary works. The scene above also accounts for the process of truth-making, by which both the performing and the performative aspects of speech acts are revealed. On the one hand, the live representation of the context and condition in which these dialogues are made, exposes the ways in which speech acts are organized and maintained by certain demands and within certain constraints. By clearly projecting the male reporter, the intentionality and credibility of certain speech acts are made visible and questionable.

Furthermore, in Butler, it is not the utterer—the police who hails the trespasser on the street (in Althusser’s famous story)—who brings the subject into sociality.<sup>44</sup> Rather, it is the utterance that echoes prior utterances and “accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices” that is accountable for the subject and its act. The recorded questions also indicate that the male

reporter is nothing more than a singular person who cites the terms and therefore establishes himself temporally as the authorial figure in the dialogue. The meta-theatrical presentation allegorically points out from where and when he gains the power. On the other hand, this process indicates that the words (regarding giving birth), no matter whether they come from the live and nascent speaking speech or the sedimented and documented spoken speech, are constituted beforehand by following a certain script and they only signify within the inscription of past speech.<sup>45</sup> That speech has been reiterated and made into a continuum that travels between past and present, synchronic and diachronic, and individual and collective. As a result, the discourse of motherhood precedes the mother. I would argue that the theatrical signification of making and repeating the speech acts about giving birth presents a hyperbolic gesture, a spectacle that visualizes the continuous cycle of “giving birth” and the forcefully and injuriously normalization of the role of mother. In other words, the resignified narrative on the stage demonstrates the past construction of a standard motherhood and exposes the habituated citational scripts that maintain the identity construction. In such a resignification, one sees that gendered and ideologized identity of a mother (or mothers) is implicated in a language that has already preceded and exceeded the speaking subject.

### *Tongue's Memory of Home*

In 2004, Zhang Xian established the Shanghai-based theater group, *zuhe niao* (the Niao Collective). He was supported by a group of professional and amateur performers who share an enthusiasm for stage, most of whom are from the *post-80s generation*.<sup>46</sup>

The members of the group call themselves *niao ren* (people of niao), and call their works plays of niao, dances of niao, and arts of niao.<sup>47</sup> Rarely used in the modern Chinese language, the character niao (嫖) has a strong graphic quality, composed of two “men” (男) one on each side and a woman (女) in the middle. The character connotes the idea of “being entangled with” or “playing with.” Although the group has no particular agenda with regard to issues of gender and sexuality in its performances, it aims to open up a “liminal” state of being on stage to tackle questions such as history, identity, and ideology.<sup>48</sup> *Tongue’s Memory of Home* was the first publicly-staged performance of the group, which premiered in October, 2004; it later won first prize at Zürcher Theater Spektakel 2006 in Switzerland.<sup>49</sup>

Similar to *Report on Giving Birth*, *Tongue’s Memory of Home* can be considered as a piece that experiments the body and language, and, as I mentioned earlier, Zhang Xian repeatedly defined his works as *zhiti xiju* (physical theater), as opposed to *huaju* (spoken drama). By tackling the question of *hua* (language), which is the cultural aspect of ideology and is “more directly and immediately expressive than [...] any other form of theatrical art,”<sup>50</sup> *Tongue’s Memory of Home* confronts the logic and teleology of a whole set of narratives that presuppose a utopian future and historical necessity. “The state power,” Zhang stated, “abstracts and re-abstracts the body into the very simple form, and we are, as a result, simply structured by officially sanctioned speeches and slogans.”<sup>51</sup> On the whole, *Tongue’s Memory of Home* explores the possible way in which the ideologized body, *a tongue* for instance, will not be exclusively expropriated by the state power, even though that possibility exists only within a small body part and lasts

only for a short while. The play also demonstrates forms of struggle for memory and identity, which are conducted theatrically betwixt and between the very detailed everyday life and the most abstracted presence and behavior.

A tongue, as an organ serving for language and at the same time being dictated, and even restructured, by language, turns into the key trope of the piece. Sometimes, the performers devotedly exhibit the most “primordial” and organic functions of their tongues: they vocalize, they eat, and they kiss. At other times, they suddenly begin to chant slogans and practice interrogation, by which their tongues are transformed into the mouthpieces for the historically and ideologically-charged activities. Skillfully and repetitively used, their tongues bear a resemblance to the feminine bodies in *Report on Giving Birth*, which are biologically given and socially disciplined. While traversing between reality and “super-reality,” between being conscious and unconscious, “a tongue” tastes and touches. It struggles with the ideological demands and pressures at times, and loses its control within the frenzy of passion at other times. In between these two phases, in that impossibly-emerging liminal space, the tongue even attempts to search for personal experience at the dreamlike “home.” [figure 2.1]



figure 2-1: *Tongue's Memory of Home*

### An Un/Conscious Ideological Performance

At the very beginning of the performance, the stage creates the atmosphere of a smothering nightmare. After an extended silence, verses of a poem titled *the White Sea* by the poet Wang Yin are projected, one after one, on a huge white curtain that hangs down from the ceiling: "I lay on the ice cold sidewalk / The concrete ground chilling as a mirror, the city / Underneath my spine / Carrying on regardless, within the great silence..."<sup>52</sup> Under the ghastly lights, the audience can vaguely recognize that four performers are orderly laying on the beds under the curtain. The setting is made analogous to any type of technico-political register of the body, such as a hospital, an army, or a school.<sup>53</sup> All of a sudden, the performers, three women and one man, sit up and utter strange vocal sounds, as if they are surprised or puzzled. Dressed in the uniform-like Chinese tunic suits (*zhongshan zhuang*, in other words, Mao Suits), with the powerful ticking of a clock or any sound of that kind, they carry out a series of actions in the precise rhythm and in a rather confident and organized manner. Walking in an absolutely gymnastic and military style, they move forward, march backward, mark time, and change direction while marching forward. At the same time, some inharmonious sounds such as coughing and flushing toilets can be heard from the stage. The staged actions and the sound effects seem to refer to a collective morning exercise and further point to a vision of collective unconsciousness drawn from the self-assured attitude and the uniform movement.

In another scene, a performer begins to take photos for the others, as if every individual identity and personal history has to be registered for further inspection and

monitoring. The performance shows the typical way in which “mug shots” are taken: standing still with a front-view photo; turning and taking a left-side view photo; making another turn, and taking a right-side view photo. Gradually each performer turns around faster and faster until it is almost like spinning. In so doing, the glaring flashes of the camera and the performers’ extreme actions completely make the process of identifying and documenting each individual a failure. Everyone is made into a member of the group; they have neither a face nor an identity. They are each a member who is identical to everybody else and therefore rendered invisible. Similar to what happened to other repeated actions, one alien element pops up suddenly: a woman snatches the camera and almost pushes the lens of the camera into her throat, onto her tongue. She screams in horror and simultaneously clicks the shutter. But soon enough, the stage comes back to normal and is balanced immediately after the loud sound and high pitch of her scream. While exposing the futile bouncing back and forth of the individual subject in between the conscious and the unconscious, *Tongue’s Memory of Home* also purposely creates the very paradoxical and parodic enactments of *the performative*. The embarrassing and strange movements of the tongues prompt a biological and psychological resistance from within the unconscious collective movements.

Later on, in a scene that seems to occur in a temple where joss-sticks are burnt in a bronze incense burner and people expect their fortune to be told, three performers (A, B, C) stop their trance-like ecstasy and, with their abstract language and gestures, approach the fourth one (D) and begin to question her. All the questions are the same—“and then?” And yet, the tones and manners of the questions turn the scene into an

interrogation, by which the audience is immediately reminded of the merciless and abusive elements in the political-ideological campaigns mobilized by the socialist state.

A: And then?  
D: I went in...  
B: And Then?  
D: S/he looked at me.  
C: And Then?  
D: So I saw (her/him).  
A: And Then?  
D: S/he wiped up something.  
B: And Then?  
D: I covered her/his mouth.  
C: And then?  
D: S/he can't speak.  
A: And then?  
D: I told her/him, "Even if you want to say something, you should be tongue-tied."  
B: And then?  
D: S/he said, "You wouldn't have understood even if I tried to explain."  
C: And then?  
D: So it wouldn't matter even if I understood.  
A: And then?  
D: People can never get out once they are here...

The dialogue is repeated and made faster, from which one can easily sense a frenetically inquired and impossibly articulated absent "thing." "I" covered her/his mouth when "s/he" attempts to speak out what is it, and "s/he" wiped up what should never be explored. We—both "s/he" and "I" understand that, since what stays behind all this is the order of the phantasmatic; we should stop talking, otherwise we would only find the emptiness behind the ultimate signifier and nothing more. Soon, *Tongue's Memory of Home* transforms the interrogatory scene into sadistic yelling. Shouted down by all the "interrogators" with their stormy and nonstop "and then," the answer from D does not need to be heard any more. When the collective unconscious is stirred up, an

individual would be guided to its extreme and would retain little of its original status quo. Not only is s/he in the movement, s/he “becomes” the movement itself.

The concept of the collective unconscious pondered at this point does not rely on the Jungian idea of the suprapersonal and ahistorical matrix of psychic patterns, especially considering Fanon’s critique on Jung’s inadequate contemplation of cultural and social aspects of the collective unconscious. Here I would like to relate the collective unconscious to the relationship of the individual to ideology. Ideology, in favor of maintenance and conformity, is rooted in the collective unconscious and, as Karl Mannheim puts it, “there is implicit in the word ‘ideology’ the insight that in certain situations the collective unconscious of certain groups obscures the real condition of society both to itself and to others and thereby stabilizes it” (Mannheim, 40). It is important to note that, to think of the definition of ideology, if understood from the Althusserian perspective, *materiality* of the ideological apparatus is repeatedly emphasized. But the term ideology can be also seen as the immaterial Lacanian big Other which has been always *performatively* presupposed by the interpellated subjects.<sup>54</sup> In Wang Ban’s *The Sublime Figure of History*, ideology is considered as the aestheticized politics that triggers and encapsulates the individual’s “unconditional love” for the hegemonic; in so doing, ideology is reproduced “in the collective unconscious, at the level of sensibility, affect, desire, and pleasure” (Wang, 1997, 154). In this sense, individuals are constantly bound to and intervened by powerful social mechanisms and collective agencies, by which they unquestionably submit their critical positions and sensibilities to best maintain the existing order and mentality.

Here I also want to draw upon Theodor Adorno's idea of "acting identification," derived from his essay "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda." In this study of group psychology and massification under the Nazi regime, Adorno argues that mass psychology is dependent upon individuals whose id is directly appealed by the external superego. Furthermore, he astutely exposes the false and calculated aspect of the attachment among individuals and ideology by analyzing how individual Germans, while not spontaneously nor truly identifying themselves with the leader,

"[...] perform their own enthusiasm, and thus participate in their leader's performance [...] It is probably the suspicion of this fictitiousness of their own 'group psychology' that makes fascist crowds so merciless and unapproachable. If they would stop to reason for a second, the whole performance would go to pieces, and they would be left to panic."

(Adorno, 137)

Although the ultimate point of Adorno's analysis is to make explicit the loss of individual psychological agency within the consumer-oriented cultural industry, the essay sheds light on the *artificiality* of an individual's submission to authority and ideological interpellation. That artificial dimension of individual sincerity, or, borrowing Adorno's term—*inner distance*, leads to the unconscious worship and following of the dominant ideology on the one hand, and the conscious, albeit brutal at times, performing and maintenance of the ideological ritual on the other hand. That said, I would argue that, *Tongue's Memory of Home* carefully captures a dramatic swing between the conscious and the unconscious, and signifies the very critical moment at which the individuals' ritualistically ideological performance climaxes under the gaze of the big Other, i.e. ideology.

In *Tongue's Memory of Home*, no one has any distinguishable individual identity. At some moments when almost everybody in the morning exercise session is moving at the same pace, one "anarchist" performer suddenly stands out from the collective group and destroys the rhythm and flow of the choreographic movements. It looks as if s/he unexpectedly loses the direction of the collective group in the course of marching, or accidentally fails to keep up with other group members. Before being recruited back into the collective, this anarchist momentarily becomes the opposite of the collective "believers" of this "ideological performance," which is literally a performance. Nevertheless, I want to point out that her/his short-lived carnivalesque is not so much the individually conscious choice against the collectively unconscious activity; rather, the transgression interrupts the collectively conscious obedience of the rules of the "performance." Without eradicating the individual rebel who is unable to keep up with the fictitiousness, the "performance" would completely fall apart, and "and they would be left to panic."

The violent form and content of the "interrogation" not only implicates the context of the utterances but also points to the power that performativity calls for: the power assures that the subject-effect will be brought into being based on the repetitive citation of a script. In this explicit representation of "the subject speaks language and language speaks it,"<sup>55</sup> the tongue simply mechanically and unconsciously reproduces the echoes of the empty language from the past totalitarian period. While the "traumatic and productive iterability" is repeatedly reenacted and resignified, the performance demonstrates the moment of rupture as the "inevitable effect of the instability of

language,” at which the question of “why do I become a social being” can be consciously raised.<sup>56</sup> Maybe that unusual moment when the woman tries to thrust the camera into the middle of her throat, for instance, can be seen as a carefully planned accident that bursts into being in the resignifying practice of the performative, in which the former lawful product/subject of the prior signifying practice, keeps doing what she has been asked to do, and does something more excessive than expected. As usual, however, the carnivalesque is rendered back into the uniform movement quickly, which lasts peacefully for quite a while until the next utopian-like bodily chaos comes into being. Even though the performers keep changing their costumes, by which the change of temporalities is symbolized—from Mao Suits, the white underwear, and the silky body wrappers—they cannot quite escape this “nightmare.”

### **Gestus—A Re-quoted Sign**

As I mentioned earlier, *Tongue’s Memory of Home* “imagines” a liminal space in between the conscious and the unconscious, in which a subject realizes itself as the subject-effect of the performative, even though it stays within the matrix of significations. In the piece, this in-betweenness is evoked by a Brechtian character whose presence and actions might remind the audience of the illusive apparatus of the “performance.” Based on his blocking, costume, makeup, props, and body language, this unique performer has no connection or communication with any other performer. Dressed in the uniform of “Mao green,” he brings the collective group in their morning exercise, some wild flowers—an untimely and immediately ignored action. When everybody is rinsing their

mouths and cleaning their tongues, he contentedly walks around and dusts the stage with an old-fashioned feather duster. As soon as he enters the stage, the screen shows a series of games popular among the children during the Mao era, such as *fan sheng* (flip-flop a string), *tiao fangzi* (the Chinese version of hopscotch), and *tan qiu* (playing marbles). In fact, what he brings in and induces is precisely a specific ideologically-charged temporality, and yet he comfortably connects it with enjoyment and fantasy, and even a little bit of sensation.

At one moment, when no other performers are present, he slowly and calmly lifts his arms and lowers his head down towards his knees, posing in a v-shape *feiji shi* (*plane position*), a form of punishment popular during the Cultural Revolution whereby the arms of the punished person are held up behind the back. He even raises one of his legs so he has to keep balancing himself. Without any enforcement or compulsion, a historically-charged bodily gesture signifying brutality and humiliation is abruptly placed on the stage. His gesture immediately transforms his live body as an equivalent to a sign, the effect of which is fully realized since the “localization” and the “destiny” of the sign have been rather intelligible in the system of ideological representation. And, it is he himself who consciously places his body within this system.

Seen as a Brechtian *gestus*, his action is a unit of performance that bears a specific social attitude and a historical situation, as well as exhibits and materializes complexity of ideological and political conditions of a specific historical period. This gest, as Elin Diamond puts it, imagines “a *polyvalence* to the body’s representation, for the performer’s body is also historicized, loaded with its own history and that of the

character” (Diamond, 1996, 129).<sup>57</sup> While demonstrating the dialectical work of the archive and the repertoire in transmitting social knowledge, cultural memory, and identities, Diana Taylor also carefully illustrates the intertwinement of the archive and the repertoire when they exceed each other yet at the same time work together to create and maintain the cultural memory. In discussing a short piece of Teresa Ralli’s “Fragments of Memory,” Taylor carefully illustrates how Ralli “included the gestures she associated with the women as a way of signaling the continuity of cultural gestures and behavior” (Taylor, 2003, 207-208).<sup>58</sup> Therefore, I would argue that via that *plane position*, the performing body activates both a conscious historicization and retrospective memorialization of the top-down subjugation of the body. This presentation refuses to valorize a “holy/essential body” in an archetypal condition rooted in the modernist discourse and seen as being able to achieve a transcendental elevation beyond social discourse. Rather, that expressive and gestural body in the act of transfer, passes on what Taylor calls “scenario.” It is a *freeze* of the “already-there” and “accumulative repeats” (Taylor, 2003, 28). Also, in such a resignifying process, which is rather different from Butlerian’s site of resistance that lies exclusively within the linguistic dimension, the body has moved beyond an inner state of being and become a public nexus where different historical contexts and existences meet.

Moreover, when posing, that Brechtian character not only imitates a historically-charged gesture but also consciously reads his gestic body. It is, so to speak, a practice that makes use of “a quotable gesture.” In “What is Epic Theater,” Walter Benjamin’s reflection on “quotable gestures” wonderfully brings up a twofold meaning: (1) “a

quotable gesture” as an act that is quoted and reenacted in different contexts; (2) “a quotable gesture” as an “interruption” that happens when an actor, for instance, quotes her/his own gestures and witnesses her/his consciousness. When presenting the repressed somatic and visceral position via that soundless freeze—*feiji shi*, for instance—the Brechtian character recognizes himself as the subject-effect signified by the social gesture. Exactly at this moment of resignification, we find that the embodied knowledge and judgment turns into the enduring materials that summon collective remembrance and personal consciousness through a particular setting and the reading of the “marked” body.<sup>59</sup>

#### **A Tongue vs. A National Performance**

At the end of the play, in a lyrical atmosphere of peace and tranquility, a huge picture frame is installed on the stage. Inside the frame we see a living-room with realistic layouts, decorated with bright colors and warm lighting. Dressed in their casual and everyday clothing, some performers sit around a table in the middle of the room. Playing mahjong and feeding each other candies and snacks, they craft a representative composition of “living happily ever after.”

What the “room” has presented allegorizes Zhang Xian’s idea of *Guojia Biaoyan* (performance of a nation).<sup>60</sup> To Zhang’s understanding, *guojia biaoyan* is a political entity and psyche, performed in the name of a nation, by which individuals are made into citizen subjects of the nation-state and recruited for the endless and spectacular national rituals. On the very first day of the establishment of the PRC, Zhang argues, people were

mobilized to perform standard *putong hua* (regular/common Mandarin Chinese), to conduct the magnificently national constructions, and to perform all other forms of social dramas that propel the reality. He writes, “to a great extent, *guojia biaoyan* has become analogous with *huaju* (spoken drama) because it begins with language, and it forges and promotes a master historical narrative of the nation through language.”<sup>61</sup>

The term *guojia biaoyan*, posited by Zhang Xian, implicates a complex integration of societ(ies) into the nation-state by consolidating the state ideology through a cultural dimension. Conditioned by the historical task of revolution when the nation was at stake, the construction of an *integral* national culture reached its full swing before the establishment of the PRC. The unifying action fused together nationalism with the revolutionary hegemony, by which the nation of China was imagined as a politically and culturally unique entity and was aimed to be preserved as such. After 1949, the total national culture continued to be promoted as the culture of the people and became one part of the ideological mechanism itself. Established in a top-down manner, the absoluteness and the exclusiveness of the new national culture rejected Confucian ethics and other traditional values and demanded subjection of the people; it also managed to create a higher and broader imagination of the sublime. Individual practices, as a result, can be engulfed by the ideologically sublimated goals of the nation, and become one part of the *guojia biaoyan*.

A look at the history of the pioneering Chinese *huaju* (spoken drama)—the leading national performance genre in the modern era of China—can further allow us to understand the imperative trajectory of the formation of *guojia biaoyan* (performance of a

nation); it also reveals a “symbiotic” relationship between the meaning and agenda of *huaju*, and the specific historical context in which *huaju* came into being—a time of national crisis. The emergence of the short-lived *wenming xi* (civilized play) brought in a gradual aesthetical and philosophical shift<sup>62</sup>: although a clear line dividing Chinese and Western theatrical forms was not yet set up during the time, there was a replacement of a conventionally formalized and stylized theater by another one that placed importance on naturalistic and propogandic speech and action in order to enlighten audiences.<sup>63</sup> After Chen Dabei, Yu Shangyuan, and other major dramatists of the May Fourth period, promoted *aimei ju* (amateur theater) to initiate aesthetic experiments against a commercial culture as well as to introduce new plays and innovative methods of theater training,<sup>64</sup> the outburst of the May Fourth movement soon drove students, intellectuals and others into an anti-imperialist and patriotic participation of the *aimei ju* movement. Infused with the spirit of May Fourth and inspired by the modern Japanese theatrical form *shingeki* (new drama)—especially in terms of the tradition of presenting social commentary in *soshi-geki* (plays about agitators) and *shosei-shibai* (dramas about students), *huaju* in this early and amateurish stage, frequently added a large number of iconoclastic and propagandist speeches to the ongoing performances to exercise patriotic statements for revolution in an improvisational manner, by which the dramatists were also able to relocate themselves among the common people and attach their aesthetics with social and political concerns.

After that, under the influence of Qu Qiubai, who vigorously advocated the *dazhong hua* (massification) of the Chinese modern language and its literature,<sup>65</sup> the Left-

Wing writers/dramatists actively promoted the “people’s language” to introduce modern literature and modern drama to the peasants and working class, to combat illiteracy, and to unify the masses.<sup>66</sup> The eruption of the Sino-Japanese War further transformed *huaju* into the primary and most effective propaganda channel. Under the banner of *guofang xiju* (national defense drama), the Left-Wing dramatists performed anti-Japanese propaganda plays in rural villages in the interior and brought enlightenment and war news to the masses, for, the powerful impact of modern spoken drama produced “not only on the eyes and ears of its audiences, but also on their emotions” (Hung, 50). Zheng Junli—a well-known Shanghai-based dramatist, actor, and film director, also considered that, spoken drama “established its form and content on the ruins of opera [...] meanwhile, spoken drama itself [...] became part of the practice of national revolution” (Hu, Jubin, 41).

It is fair to argue that throughout the Chinese Literary Revolution in 1917,<sup>67</sup> the development of Left-Wing Literature in the 1930s,<sup>68</sup> and the popular culture campaign in the Wartime China,<sup>69</sup> *huaju* increasingly played a highly political role and became one of the most primary medium and propaganda arsenals of revolutions of modern China. In the course of the development of *huaju*, an anti-imperialist and anti-traditionalist agenda carried by a reformed common language was able to reach both the broad masses and intellectuals alike, by which the unification of the culture of China, a country once divided by cultural, regional and socioeconomic differences, can be realized. Within this specific historical context, when the nation faced both internal disturbance and foreign aggression, to construct a unified national culture was an imperative approach to form a

clear and solid sense of identity and unity of a modern nation-state. Furthermore, under the double banner of *qimeng* (enlightenment) and *jiuwang* (national salvation) of modern China, the evolution of Chinese *huaju* led by the intellectuals can also be understood as a project of modernity, a project that not only aimed to free the nation from the imperialist and feudalistic fetters but also proceeded to reconstruct and revitalize *minjian wenhua* (folk culture) with a modernized and enlightened mindset. Confronting its destiny and initiating a fundamental reform—a reform that transformed the earlier surface western style and aesthetic value into one that can be integrated into popular culture and life of the masses—Chinese *huaju* also imbued folk culture with the spirit of enlightenment, and at the same time localized and politicized the imported cultural form to “suture” the rupture between “modern” and “tradition.”

By examining the dynamics among the nation, society and Chinese *huaju*, Hu Zhiyi not only argues that modernization of *huaju* in the first part of the twentieth century coexisted with the establishment of the modern nation-state of China, but also points out the significance of “the Yan’an Way” in the process of promoting and modernizing *huaju*.<sup>70</sup> This “Yan’an Way,” brought up by Hu, has been understood and theorized as the summation of the Chinese revolution led by the CCP after Mao looked for revolutionary change in the countryside. It discovered concrete methods to inject popular participation, especially from the rural forces, into the construction of a new nation-state, along which the imported western enlightenment thoughts were strategically “translated” to perpetuate the mass mobilization and therefore brought aroused social consciousness, and the socio-political movements of national salvation tightly engaged individual

identifications with a perceived unified nation. Hu Zhiyi's exploration of the Yan'an way elucidates that only during the Yan'an era was Chinese *huaju* truly nourished by and made suitable for a wider local culture and society; in return, the new formula of *huaju* brought together both the rural masses and the urbanites when facing a "national crisis." Hu also examines the dialectics between what the wartime "spoken drama" movement achieved and Eric Hobsbawm's notion of proto-nationalism<sup>71</sup>—a sense of collective belonging that existed before the age of nationalism and built a powerful and pre-political matrix of organizational structures, emotions, beliefs and solidarities. Or, to put it in another way, the modernization and systemization of *huaju* has provided an important hotbed for establishing a structure of the feeling of collective belonging. With the series of reforms of language, literature and other art forms at the time, it created a common culture that moved away from the monopolization of the Confucian literati and bureaucracy of the imperial state and eventually reached the masses. This common culture awakened to mind an elevated sense of the nation-state of China through *performance of a nation—guojia biaoyan*, and facilitated to unify the community and the collective actions.<sup>72</sup> The founding of the Lu Xun Academy of Art and the establishment of the All-China Resistance Association of Dramatists,<sup>73</sup> for instance, demonstrate how social groups at the time aimed to create a common culture tightly attached to the state system; their struggles for cultural consolidation to a great extent galvanized feelings of national identity among the population. The process of modernizing *huaju* also integrated the artists, intellectuals, and audience masses, and transformed them into the

participants/performers of the ritualistic *guojia biaoyan* for both the discursive and material constructs of the nation.

What Zhang Xian and the Niao Collective have strived for, in the postsocialist condition, is a conscious separation from the integrated and *orthodoxized* national performance (*huaju*), which is inherently the *performance of a nation*. After 1949, socialist realism became the orthodox mode of representation, and in the 1950s, new terms such as revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism came into the official discourse. The intensively-necessitated connection between the intellectuals / artists and the state system was in part manifested in the field of theater, through the further massification and ideologization of *huaju*. In other words, in the construction of a new socialist nation-state, a society has been sutured together to engage in a set of national rituals and ideological norms. As feelings and narratives are monopolized and unified by the nation-state and infused into *huaju*, possibilities of alternative expression and consciousness are excluded. *Hua* (words) in *huaju* are interwoven into the institutionalized discursive self-referentiality that draws upon the symbolic order of grand history of the socialist nation-state, and performs as one of the most salient characters in that signification system.

*zhiti xiju* (physical theater) in Zhang Xian's practice thus operates with two connotations. First, it employs the physical and the non-verbal to challenge the predominant role of language and its invisible, state-authorized, linguistic violence. In fact, a number of playwrights have intentionally radicalized the application of language in *huaju* since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Gao Xingjian, for instance,

demonstrates a speech pattern analogous to that of *the Theater of the Absurd* in his *Che Zhan* (Bus Stop). Presented as a playable form rather than subject matter, language in this particular play is made to mirror and exemplify the exitless and unsignposted absurdity of the social condition in the PRC. Guo Shixing, in his *Xianren Sanbuqu* (The Trilogy of Dilettantes), dives into Beijing local tones and plays with tongue twisters, puns, and rhymes, to not only showcase untranslatability and unintelligibility of certain local cultures and activities, but also to question what has been stripped off from a government-mandated official language. In Zhang Xian's works, the body is directly placed against the practice of language, which results in absence, retreat, and even dysfunctional continuation of the spoken words. Unquestionably, all these practices deviate from the top-down regulated and censored signification system. Second, *zhiti* (the body) can also be read as *language*, sets of physical language, movement, or expression. The bureaucratized and ideologized physical language is also fraught with the power that can violate the legitimacy of any untamed bodily presentations. In this sense, resignifying the historical process of the chained / trained embodiment through the performing body in the *zhiti xiju* (physical theater) presents a particular historian's task and entails more attentive examination of historical problems (of the body). The title of *Tongue's Memory of Home* strongly calls for an embodied *rumination* of the history. This process operates through the most local and personal part of the body and the most compulsive embodied memory; it fragments and reveals a totalized representation that has transformed every *body* into the unassuming ideologized subject.

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<sup>1</sup> The major performance space of the Living Dance Studio is located in the *Caochangdi Workstation* in Beijing.

<sup>2</sup> The main performance space of the Niao Collective is located in *Xiahe Micang* (Downstream Garage), in the city of Shanghai.

<sup>3</sup> Wu Wenguang is recognized as one of the leading figures of China's *Xin jilu yundong* (the New Documentary Movement). Chris Berry posits that, the distinctive Chinese New Documentary Movement, which began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, operates under the imperative to "get real," namely, digging into the truth and facing the reality. The movement reflected a new social understanding "of the limits of the emergent public sphere and the possibilities of social transformation" after June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1989 (115). Berry's research puts an emphasis on the postsocialist local specificity. As Berry sees it, there are four main characteristics shared with the new Chinese documentaries: first, the experience and memory of June 4th 1989 is a crucial structuring absence; second, the focus is directly on contemporary city life in China among educated people like the documentary makers and the filmmakers themselves; third, spontaneous shooting is frequently used; fourth, production within the state-owned system is eschewed for independent production. See Chris Berry's "Getting Real: Chinese Documentary, Chinese Postsocialism," in *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*.

<sup>4</sup> This passage about Wu Wenguang's understanding of *xianchang yishu* (live art) is based primarily on my interview with him. The interview was held in January, 2007, in the *Caochangdi Workstation* in Beijing.

<sup>5</sup> *Huaju* (spoken drama) is the modern Western-style theater, adopted/adapted by the Chinese artists and intellectuals at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Huaju* has been one of the most influential and popular propaganda instruments since the founding of the PRC in 1949. Having said that, I have no intention to simplify *huaju* as a purely ideologically-charged cultural product. Both the gradual withdrawal of the intervention of the CCP and the new pervasiveness of cultural consumerism have increasingly complicated the role of *huaju*. See also Colin Mackerras's *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times from 1840 to the Present Day*.

<sup>6</sup> This passage is based on my interview with Zhang Xian in January, 2007, in Shanghai.

<sup>7</sup> The performance pieces of the Living Dance Studio and those of the Niao Collective are often staged together. The annual Contemporary Dance Festival *Jiaocha* (Crossing) held in Beijing, for instance, has provided the two groups with a platform for artistic exchange and dialogue.

<sup>8</sup> See Ana Sánchez-Colberg's article on physical theater. In defining physical theater, she also borrows Garner's theoretical articulation of the political meaning and potential of the body. See Garner's "Post-Brechtian Anatomies: Weiss, Bond, and the Politics of Embodiment."

<sup>9</sup> Whereas the traditional birth culture centers on two aspects of Chinese family life—filial piety and patrilineality, the socialist birth culture bureaucratically promotes the disintegration of the traditional birth culture, publicizes the scientific and progressive concept of marriage and child-birth, and enforces the one-child policy to curb population growth.

<sup>10</sup> See Althusser's "Thesis II: Ideology has a material existence" of "Ideology and Ideological 'State Apparatuses'" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 165-170. He points out that ideology always has a material existence: "[...] an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices" (166). In every case, the ideology of ideology thus recognizes, despite its imaginary distortion, that the 'ideas' of a human subject exist in his actions, or ought to exist in his actions [...]" (168).

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<sup>11</sup> Both of the dance-theater productions of the Niao Collective—*Tongue's Memory of Home* and *Ward No. 14*—portray the ways in which the individual bodies are structured in accordance with the socialist ideology.

<sup>12</sup> Engels framed the famous phrase in “Realism and Partisanship, II.” Also see the endnote (no.25) in *Chapter 1*.

<sup>13</sup> *Report on Giving Birth* was premiered in the little theater of Beijing People’s Art Theater in 1999, and toured to several international theater and dance festivals in the past years, such as InTransit Festival in Berlin in 2003, ImPulsTanz, Vienna International Dance Festival in 2004, Röda Sten Festival in Sweden in 2006, and Festival de Liege in Belgium in 2007. My reading of the play is primarily based on the new production staged at the Shanghai Dance Festival in 2006, under the same title.

<sup>14</sup> The interviewees include teachers, housewives, works, and writers. In the interviews, they were asked to recall their experience of child-bearing and birth giving. They were also asked to describe their emotional and psychological journey of becoming mothers. The information is based on my interview. Also see Karin Bergquist’s “Chinese Body Language—Raw, Sensual and Provocative Dance.” <http://www.culturebase.net/artist.php?1227>

<sup>15</sup> See “Born of Modern Dance: Choreographer Wen Hui Brings Experimental Dance to Life.” <http://www.beijingscene.com/v06i010/feature.html>

<sup>16</sup> For instance, *yangge* is a representative collective folk dance that combines music, dance, and drama. It has a long history and diversified forms, each distinguished by different manipulations of the silk handkerchiefs and different movements of the feet.

<sup>17</sup> The signifying process constitutes what Peirce terms “thirdness”—which “is nothing but the character of an object which embodies Betweenness or Mediation in its simplest or most rudimentary form; and I use it as the name of that element of the phenomenon which is predominant wherever Mediation is predominant, and which reaches its fullness in Representation” (244). See *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*.

<sup>18</sup> See Thomas Turino’s “Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music.”

<sup>19</sup> Also see *Peirce on Signs* (141-43, 239-40, 253-259).

<sup>20</sup> It is a Chinese old saying “nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei,” literally translated as “men tend the outside, women tend the domestic.”

<sup>21</sup> See Stacey’s *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*.

<sup>22</sup> See Hershatter’s “Making the Visible Invisible: the Fate of ‘the Private’ in Revolutionary China” in *Jindai Zhongguo de Funü yu Guojia (1600–1950)*.

<sup>23</sup> Hershatter gives an example that the late imperial statecraft writers promoted women’s handicraft labor as crucial to the health of the agrarian economy and the stability of the state itself.

<sup>24</sup> See Julia Kristeva’s “Word, Dialogue, and Novel.” Kristeva refers to texts in two axes: a horizontal axis that connects the author and the reader, and a vertical axis that connects the text to other texts. See also Kristeva’s *Desire in Language*.

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<sup>25</sup> See Derrida: *A Critical Reader*.

<sup>26</sup> As Charles Peirce points out, "Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else. Secondness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third. Thirdness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other" (221). Also see *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*.

<sup>27</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte writes: "By enacting the role, the actor reproduces a symbolical order as formed by the language of the play, under the particular conditions that are given and determined by the actor's own individual physis. Since the actor's body, partly at least, still belongs to nature, this very procedure leads to a particular desymbolization of the role as a symbolical order. What has been language now becomes [...] nature. This means that the significance of language is partly canceled and extinguished by the nature of the actor's body" (294). See "Signs of Identity: The Dramatic Character as 'Name' and 'Body'." Also see Charmaine Eddy's "Material Difference and the Supplementary Body in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*."

<sup>28</sup> Kristeva calls the body's semiotics a pre-symbolic, a "[...] signifying disposition [...] that is definitely heterogeneous to meaning but always in sight of it or in either a negative or surplus relationship to it" (133). See *Desire in Language*. Also see Susan Melrose's *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text*.

<sup>29</sup> Also see Tina Mai Chen's "Internationalism and Cultural Experience Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s."

<sup>30</sup> The audiences were also given melon seeds when they entered the performance space.

<sup>31</sup> In the novel, sister Xianglin finally killed herself, and her part was also eventually dismissed by the male narrator. Some scholars argue that the setting of the disappearing woman in this fiction helps to locate the dominant concern of the story, which is to present "the inadequacy of China's new male intellectuals of the 1910s and 1920s" (McDougall, 134). See McDougall's *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century*. This argument is connected closely to an analytical tool developed in western feminist literary criticism—the identification of disappearing women in fiction and drama, and *Camille* would be the one of the prominent examples. But some scholars also problematize the above argument by pointing out the methodology of gender analysis is oversimplified and applied in a "random and unsystematic way" if considering Chinese novels in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in particular. See Stephen Ching-kiu Chan's "The Language of Despair: Ideological Representations of the 'New Woman,' by May Fourth Writers."

<sup>32</sup> For Kristeva, such type of semiotic rupture is employed to disrupt the symbolic order of textual communication. And, this rupture can be achievable in the theater and performance spaces where visual signs speak for themselves, perhaps detracting attention from the text, eliciting meanings which counter those in the text, or even replacing text altogether. Also see the Introduction of *Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women*.

<sup>33</sup> Butler's idea of "language being not only the instrument of expression but also the very condition of possibility for the speaking subject" is crucial here. Through social performance, the subject is brought into being by entering into the normativity and performativity of language, and hailed by the symbolic order. See Butler's *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Also see Butler's *Excitable Speech*.

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<sup>35</sup> See Wang David Der-wei's "Three Hungry Women." Wang applies Kristeva's Symbolic/Semiotic theory to the short story and argues that Kristeva's theory locates the site of abjection in women and links such a feminine abject state to the formation of a language system.

<sup>36</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte's careful and detailed semiotic analysis of the role of language in theater is helpful here. See Fischer-Lichte's "The Dramatic Dialogue—Oral or Literary Communication?"

<sup>37</sup> *Cai diao* (猜调) is a Han folk song genre popular in Yunnan Province, usually sung by the children when they play games.

<sup>38</sup> Here is a rough translation of the lyrics of the song "xiao guai guai (little darling)," Part I. The translation is mine.

"Little darling, little darling, let me tell you the riddles and you give me the answers.  
What would grow up till the sky?  
What would grow up in water?  
What would grow and be sold in the streets?  
What would grow in front of the little girl?  
Little darling, little darling, you tell me the riddles and I give you the answers.  
The Milky Way grows up till the sky.  
The seaweeds grow in the middle of the water.  
The rice noodle grows and is sold in the streets.  
And the threads and needles come all the way to you, little girl."

<sup>39</sup> See Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>40</sup> As Kristeva notes, "[e]vocation of the maternal body and childbirth induces the image of birth as a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides" (101). See Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*.

<sup>41</sup> Kristeva creates "the semiotic" and "the symbolic" to transform Lacan's theorization of "the imaginary" and "the symbolic." Also see *The Kristeva Reader*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> See Lü Xinyu's *Jilu Zhongguo: Dangdai Zhongguo Xin Jilu Yundong* (Documenting China: The New Documentary Movement in Contemporary China).

<sup>43</sup> See Ernest Larsen's "Video Verite from Beijing."

<sup>44</sup> See also Butler's *Excitable Speech*.

<sup>45</sup> Here I move to the Merleau-Ponty's take on the Saussurean distinction. See Richard L. Lanigan's *Speaking and Semiology: Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Theory of Existential Communication*.

<sup>46</sup> 组合 (Zuhe) is the Chinese spelling of the theater group. The so-called post-80s generation in China is characterized by its passion for individualism, consumerism, and "getting rich." The post-80s youths are understood as not old enough to remember what happened before Deng Xiaoping's opening and reform policy, which has brought sea changes to the nation since the end of the 1970s.

<sup>47</sup> This and some subsequent information regarding the Niao Collective in this chapter are taken from my interview with Zhang Xian.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Zürcher Theater Spektakel, founded in 1980, is one of the most important European festivals for contemporary and experimental performing arts and theater.

<sup>50</sup> See “Major Achievements in Theatrical Scholarship, Research, and Development in the People’s Republic of China.”

<sup>51</sup> This information also comes from my interview with Zhang Xian.

<sup>52</sup> Here is the rough translation of “The White Sea.” The translation is mine.

“The white sea surges across the hospital at the daybreak/  
Warmth dwindling on the naked glass pane/  
I lay on the ice cold sidewalk/  
The concrete ground chilling as a mirror, the city/  
Underneath my spine/  
Carrying on regardless, within the great silence/  
at the bottom of sorrow/  
What else there if not the night/  
My slumber summons slumber/  
And my crying, all the crying/  
That lyrical lubricant/  
Unsealing the box of lies.”

<sup>53</sup> See Foucault’s “Docile Bodies.”

<sup>54</sup> See Zizek’s “Why is Woman a Symptom of Man?” in *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*.

<sup>55</sup> In her article “Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification,” Butler argues, “The subject is born into a network of language and uses language but is also used by it; it speaks language, but language speaks it” (332). See *The Judith Butler Reader*.

<sup>56</sup> See Judith Butler’s “Subjection, Resistance, Resignification” in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*.

<sup>57</sup> See Diamond’s “Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism.”

<sup>58</sup> Even discussing a context-specific performance, I think Diana Taylor’s dialectical model of the archive and the repertoire is helpful here. See Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*.

<sup>59</sup> Considering Brecht’s commitment to socialism, it is maybe ironic to see that gestus, as a Brechtian dramaturgical choice, is used to expose the historical trauma that is rooted in the very practice of an “existing socialism.”

<sup>60</sup> See “Guojia Xiju Zhong de Geren Fan Xiju” (The Individual Anti-Theater in the National Theater), an interview of Zhang Xian by Wang Yin.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. The translation is mine.

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<sup>62</sup> *Wenmingxi*, literally translated as civilized plays or civilized drama, was the early form of *huaju* (spoken drama); it emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and helped the Chinese audience get familiar with the Western-style acting, staging, and dramatic content.

<sup>63</sup> Some scholars also point out that, because of lacking training in modern drama, the productions of *wenming xi* retained a number of characteristics of Chinese traditional theater; it was in between the traditional and the modern, and then “faced derision from both sides of the divide.” See Joshwa Goldstein’s “Mei Lanfang and the Nationalization of Peking Opera, 1912-1930.”

<sup>64</sup> See *Zhongguo Huaju Shi* (History of Chinese Spoken Drama).

<sup>65</sup> Qu was also interested in promoting native linguistic resources, such as Chinese dialects.

<sup>66</sup> See *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*.

<sup>67</sup> Also called the New Culture Movement, the Chinese Literary Revolution originally aimed to replace the classical language with the living language of the people especially in terms of written communication. As one of the pioneers of this “Chinese Renaissance,” Hu Shih sees the movement as “a humanist movement,” and firmly states that the Literary Revolution requires “a new language, a new literature, a new outlook on life and society, and a new scholarship.” The aim of the literary revolution is to “supply [the] missing factor of conscious attack on the old tradition and of articulate advocacy of the new.” See Hu Shih’s *The Chinese Renaissance*, 44, 46, 62.

<sup>68</sup> Under the influence of Qu Qiubai, the left-wing writers also had heated debate about “people’s language” among Chinese intellectuals. The experimentation and theorization of the New Culture Movement continued during the 1920s and 1930s in China. The left-wing influence grew gradually and later became the mainstream in the 1930s.

<sup>69</sup> The wartime period includes the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945, and the Civil War of 1945-1949. Chang-tai Hung has a deliberate categorization about the different stages of the culture campaign during the wartime years. See Hung’s *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945*.

<sup>70</sup> See Hu Zhiyi’s *Guojia de Yishi: Zhongguo Geming Xiju de Wenhua Toushi* (Ritual of the Nation: The Cultural Perspective of Chinese Revolutionary Theatre).

<sup>71</sup> Hobsbawm defines the term “proto-nationalism” as “certain variants of feelings of collective belonging which already existed and which could operate, as it were, potentially on the macro-political scale which could fit in which modern states and nations.” See Hobsbawm’s “Popular Proto-Nationalism” in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*.

<sup>72</sup> Hung writes: “words were deemphasized while action was encouraged, the assumption being that words were often too sophisticated for the illiterate peasants to understand. Engaging facial expression and fist-clenching histrionics generated passions that high-sounding patriotic slogans like ‘Down with Japanese imperialism!’ (*dadao Riben diguozhuyi*) simply could not. As one dramatist wrote, if the desire was to communicate effectively with the audience, ‘text [was] less important than performance.’ Much of the language that remained in the street play was colloquial and direct; and instead of long didactic harangues, songs might be used to carry uplifting messages” (58). See *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945*.

<sup>73</sup> The Lu Xun Academy of Art (Lu Xun Yishu Xueyuan) was found in 1938 in Yan’an and it further promoted the spoken drama campaign. The All-China Resistance Association of Dramatists (Zhongguo Xijujie Kangdi Xiehui) and other regional drama associations established in 1938 also soon became the

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headquarters of the nationwide drama campaigns. Also, “[...] immediately after the war broke out in Shanghai in August 1937, a group of theater and cinema activists formed the Shanghai Theater Circle National Salvation Association (Shanghai Xjujie Jiuwang Xiehui).” In August 1938, Tian Han launched the famous Wartime Dramatist Class in Hankou (Liu Han Geju Yanyuan Zhanshi Jiangxiban). See Hung’s *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945*, 89.

## Chapter 3

### Factory 798: the Site of Nostalgia and its Dwellers

*“Factory 798 looks like an enormous performance of Political Pop. However, what emerges from the horizon is not the presentation of memory, but the disappearance of historicity.”*

—Dai Jinhua<sup>1</sup>

#### A Nostalgic *Non-Place*, Factory 798

Contemporary Chinese art is experiencing an unprecedented ascent, which has transformed Factory 798 (also called 798 Art District, or Dashanzi Art District) into a space in which the power and logic of transnational art and capital have increasingly merged. Seen by Mao Zedong in the early mid 1950s as a model state-owned military-industrial enterprise for an advanced socialist state, the entire factory complex served the former planned economy of the PRC in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, the enterprise gradually declined, forcing the furlough of more than 10,000 workers and leaving the buildings nearly deserted.<sup>3</sup> And yet, the factory space continued to be engraved with historical marks of Chinese socialism.

The rebirth of Factory 798 during the late 1990s and 2000s was a direct result of the congregation of artists and entrepreneurs hoping to create an international contemporary art circle.<sup>4</sup> The state’s endorsement of *Chuangyi chanye* (Creative Industry Enterprise) was another crucial factor.<sup>5</sup> In 2006, the Government of Beijing’s Chaoyang District announced its decision to cooperate with Seven Star Group—the property management company of Factory 798—and declared the site one of the “Creative Culture Enterprises” in Beijing.<sup>6</sup> Soon enough, the factory represented both the “socialist legacy”

and the so-called hippy-avant-garde lifestyle. It has come to embody a particular postsocialist condition,<sup>7</sup> which connotes both the waning effect of socialism and the party-state's shifting focal point in controlling the cultural, economic, and ideological arenas; it also exhibits free flow of ideas and capital generated by domestic and global developments.

“Time has become a perpetual present and thus spatial. Our relationship to the past is now a spatial one” (Stephanson, 32). Frederic Jameson notes in discussions of the characteristics of postmodernism. Time and space are fragmented into a series of present moments in the logic of late capitalism, and the concrete sense of temporality and history is arguably replaced with a *visualscape* saturated with simulacra of history. Celeste Olalquiaga also describes the postmodern obsession with iconographies as a project of simulation rooted in “intertextuality instead of indexicality” (6). As a result, not as much history (historical objects, events, and sites) as visual representation of first-degree references to history is fashioned for verisimilitude.<sup>8</sup> Seen from these views, the destination of over-proliferation of the highly profitable and marketable signs of history is determined by the postmodern acts of decontextualizing and flattening history into a nostalgic “retro” space, which is primarily manifested in the shift from the sign's use value to its exchange value.

A version of flattened history has gradually been written onto Factory 798, serving the need for *huaijiu* (nostalgia), a most recognizable fashion in the cultural arena of contemporary China. China's rapid modernization has generated contradictory sentiments in the society. On the one hand, the official ideology of progress and the

phenomenal increase in material wealth foster ambition and satisfy desires. On the other hand, memories of the past inspire a longing for a time and a space that is socially equal and economically egalitarian. In Factory 798, imagination and embellishment assuage anxieties about the present. Rather than creating a resemblance of historicity, this nostalgic atmosphere, when alleviating the identity crisis that the Chinese people have experienced within the rapid transformation of society and supplementing their loss of memory and vocabulary, creates some new historical imaginations; it simultaneously accomplishes, as Dai Jinhua so eloquently puts it, “a representation of consumerism as well as a consumerism of representation” (Dai, 2000, 211).

As the embodiment of socialist history, Factory 798 seems to be a well-legitimated medium for nostalgia as it brings in both temporal and spatial dimensions. The factory marks an ideologized period of history through a vibrant articulation of the textual, visual, and architectural signs; it literally opens a material and psychological “homespace” for the homesick to remember, if not fetishize, the past. The promoted characteristics of the factory—such as the modernist Bauhaus style,<sup>9</sup> the New York SoHo lifestyle, the post-industrial cosmopolitan art enclave—undoubtedly highlight the “global” signifiers of the space, and therefore position Chinese nostalgia within a transnational cultural context. The factory overflows with historical and ideological symbols, like second-degree kitsch. This excess of visual and material signs leaves us with what French anthropologist Marc Augé defines as a *non-place*.<sup>10</sup> Augé considers a space that cannot be “defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity” as a non-place, a world in which “transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating” and a

world “surrendered to [...] the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral [...]” (77-78). Factory 798 is a unique type of *non-place*, a palimpsest on which layers of historical coatings are accumulated and reorganized. Fed with an excess of history, the factory manages to turn individual identity, historical reference, or any sense of belonging associated with the space into consumption of nostalgia.

Zhang Xudong defines *Shanghai Nostalgia* as one of the zeitgeists that emerged in the 1990s when consumerism began to flourish.<sup>11</sup> *Shanghai Nostalgia* idealizes the metropolitan grandeur and bourgeois modernity of Shanghai in the pre-socialist era and disavows the history of socialist China. As a matter of fact, *Shanghai Nostalgia* can be understood as a form of “pre-socialist melancholia” that fails to acknowledge the very existence of a socialist history in China and painstakingly enables the public to imagine a history and present of Shanghai that is untouched by communism and the socialist nation-state.<sup>12</sup> This particular form of nostalgia assists the city of Shanghai in re-embracing the global capitalism and free-market ideology in the present by retrieving the past glory, which was embedded in the colonial system, the old global system.

The form of nostalgia promoted and disseminated in Factory 798, nevertheless, involves the opposite kind. After years of societal silence about the Cultural Revolution and the state’s efforts at the “thorough negation” of that traumatic period, the remembrance of the revolutionary history of the nation-state and the return to *Hongse jingdian* (Red Classics) came into being in the 1990s. In Factory 798, reproduction of the “Red Classics” is also developed into that of the “Socialist Classics.” With the aid of the overflow of signs, art works that represent socialist artifacts and even the cult of Mao as a

dedication to the evocation of the socialist past seem to fill the factory and emerge continuously.

For instance, in 2003, the galleries 798 Space and Dayaolu Workshop held an exhibition for 50 Chinese and German sculptors titled *Zuoshou Youshou* (Left Hand, Right Hand). The central piece of the exhibition was the enormous statue of “Mao’s Right Arm,” created by Sui Jianguo.<sup>13</sup> This super-sized piece immediately turned into the most prominent signifier in the factory space evoking the image of the famous sculpture of Mao standing and waving his right hand. While the mold of the sculpture is actually based on the right arm of the artist, remembrance “overkills.” Just as metonymy exploits contiguity between the artist’s and Mao’s right arm, metaphor links Mao’s right arm to the implication of Mao’s waving, and to the Maoist mass mobilizations and political campaigns of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.<sup>14</sup> While this enormous right arm reminds people of the socialist past, as the one and only “body piece,” it also suggests an incredible sense of lack and loss; it also evokes an acknowledgment of the breakdown of the “ultimate icon of communism” (Barmé, 1995, 49) and the public disenchantment with what the icon once stood for: the totalizing ideological discourse of truth and history has become an illusion.

As early as 1997, Sui Jianguo, the artist who made “Mao’s Right Arm,” set up his studio in Factory 798 and staged one piece of his sculpture series *Yi Bo* (Legacy Mantle). The piece soon became a signature sculpture. The huge, body-less/head-less, fiberglass “Mao Jacket” with surface corrosion acknowledged the *disappearance* of the Maoist era; it invoked not so much a sense of “psychic fragmentation and social alienation as

spiritually wounding” (Eagleton, 70),<sup>15</sup> as a preconditioned sense of relief and indifference since nothing metaphysical is left for viewers to struggle against. The empty shell of the “Mao Jacket” also allegorizes the empty shell of the factory space, a *non-place* that can be comfortably made into a monument or a *site of nostalgia* with no (real) human subjects.

Other art works presented in Factory 798 also take advantage of the previously ubiquitous ideological signifiers as if an ever-increasing proliferation of the high socialist signs can satisfy the desire governed by the absence of Mao’s era. These works include Chen Wenling’s sculpture series *Hongse jiyi* (Red Memory), Yang Tao’s painting series *Yangban yundong* (Model Movements), Gao brothers’ sculpture / photography series *Mao xiaojie* (Miss Mao), and Hui Rui’s installation *Maozhuxi wanyuan* (Chairman Mao, 10,000 Yuan). These works provide us with a form of “nostalgic” representation that risks a fetishization of the past as artists and spectators grow increasingly reluctant to face the socialist history of China with critical depth, and instead rely on reminiscence triggered by visual items.<sup>16</sup> If *Shanghai Nostalgia* anxiously looks back to a distant past to displace the history of Chinese socialism, some of the nostalgic projects presented in Factory 798 encourage one to look back at propagandistic materials and ideological signs, and celebrate the recurring act of “looking back.” One can even argue that, some of the “looking-back” artworks are the unmistakably reproducible products circulated in a depoliticizing environment, or, in an environment charged with *postpolitics*, by which “everything is political and nothing is political at one and the same time; politics is everywhere, and yet it subverts itself at any moment” (Chen, 2000, 124).<sup>17</sup> This form of

omnipresent *political unconscious* once exerted its power as a social organizing power and ideological force, and now it has become a symbolic act of parody-travesty flourishing in Factory 798; in a way, it also proves that the particular (socialist) past has gone and what is left for us to do is the harmless consumption of the symbolic value of socialist retro artifacts and the cult of Mao.

This chapter examines Dai Guangyu's performance piece titled *Shi Jin* (Incontinence), performed in one of the signature buildings in Factory 798 in 2005. This performance piece, by presenting and playing with the physical, visual, and metaphorical connotation of an incontinent body, tackles the question of post-socialist nostalgia, since a particular socialist history has been repeatedly compressed and resignified within this specific space.

### **The Incontinent, and the Loss of Prohibition**

In 2005, at the Beijing Tokyo Art Projects (B.T.A.P)—an exhibition gallery founded in 2002 by Yukihiro Tabata at Factory 798, a performance artist, Dai Guangyu, hung himself on a structural beam of the building, “floating” or “being suspended” as paraplegic in the middle of the factory hall, about 60 inches above the ground. His face was painted all white, and he held a rooster in his arms. Sticking a children's toy whistle in his mouth, he occasionally blew into it and made some painful whistle-like noises. Right under his hanging body was a spittoon. Inside his pants, a device was placed close to his crotch and it spread ink arrhythmically and nondirectionally. Some of the ink dropped in the spittoon and some of it missed the container and blackened the floor.

Above his head, the once most popular Maoist slogan in huge and red characters was inscribed on the wall: *Mao zhuxi shi women xinzhong de hongtaiyang* (Chairman Mao is the Red Sun in Our Hearts). But the artist might not be able to pay much attention to the slogan, since the black liquid, in extreme contrast to his whitened face, continued to leak from his pants and he was in a state of, as the title of this piece suggests, *Shi Jin* (Incontinence).

*Shuimo* (water and ink), the medium of traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, has been taken as the primary medium in Dai Guangyu's performance art. Instead of applying water and ink to paper or silk, however, Dai Guangyu uses his body to "intervene" between the page and the pigment. His imagination gestures toward the traces left behind by this interference. His work echoes and yet diverges from Chinese literati visual culture, which was achieved primarily by indexical modes of signification. According to David Clarke's analysis, Chinese traditional art, particularly painting and calligraphy, foregrounds the indexical signs that are suppressed or de-emphasized in European mimetic painting. Chinese calligraphy, for example, exposes and emphasizes brushstrokes as the traces of the artist's endeavors and injects the artist's being into the indexical marks.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the very core of representation of a (Chinese) body in traditional art is not purely or primarily based on mimesis, but is a process of transformation, through which the formlessness or formality of the body deals with a transformational coexistence of the mind, and the body, the spirit, and the matter. In John Hay's view, this transformational process precisely presents the hierarchically differentiated and socially articulated codes.<sup>19</sup>

Dai Guangyu's performance certainly involves indexical and metonymic modes of representation, as any performance does. But unlike in calligraphy, where legible marks capture the three-dimensional sequence of an artist's movements and enable viewers to infer these patterns from the artist's two-dimensional brush strokes, Dai Guangyu's work on water-and-ink intentionally creates illegible chaos. Water-and-ink leaks out of his body, like bodily waste. This scattering of the substance of expression eradicates all possible indexical or iconic representations, failing to construct a proper, controlled social body. Interestingly, in an interview, Dai Guangyu explained that his art deals with the problem of cultural continuation,<sup>20</sup> and his performance of *Incontinence* emphasizes nocturnal emission, another form of bodily failure. How does his performance convey this concept? How does the non-procreative and non-productive liquid leak illuminate the concept of cultural continuation? To start, one might say that the term (continuation), in Dai Guangyu's usage, registers a heightened sense of sincerity as well as irony.

In *Incontinence*, Dai Guangyu's body failed dramatically. His uncontrolled emissions emanated from a body suspended in Factory 798 beneath a deliberately preserved Maoist slogan emphasizing leadership and order. His body was caught between a transitory pleasure and an enduring humiliation, and implicated a problematic continuation that was literally out of control and out of order. The suspended and leaking body emphasized an epitome of contradiction. It hinted at the rigidity of history and memory, but also suggested the possibility of dialogue between past and present—history remade in the anachronistic space. The performance became what Walter Benjamin

termed, “a forever incomplete and imperfect” allegory (Benjamin, 1998, 45). It designated a distance from its origin and rejected the illusion of and nostalgia for a wholeness of history. The allegorical body freezes “the shocked face of history in memorable form” (Seyhan, 68),<sup>21</sup> and yet its enactment captures an experience that is inaccessible to either a stage of realization and transcendence, or a de-contextualized simulacrum of history. Indeed, this body signifies a huge embarrassment and hindrance in this *non-place* of nostalgic history-remaking.

The term *incontinence* is composed of different concepts and layers of meaning. In Aristotle’s *Ethics*, incontinence involves something akin to *akrasia* (weakness of will). Being construed as the loss or lack of self-control with moral implications, incontinence is primarily “concerned with that which is in excess of the state characteristic of most men; for the continent man abides by his resolutions more and the incontinent man less than most men can” (25).<sup>22</sup> Incontinence leads to irrationality and violates rational judgment of what is good, that is, moral. The incontinent person is the one who acts against his choice (*prohairesis*), namely, his rational desire that arises from reason and deliberation. In Thomas Aquinas’s thought, the incontinent, out of passion, deems prohibited acts as good and enjoys the “transitory vice” without recognizing that certain pleasures should not be pursued.<sup>23</sup>

These philosophical analyses of good and evil, rational and irrational, carefully connect shame to passion and avoid the physical and erotic dimension of the so-called incontinent pleasure. Thus, incontinence is coded as intemperate and attributed to the morally “unwise and weak man.” Here incontinence certainly has sexual connotations,

particularly in reference to the inappropriate and uncontrolled promiscuity that could undermine social morality and cause public health problems. While female sexual incontinence, the loss of female chastity, is associated with social incontinence,<sup>24</sup> male sexual incontinence and “out-of-controlness” is naturally and inevitably interpreted as biologically driven and appropriated into the “male sexual drive discourse,” a discourse by which a highly gender-differentiated cultural norm of heterosexual sex and relationship can be legitimated.<sup>25</sup>

Then we can move the term into its most uncomfortable category—incontinence in regard to bodily waste and fluids, and to the modern body in danger of becoming a humoral and unreliable one. The connection between the physically experienced body and its social and discursive realization cannot be overlooked. This bodily dysfunction, as Gail Kern Paster sees it, has also been bounded with social and cultural anxieties imposed upon (gendered) problematic behaviors in the social formations of capitalism.<sup>26</sup> Incontinence emasculates men and places them closer to the feminine state, to a threat of castration and sexual impotence, and to becoming the yielding body with no determinate borders. The incontinent women are, on the other hand, the “leaky vessels,” the ludicrous Bakhtinian grotesque, as they fail to remain in the social role in which they should only urinate privately. The open leaky incontinent body is often seen as dangerously uncontrollable, and the corporeal waste of the female body presents, in Julia Kristeva’s view, “the in-between,” “the ambiguous,” and “the objective frailty of symbolic order” (Kristeva, 1982, 70).

The two Chinese characters, *Shi* and *Jin* (incontinence), are deliberately chosen to title the performance. *Shi Jin*, besides carrying all the above connotations, can also be understood as “losing prohibition” in the literal sense. This loss of prohibition is palpably associated with the fact that, since the market-oriented economy replaced the centrally-planned system, the former omnipresent state has retreated from some economic and political arenas. The socialist ideology that once justified communist transcendence has been abandoned or reinterpreted. The ruling ideology, as Geremie Barmé argues, “has gone through a transmogrification [...], absorbing both communist and capitalist ideas” (Barmé, 1999, 328). The transitional period of the 1990s, accompanied by the loss of “the taboo and the prohibition,” was also the society’s anxiety about the “loss of the sacred and safe,” mainly propelled by the economic and political uncertainty, the soaring social inequality and bureaucratic corruption, and the Tiananmen Square crackdown. What emerged as a response was, as Barmé unmistakably terms it, “totalitarian nostalgia,” an ambivalent sensation toward a “yearned-for” Maoist past that ostensibly promised social harmony and utopian perfection. Totalitarian nostalgia expressed longing for national security and pride provided during the more totalitarian Maoist era. This type of nostalgia was expected as “a language of *denunciation* that offered simple solutions to complex problems” (Barmé, 1999, 317).<sup>27</sup>

When examining the ways in which a touch of nostalgia affected the society of the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, Svetlana Boym carefully detects the complementary interplay between two forms of nostalgia—*utopian* and *ironic*. According to Boym’s account, whereas utopian nostalgia is reconstructive and totalizing,

stressing “the first root of the word, *nostos* (home),” and emphasizing “the return to that mythical place on the island of utopia where the ‘greater patria’ has to be rebuilt,” ironic nostalgia is something inconclusive and fragmentary, which “puts the emphasis on *algia*, longing, and acknowledges the displacement of the mythical without trying to rebuild it” (Boym, 285).

Dai Guangyu’s performative *Incontinence* strategically represents both forms of nostalgia. The sense of “ironic nostalgia” is easier to perceive. On the one hand, the artist performed the piece in a former state-run factory, originally conceived as an element of the future communist utopia and a model of manufacturing efficiency. The factory served the socialist narrative that lauded a proletarian collective consciousness and promoted an ideal of nationalist industrialization. All of these ideas were encapsulated in the slogan painted on the factory wall and in the structure of the building itself. During the 1950s and 1960s, the heyday of Factory 798, an architectural aesthetic of utilitarian and functionalist logic dominated industry and exchange. Factories such as 798 served as the material foundation of a labor collective and the center of an egalitarian way of life, and it also operated as self-contained communities for urban workers and their families, struggling together to construct the utopian vision of socialism. In *Incontinence*, the artist’s gyrating body with the problematic function and implication precisely signifies what was lost. It signifies the absence of the collective, the collapse of the aestheticized milieu of the workers, and the disappearance of place that once integrated life, art, and production.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, the dribbling dark fluids and hanging corporeal shell create a haunting visual effect of violence and displacement. The ghostly hung man resembles the tragic “suicide hanging,” a person’s final gesture of disobedience against a miscarriage of justice in the Confucian system. Similar forms of extreme violence against the self, as a reaction to and an escape from hopelessness, reportedly occurred often during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>29</sup> That sense of displacement derived from the performance acknowledges the unredeemable pain and humiliation from the past; it also reveals that the nostalgic search for a secure and *grounded* homespace can be nothing but a futile gesture, and the nostalgic attitude toward the past does not reflect “continuation” as it does a predetermined “discontinuation” of that secure past. It is fair to argue that the “brutal” commemoration creates a dialogical tension and contradiction with the commemoration of the brutality in the past, and performs a *perceived* mourning and melancholia for the impossibility of return.

The expressionless, whitened face is also deliberately used in *Incontinence*. This “masked” face, which conceals the real identity of the performer, is Dai Guangyu’s trademark persona and has been repeatedly employed in a number of performances, such as *Yidi kan dianying* (Be Lost) in 1999,<sup>30</sup> *Shanshui* (Picturesque Landscape) in 2006, and *Yizhiji yu yizhi siqu de tuzi duihua shi kunnan de* (It is Difficult to Make a Dialogue between a Rooster and a Dead Rabbit) in 2007. The disguised and over-repeated representation of “the face” can be attributable to what Zhu Qi characterizes as an important allegorical feature of contemporary Chinese visual art, namely, *de-individualization* of the individual.<sup>31</sup> This abstract spectacularization of the self

withdraws any unequivocal idiosyncratic expression; it fashions the self as a “spectacle of the collective,” and as “allured by the act of searching for and ridiculing the collective spirit.”<sup>32</sup>

The approach of using a singular persona with identical or similar facial expressions—most of which are based on self-portraits of the artists—throughout a series of visual practices has been evident in the work of some contemporary Chinese artists since the 1990s. The head-shaven yawning man by Fang Lijun, the endlessly grinning face by Yue Minjun, and the people who wear the same masks and the same *hong linjin* (the red scarf—the symbol of the bloodshed for the revolution) by Zeng Fanzhi, for instance, are the most recognizable trademark figures in the post-1989 art movement of *wanshi xianshi zhuyi* (Cynical Realism).<sup>33</sup> When encountering everyday life, historical moments, and even an execution scene, these famous personas all carry the intentionally-made unitary facial expression, and, each expression can be duplicated many times and juxtaposed within a single composition. As the visual subjects are made to splurge on the recurring and identical expression and establish a “self” as the collective spectacle, their affect and memories are excessively emptied out and only the bodily husks are reserved to “make scenes.” Invaded by the wholesale nature of symbolization, any individual identity is rendered to represent the collective everyman. And yet, the decontextualization of the visual symbolization—for instance, the never-ending joviality, or, the so-called post-Mao cynical euphoria, demonstrated through Yue Minjun’s laughing man—at the same time violates the arbitrary and totalizing order between signifier and signified.

Using his recurring disguised and whitened face to “unfeelingly” and “expressionlessly” encounter various forms of social and performative circumstances, Dai Guangyu’s spectacularization of the collectivized self, which nevertheless remains after “losing the prohibition,” also tackles the tension between the individual and the collective. While his nonchalant appearance illustrates a physical and psychological separation from and expulsion of the Maoist cult and sign, the “abject” with the aura of the sublime, if borrowing Kristeva’s term, “permeates” the subject and brings about the realization of the subject as always-already a part of the “abject” (11),<sup>34</sup> and always as an ordinary product out of many. In a way, *Incontinence* brings in a loss of and an uncanny nostalgia for the wholeness.

### **A Surplus of Nostalgia, and a Failure of Transcendence**

Being inevitably inauthentic, nostalgia is a strategic and selective recollection of the past; it lingers on the lost past and acts as, in James Hart’s account, “the secret of the present protention of the future” (405). Hart’s article on the phenomenology of nostalgia carefully looks into how nostalgia functions in relation to our perceived temporality. I quote Hart at length here.

Various themes of nostalgic reveries suggest that the present future is included in the nostalgic past. Where we were in the golden time of nostalgia was a home for us not unlike the home of which we are now in search. But as an explicit remembering of the past actual home would only reveal a prosaic reality, so the explication of the everyday expectation of the present future would not reveal the golden qualities of the hoped-for future

(Hart, 408)

According to Hart's analysis, the here and the now of the present *remembering I* slips into the memory world in which the future (in the remembered past) was not yet determined. Subsequently, from the standpoint of the *remembering I*, the future provided by the memory "appears determined up to the very moment of the present remembering." This trick of temporality invoked by nostalgia generates a specific pattern of being, by which the past, with the newly given intentionality, is able to bridge and comprehend the *present future*.<sup>35</sup>

Here, one form of *socialist nostalgia*, constructed in the form of retelling personal stories known as *su ku* (speaking bitterness), can be taken as an illuminating example of this functional nostalgia. This retelling and reorganizing of personal memories present an expression of discontent against the most recent version of modernity in the PRC that displaces the nostalgic subjects and disavows their historical identities.<sup>36</sup> Lisa Rofel's ethnographic study that interrogates the teleological discourse of modernity in the PRC shows that the old Chinese women workers in the increasingly marginalized state-owned factories draw on socialist nostalgia, the dominant mode of which "endeavors to capture a protected and pure essence of socialism that precedes the history of its degradation" (Rofel, 1999, 136). Their nostalgic memorization not only reconstructs a historical narrative of the past in which they were once the heroes of the Maoist state, but also provides an alternative socialist history and implicit social commentary on the postsocialist vision of modernity.

This strategic recollection and representation of the past facilitates the subject to create both a contested terrain in which to review the gendered and ideologized identity

in the socialist past, and “a certain distance between themselves [...] and the post-Mao state” (Rofel, 1999, 137). In other words, this type of nostalgia takes part in lived experiences, harks back to the historical trajectory from the past to the present and to the future, and expresses the attempt to diverge from teleologically-charged paths of progress, which, in this case, is China’s modernization. In reconstructing the individual temporality of *remembering I*, these aged women workers, or, the marginalized nostalgic subjects, imagine and value their future in a more critical way, and gradually develop a new form of collective identity and consciousness—instead of thinking of themselves as mere wage earners, these workers still preserve certain commitment and pride in contributing themselves to the workplace, which is also their home.

Unfortunately, nostalgia, particularly with the economy of nostalgia in the postmodern age, has also become a surplus; it is overdosed with signification and memorization of history. The resignifying productivity based on the continuously melancholy fascination with displacement inherently results in the surplus consumption and investment of the sign exchange value of individual and cultural memory. The phenomenological experience of nostalgia and its multiple temporalities is easily and entertainingly added with a postmodern touch. Through the consumption of nostalgia, the irretrievable past is made to appear at the present and then to disappear into the future, as a *history effect*, by which we find and accept that the imagined past can go perfectly hand in hand with the imagined future. To put it in another way, the desire for a moment of transcendence is now subordinated to signs.

Jean Baudrillard predicts the end of critical reflection and transcendence in the postmodern world of consumption and simulation: “there is no transcendence any more, not even the fetishistic transcendence of the commodity. There is now only immanence in the order of signs” (Baudrillard, 1998, 192). In this order of signs, nostalgia replaces history and “assumes its full meaning” (Baudrillard, 1994, 6-7),<sup>37</sup> and transcendence, or, the so-called postmodern transcendence, promises nothing but makes an ephemeral and brilliant spectacle. While the experience of postmodernity is like a kind of “macro-nostalgia,”<sup>38</sup> it is possible that the modernist aesthetics that have longed for a transcendental moment of exceeding the existing praxis and its temporality will turn out to be vain hopes.

As a result, another form of socialist nostalgia, the postmodern one, takes more pleasure in diving into the semiotic matrix of the socialist history, and it also, as Susan Stewart notes in her book on the problematic relations between lived experience and narrative of longing, “reproduces itself as a felt lack” (Stewart, 23). This type of nostalgia exploits the slippage between the nostalgic narrative and the lived experience, which is manifested as the sign in crisis in the representational practice, and as the gap between signifier and signified that Derrida and others have termed the “myth of presence in Western metaphysics” (Stewart, 17). The original loss, the signified or the referent, is less attractive than the desire for what is lost, a desire that is only sustainable by dwelling in a self-sufficient sign-making machine and separating the loss and its substitute presence(s)—the signifier. This is where we can see that nostalgia flourishes precisely ascribable to the segregation of history and its consumable narrative, and, as

Stewart argues, that the “nostalgic dreams of a moment before knowledge and self-consciousness that itself lives on only in the self-consciousness of the nostalgic narrative” (23). And, the particular form of socialist nostalgia, from this perspective, should be understood as a longing narrative structured by the “ideological closure on the meaning of socialism” (Rofel, 1999, 137), from which a real amnesia—or, a real loss—of the past that indulges our excessive interpretation and parade of the particular history can come into being. To my understanding, a desire for a moment of transcendence of the existent and present is therefore provided by, and expected from this postmodern socialist nostalgia, with a “distinctly utopian face.”<sup>39</sup>

When we return to Dai Guangyu’s *Incontinence* at this point, we can find the ways in which “incontinence,” no matter whether it is conceptualized as morally weak or physically degenerated, constitutes an ambiguous and profane state that is precisely impossible for transcendence. For instance, confronting the well-protected, ready-for-nostalgia textual ruins of the painted Maoist slogan, which can be utilized as a perfect spot on which nostalgia dwells and redeems an idealized past in the trendy mode of cultural consumption, the performing body is made to, metaphorically and literally, dribble away the ink and disarray its visible traces. Those black and messy (bodily) traces, which are potentially indexical signs referable to text or inscription of certain gestures acknowledge a discontinuity between the given historicity and the individual endeavor to fetishize and transcend that given, and between the referenced signification and its resignification.<sup>40</sup>

Holding and talking with a rooster has been a recurring setting in Dai Guangyu's performance series. He enjoys using the somewhat strange action of interacting with an animal to mimic Joseph Beuys's similar action in *How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare* (1965). In the performance presented at the Schmela Gallery in Diisseldorf, Beuys's head was coated in a mixture of honey and gold leaf, indicating a potential in alchemical transformation. He spent three hours in a "conversation" with a dead hare, since "even a dead animal preserves more powers of intuition than some human beings with their stupid rationality" (Hopkins, 90). In the enigmatical and poetic explanation of his artistic principles to the dead hare, Beuys endowed his art with a strong sense of idiosyncratic charisma, legitimacy, and myth, as though he and only he could manage to "divine" art into its ontological and essential realm, so that certain human existence and its possibility of transcendence could be mystically revealed. Fat, felt, honey—the primary mediums of Beuys's art, the benign and redemptive materials—unquestionably reaffirm his idea that everything is in a state of change; they symbolize the alchemical transmutation as well as promise of a social, spiritual, and spatio-temporal transcendence. Urszula Szulakowska astutely points out that Beuys's *Fat Chair* (1963) implies "history is no more substantial than myth, [and] redemption is possible through the imagination alone" (182). Intentionally imitating and mocking the transcendental confidence embedded in Beuys's act that is preoccupied with occult and unspeakable experiences, Dai Guangyu, the rooster held against his hung body, and the annoying whistle sound, only construct an unspiritual, copy-cat-like performative composition "in bad taste." One can also argue that the unsuccessful aesthetic autonomy and sublimity subtly plays with a

*spatio-temporal lump* at which one cannot be channeled throughout different stages of the “advent of being.”

In this sense, *Incontinence* also distinguishes itself from many other contemporary performance pieces in China that seek to create a link between transcendence and actions that entail terror and violence, a link that reflects the classical Kantian idea and formation of the sublime. Since the 1990s, a number of documentary photographs of contemporary Chinese performance art have shown the artists’ brutal treatment of their own performing bodies—the male bodies in particular. In *Shier Pingfangmi* (12 Square Meters, 1994), for instance, the artist Zhang Huan covered his naked body in fish oil and honey, and sat in a stench-filled public toilet, attracting flies. Yang Zhichao, another performance artist, invited people to plant grass in his back or brand his government ID number on the body.<sup>41</sup> In a performance titled *Zhu* (*Casting*), in 2004, the artist He Yunchang cast himself within a cement block and stayed in there for 24 hours. The internationally notorious “voluntary and self-inflicted” enactment of pain and suffering of the (male) body through performance has become a contentious issue at levels of social and scholarly inquiry.

In Gao Minglu’s view, these artists, by using the body to pursue the emotional and physical capabilities of endurance, show their belief in and commitment to human dignity in the most unbearable socio-political environment, namely, the new wave of political conservatism and the boom of consumer society in the post-1989 era.<sup>42</sup> Lesley Sanderson, from “a westerner’s point of view,” comments on these pieces from another direction and criticizes this mode of cruel embodiment as “a motif and another way of

classifying, othering, and exoticizing the body” (Sanderson, 82). But both of the reviews note how the artists understand the act of self-torturing the body as a path toward sublimity and transcendence, and as a way in which the spectators might “suture” their aesthetic and cognitive abilities to “find back” themselves in the socio-political chaos and thus be liberated along with the artists. To my understanding, the above performative presentations of the male body, while criticizing the brutality of political repression and ideological zeal in the Maoist era, as well as commenting on the public disillusionment and skepticism in the post-1989 everyday life in the PRC, explicitly insist upon the self-contained qualities of the work of art, and try the very best to approach the sense of grandeur and magnificence through “super” masculine physicality and aestheticized magnitude. This longing for sublimity and martyrdom, given their sources in terror, pain, and power, ironically echoes or mirrors the positivist and revolutionary romanticism demonstrated in socialist realism.

In contrast to such performative sublimity, Dai Guangyu’s *Incontinence* showcases a disappointing and emasculating image of bodily endurance, a phenomenologically constructed “perception of the end of the ideal,” and “failure of transcendence.” Also, while some performance artists emphasize dialogue between the social and historical determinants of site and the art work within, *Incontinence*, along with its sense of anti-sublimity, expresses a mocking attitude toward the overexploited site-specificity, as the pre-existing spatial and architectural signifiers of Factory 798 have been immodestly used to produce second-hand representations of the real. Opposed to *lieux de mémoire* (sites/places of memory), in which traces of memory can be physically

crystallized or “taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge [...]” (Nora, 13),<sup>43</sup> Factory 798, a site of nostalgia, does not necessarily entail the exercise of memory and body’s inherent self-knowledge, or “take root in the concrete.” Rather, such a site works with an overabundance of signification that continues to be evocative and to connote more than it can possibly do.

Nostalgia is narrative; it is, in Susan Stewart’s view, a process that orchestrates retrieved information about the past, and the past probably “has never existed except as narrative” (23).<sup>44</sup> As Factory 798—the “gradually expanding signifier” that produces the effect of time and space—functions precisely by making use of the orchestrated narratives of the past, it deftly integrates different narratives into a unifying source of discourse. In 2003, a group of studio artists in Factory 798 voluntarily participated in a social project titled *Zaizao 798* (Reconstructing 798).<sup>45</sup> At the surface level, the project was a direct result of the controversy between the art community and the property management company—Seven Star Group, regarding the allocation and arrangement of some spaces in Factory 798. At a deeper level, through *Reconstructing 798*, a number of artists began to draw the attention of the public to Factory 798 by projecting its particular socio-political history. They also gradually developed a distinctly new ecology deliberately derived from a series of contrasts, such as utopia vs. reality, past vs. future, and historical sediments vs. development paradigms. These aestheticized binary oppositions about recounting the past in the present strangely promise a peculiar effect of the real (history). Soon, the Beijing government and the government of Beijing’s

Chaoyang district understood the ways in which the so-called “contemporary art” might not only ensure the prosperity of the art market but also result in certain political achievements. The artists also found that the creation and development of the socialist nostalgia effectively coupled local resources to global opportunities. Moreover, the so-called “Cold War paranoid,” as some people conceived, still brought in an intricate negotiation between political and aesthetic power; it certainly also brought in new artistic inspirations and sufficient cultural capital. As a result, *Reconstructing 798* has been developed into a sustained concept, by which Factory 798 can obtain legitimacy and acceptance through forms of ambiguities in regard to the reconstruction and re-interpretation of socialist history, culture, and ethics. It is also precisely through this form of “reconstructive” visualization of plenitude that Factory 798—the site of nostalgia—might evoke an imagined and semiotic wholeness that would not be lost because it never existed.

As the hung and out-of-control body of Dai Guangyu stubbornly lingers between past and present, it makes an empty gesture to “confess” its lack of lived experience since it is a pure spectacle, a sign contributing to the nostalgic sense of a real loss in this *non-place*. In a way, the piece suggests the problem of “lacking” and “leaking” identities in this particular space. It both admits the hunger for roots that are fundamental to our deepest identity, and is vigilant about the way in which it can be turned into a retro visual effect for consumption of the socialist past, just like the magnified “Mao’s Right Arm” or “Mao Jacket.” “I cannot and will not go anywhere; I am this endless”—in this state of incontinence—that is against the very longing for retrieving the uncatchable eminence of

the past and turns what was lost into a restorative, idealizing image of plenitude—we find the new definition of nostalgia.

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<sup>1</sup> See Dai Jinhua's "798: mingxie yu yanmai lishi de kongjian" (798: the Space that Inscribes and Buries History), 30.

<sup>2</sup> In October, 1957, Joint Factory 718—the predecessor of Factory 798—had a glorious opening and enthusiastically welcomed the workers. The China's vice premier Bo Yibo and the East Germany's vice premier Erich Honecker presented at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. "To the citizen of Beijing, (the factory) becomes a coveted place *to work, to live, and to contribute* to the communist cause. It becomes a shining example of the communist ideal—*work hard for the community, and the community will take care of you* (italics added by the author)." See Eliot Kiang's "798: Five Glorious Decades" in *Reflections on Art, Architecture, and Society in China: Beijing 798*.

<sup>3</sup> Starting in 1997, the Chinese central government launched a number of major initiatives to reform the industrial sectors, which dismantled the political economic basis of the planned economy. The initiatives, with the aim of strengthening central state fiscal capacity, have resulted in the decline of the traditional industrial constituencies. Most factories of Joint Factory 718 had to reduce productivity severely after the mid 1980s, and a large number of factory workers left their posts (*xia gang*, a euphemism for layoff). The factory complex went through a decline and eventually faded away from the economic stage. Parts of the complex have been laid idle for years, turned into obsolete ruins, or simply torn down. Also see *Reflections on Art, Architecture, and Society in China: Beijing 798*, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Since the late 1990s, groups of artists and art merchants have begun to move in the space, establishing horizontal cooperation and networks, and trying to keep themselves away from the vertical reliance on the state and its patronage systems. They have gradually transformed the factory space into an approximately 500,000 square meters area (including performance spaces, studios, galleries, cafes, restaurants, shops, and residence area), making Factory 798 into an exclave and a citadel of a huge number of independent artists, art dealers and collectors. "Almost overnight," writes Karon Morono Kiang, "798 had established itself as a viable alternative, a center of contemporary art, architecture and culture that was as organic as it was vibrant." In November of 2007, the Belgian art collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens established the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA)—a non profit Art Centre—in Factory 798. Also see Karon Morono Kiang's "Introduction: A New Vocabulary" in *Reflections on Art, Architecture, and Society in China: Beijing 798*.

<sup>5</sup> In the 11<sup>th</sup> municipal Five-Year-Plan, the Beijing Municipal Government states that "Cultural Creative Industry" is one of the future pillar industries of Beijing, and the government will "give priority to the development of six major cultural creative industries." See the official website of *The Beijing Municipal Bureau of Commerce*.

<sup>6</sup> See Ling-Yun Tang's "Postsocialist Cultural Policy in Beijing: Making Space for Contemporary Art." It is an unpublished paper presented at "the Third Annual Graduate Seminar on China" at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2007. The major part of the paper is included in Chapter 1 of Tang's dissertation, entitled "Commodifying Culture in the Global City: Spatial Practices and Symbolic Boundaries of Contemporary Art in Beijing" (2008).

<sup>7</sup> As I mentioned in *Chapter I*, Paul Pickowicz locates the definition of postsocialism within the domain of public perception and considers postsocialism as a negative, dystopian condition that designates public disillusionment and skepticism about the officially defined socialist ideology. That shared overwhelming feeling, writes Pickowicz, is "[...] the public awareness of the failure of the traditional socialist system and the absence of a socialist identity among ordinary people who live in or have lived in traditional socialist societies" (61). See Paul Pickowicz, "Huang Jianxin and the Notion of Postsocialism." Emphasizing the

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importance of *actually existing socialism*, Arif Dirlik's theorization of postsocialism examines the ways in which Mao's socialist politics has been, through state top-down intervention, reconceptualized into the context of global capitalist modernity in a strategic way. He understands this revised socialism as postsocialism, which responds to the experience of capitalism yet still possesses the capabilities to overcome the deficiencies of capitalist development. See Arif Dirlik, "Postsocialism? Reflections on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics."

<sup>8</sup> Also see Celeste Olalquiaga, *Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to point out that both Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus head Erich Mendelsohn insisted on an architectural vocabulary that would, despite advocating mass production and an understanding of the "machine age," embrace spiritual aspirations and formal poetics, rather than the strictly functionalist aesthetics and Rationalist ideals espoused by some of their contemporaries. In this sense, the functionalist style reflected in Factory 798 is not quite the same as the factory aesthetic of the Bauhaus school. Here I am inspired by Jenny Lin's working paper, entitled "798 and the Construction of a Contemporary Chinese Art."

<sup>10</sup> See Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. He writes: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined accordingly will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which [...] do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory,' and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position (77-78)."

<sup>11</sup> *Shanghai Nostalgia*, as a collection of colonial remains, is reflected through a series of literature and cultural works coming out of 1990s. By relocating and reinventing its past via *Shanghai Nostalgia*, the city of Shanghai successfully places itself on the national as well as the transnational stage. See Zhang Xudong's "Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allegories in Wang Anyi's Literary Production in the 1990s." Also see Lu Hanchao's "Nostalgia for the Future: The Resurgence of an Alienated Culture in China."

<sup>12</sup> Also see Zhang Xudong's "Shanghai Nostalgia," 368.

<sup>13</sup> Sui Jianguo is professor and head of the Department of Sculpture in Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.

<sup>14</sup> Feng Boyi, the curator of the exhibition, considers that the exhibition aimed at, by investigating and reinterpreting *Hongse Jiyi* (Red Memory) from a different perspective, searching for a new momentum alternative to the hegemonic globalization. See Feng's "Hongse de jiyi yu xiangxiang" (The Red Memories and Imaginations).

<sup>15</sup> In his essay, Terry Eagleton examines the difference between modernism and postmodernism regarding presence and absence of the subject. He argues that while modernists still search for meaning and get caught up in feelings of alienation and self-contradiction, the postmodernists find the sense of struggle has vanished, for "there is no longer any subject to be alienate." See Terry Eagleton's "Capitalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism."

<sup>16</sup> Some of these individuals experienced turbulence and trauma during the socialist era. Also see Francesca Dal Lago, "Personal Mao: Reshaping an Icon in Contemporary Chinese Art—Chinese Political and Cultural Leader Mao Zedong." (only as reference)

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<sup>17</sup> See Chen Xiaoming's "The Mysterious Other: *Post-Politics* in Chinese Film," and *Biaoyi de Jiaolu* (Anxiety of Representation).

<sup>18</sup> See David Clarke's *Iconicity and Indexicality: The Body in Chinese Art*.

<sup>19</sup> See John Hay's "the Body Invisible in Chinese Art," in *Body, Subject, and Power in China*.

<sup>20</sup> See *A Dialogue between Gao Minglu and Dai Guangyu*, a special contribution to [arts.tom.com](http://arts.tom.com).

<sup>21</sup> Here I borrow Azade Seyhan's intriguing argument from his discussion on the difference between allegory and symbol. See Seyhan's "Allegories of History: The Politics of Representation in Walter Benjamin," in *Image and Ideology in Modern/Postmodern Discourse*.

<sup>22</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics*. Also see Burnyeat's "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good" in *Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays*.

<sup>23</sup> The term, "transitory vice," is borrowed from Bonnie Kent's "Transitory Vice: Thomas Aquinas on Incontinence."

<sup>24</sup> The insistence on female chastity can be understood as a larger concern with sexual discipline. In her research on female victimization and female agency exemplified in Jacobean drama, Karen Bamford examines the discourse of chastity that dictates the representation of women on the early modern stage. She argues that, "historians have observed a heightened emphasis on sexual morality from the middle of the sixteenth century," by which the sexually "unruly," "leaky" women were seen as "unchaste" women. See Bamford's "Introduction" in *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage*.

<sup>25</sup> See Wendy Hollway's "Gender Differences and the Production of Subjectivity" in *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*.

<sup>26</sup> See Gail Kern Paster's "Leaky Vessels: the Incontinent Women of City Comedy" in *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 317.

<sup>28</sup> See McCauley's "Production Literature and the Industrial Imagination."

<sup>29</sup> See *Violence in China Essays in Culture and Counterculture*, edited by Jonathan N. Lipman.

<sup>30</sup> This is a piece performed by Dai Guangyu and Liu Chengying.

<sup>31</sup> See Zhu Qi's *Dizhi Jingguan* (Resisting Spectacles).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> Cynical realist painting emerged in the early 1990s, which usually took ambiguous social-political themes as the subject matter and presented the individual's indifferent and cold attitude to the social environment of China. The term was coined by Li Xianting, a major critic/curator of the underground Chinese arts during the 1980s. Sheldon Lu writes that "[...] Cynical realism is a roguish and irreverent travesty of the official doctrine of 'revolutionary realism' dominant during the Mao era." See *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity*, 146.

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<sup>34</sup> See Kristeva's "Approaching Abjection" in *Powers of Horror*.

<sup>35</sup> Also see James Hart's "Toward a Phenomenology of Nostalgia."

<sup>36</sup> See Lisa Rofel's "Re-Collecting History" in *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism*.

<sup>37</sup> Baudrillard writes: "When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality—a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity." See *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> See Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw's "The Dimensions of Nostalgia" in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*.

<sup>39</sup> Here I borrow a sentence from Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. The original sentence states that "Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality. This point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire. [...] nostalgia is the desire for desire," 23. In Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological account of the Hollywood historical epic, she argues that the repetitive generalization and extravagance of filmic representation of history, when mirroring the real history and exceeding the concrete, creates a multileveled temporality that "can be experienced by the spectator/consumer as subjectively transcendent and objectively significant" (33). Sobchack also points out that, in the phenomenologically constructed "perception of history," "temporality is subjectivity itself qua continuous advent of being" and certain "elevation and transcendence of individual temporality" can be achieved. This argument further points out how nostalgia, when re-organizing and re-imagining the past as "a felt lack" at the present time, envisions the future that is precisely made at present. Also see Sobchack's "Surge and Splendor": A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic."

<sup>40</sup> I am inspired by the genealogy of the sublime theorized by Donald Pease. In his article "Sublime Politics," Pease connects the discourse of modernism (the desire to be at the end of history) with the dialectic of the history and politics of the sublime. He sees that "modernism has used the sublime as a sign of the power of modernism" (43). See "Sublime Politics" in *The American Sublime*. Also see Dainotto, "The Excremental Sublime: The Postmodern Literature of Blockage and Release."

<sup>41</sup> The first piece of Yang Zhichao is entitled *Zhongcao* (Planting Grass), and his second one is entitled *Lao* (Iron)

<sup>42</sup> See Gao MingLu's *The Wall*, 176.

<sup>43</sup> French historiographer Pierre Nora develops the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites/places of memory) to examine the ways in which traces of memory can be physically crystallized and reconstituted to respond to the disappearance of national memory in the modern world. He also recognizes the human body as one of the locations of memory. The sites of memory could be "material" commemorated locations, "symbolic" ceremonial and ritualistic events, or "functional," such as associates and dictionaries. Although a number of scholars questioned the noticeable history/memory dichotomy in Nora's conceptualization, and the separation between the past and the present (Roach, Taylor), and some argued that the idea of *lieux de mémoire* upholds a melancholic and exclusionary nostalgia for the unifying entity and coherent identity of the nation-state (Legg), Nora's theoretical approach should be further developed to understand *history-making* as a project based on the mindful recollection and reconstruction of the past. See Pierre Nora's "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," 13. Also see Joseph Roach's "Deep Skin:

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Reconstructing Congo Square,” Diana Taylor’s “The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas,” Stephen Legg’s “Contesting and Surviving Memory: Space, Nation, and Nostalgia in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” and Andrew Charlesworth’s “Contesting Places of Memory: the Case of Auschwitz.”

<sup>44</sup> The emphasis of Stewart’s analysis, at this point, is on language.

<sup>45</sup> The project was launched in April, 2003, organized by Xu Yong and Huang Rui.

## Chapter 4

### The New Long March—Walking along the Thin Line

*“Historical discourse does not follow the real, it can do no more than signify the real” (122).<sup>1</sup>*

*“The function of narrative is not to “represent,” it is to constitute a spectacle. Narrative does not show, does not imitate [...]” (115).<sup>2</sup>*

—Roland Barthes

The central subject of this chapter is a large-scale, collective artistic and social project entitled *Changzheng, yige xingzou zhong de shijue zhanshi* (the Long March, A Walking Visual Display). Launched in 2002, the new Long March was created to directly respond to the historical Long March of the communist-led Red Army in the mid-1930s. One of the aims of this new project, as the chief curator, Lu Jie, explained to me, is to establish a *chaoji wenben* (super-text) based on the original Long March, which is not only a spatio-temporal coalition of the two “marches,” but also a symbolic mechanism created through a critical mixing of the literary, the visual, and the performative of the event.<sup>3</sup> In Manuel Castell’s theorization, a giant, non-historical super-text constructs a new symbolic world of make-believe, a visibility that encapsulates our material and symbolic existences and is “mistakenly” experienced as our reality.<sup>4</sup> In comparison, the super-text of the new Long March insists on possessing and creating a variety of narrative properties and possibilities based on the original historical event, triggering the cross-historical dialogues between the original and new journeys. Furthermore, this particular super-text can be read as both a performative historiography that resignifies the process of constructing a symbolic world of make-believe, and a

collective identity search that intends to reflect and refashion the past of the “Red” revolution for the vitality and legitimacy of the dimly glimpsed postsocialist future in a global context.

The entire walking visual display not only consisted of artists’ visual presentations, installations, performances, and video and film screenings, but also called upon mutual exchanges of thoughts and material goods among the artists and local villagers.<sup>5</sup> With respect to these two major goals, the new massive and ambitious project tried to, as the arguably New York-based curator, Lu Jie, stated, both provide “a dynamic exhibition platform for artistic creation that is based within local and folk culture and that transmediates between art history and theory,” and reexamine “the experiences of a hundred years of revolutionary struggle and the lived experience of socialism, which has not only influenced every facet of contemporary society in China but has also left a deep residue in the memory of the people” (Lu, 2006, 5).<sup>6</sup> Lu continued:

“Specifically, we will bring art to the people who live along the route of Mao Zedong’s Long March. Mao’s March symbolised the deliverance of the Communist ideal to the Chinese proletariat. It is with this symbolism in mind that we now choose to march contemporary art out to China’s peripheral population”  
(Lucie-Smith, longmarchspace.com)<sup>7</sup>

However, the two goals stated above seem nearly impossible to be bolted together through the geographical and performative walking visual display, since they attempted to (1) connect the party-state legitimized and standardized historiography established along the road of the 1934 Long March with the new Chinese generations to a great extent associated with “a negation of China’s whole revolutionary century” (Wang, 2006, 29),<sup>8</sup> and (2) connect contemporary Chinese art that allegedly caters to global

spectatorship and marketability with the long-neglected rural backcountry areas in the PRC.

### **The Historical Event**

The historic Long March of the Red Army from 1934-1936 was one of the central events in China's revolutionary history. Evading the military encirclement of the Nationalist army and marching for safety,<sup>9</sup> Mao Zedong and the *Zhongguo gongnong hongjun* (Chinese Red Army of Workers and Peasants, abbreviated as Red Army below) abandoned their soviet base and trudged through some of the poorest and most remote areas in mainland China, from Jiangxi Province in the southeast to Gansu Province in the northwest.<sup>10</sup> In the marching, they had to fight against the Nationalist forces, the troops of the local warlords, and the local bandits. Only about 7,000 to 8,000 out of 86,000 troops of the Red Army (including the Central Army Group, the peasant volunteers, and hired posters) survived the arduous 6,000-mile trek.<sup>11</sup> This military migration and spatial exploration eventually enabled the Red Army to escape from Chiang Kai-shek's liquidation of the communist force and preserve the army from destruction. Not long after arriving in northern Shanxi Province in 1935, the Red Army established a new and strong revolutionary base area, developed strong ties with the rural peasantry, and subsequently built up a leadership center in which Mao Zedong came to hold the supreme position.

Given that the Long March was truly a year-long organized retreat from the Central Soviet base area under the increasing military pressure from the Guomindang,

there was neither a clear marching direction nor a specific military strategy before its launch. As a matter of fact,

“Among the CCP leaders, the northern direction of the Long March was a rather controversial choice. In mid- 1935, the decision actually caused a temporary split between the CCP Central Committee and the Fourth Front Army under Zhang Guotao, who preferred a southern march to the Tibetan areas. The rationale for the northern direction was to ‘break through’ to Soviet assistance by reaching either the Chinese-Soviet border in Xinjiang or the border of the MPR.”

(Liu, 2006, 91)<sup>12</sup>

When the marching began, the Communist Party actually “did not have any long term plans as to where to go or what to do” (Yang, 1990, 101).<sup>13</sup> When seeking the aim from the Soviet Union, the Red Army also had to survive the restless nationalist pursuing forces that tried to block the path of the marching, and, at the same time, “avoid the weakening or destruction of the Chinese Communist military forces in conflicts with Japanese forces” (Collins, 58). As Jerome Ch’en sees the Long March, “History offers few comparable triumphs of will-power over circumstance, nor a better example of constant improvisation” (Ch’en, 1986, 209). Historically speaking, the “improvisational” characteristics were also the result of the desertion of some enlisted men or cadres from the Red Army, severe disagreements among the top leaders of the army, the political crisis and even a split within the party and the army.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the Long March was still a journey toward survival and even revival; it allowed the Red Army to carry on from military defeat and gradually shape a discursively and physically solidified collective body—composed of the central community of the Red Army and the related marchers scattered over the countryside.

The Long March soon became the founding myth about the birth of the new China and a metaphor for the “Red” revolution. It was regarded as “an epic story that bolstered the legitimacy of the Communist Party in the eyes of the people” (Wright, 26), although it was a fateful military retreat to preserve the power of the CCP and the Red Army, a political struggle and reconfiguration, a tremendous physical hardship, and a profound journey pulling together experiences and viewpoints from those who endured and survived it. In the report given by Mao Zedong at the Wayaobao Conference held by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in December 1935, he first termed the unprecedented military migration as *Chang Zheng* (the Long March), stressing that “the Long March is the first of its kind in the annals of history. [...] it is a manifesto, a propaganda force, a seeding-machine” (Mao, 1965, 160). Scholars have pointed out the significance of the Wayaobao conference, as it created a new stage of Chinese revolutionary history, in which the CCP adopted the strategy of building up an anti-Japanese United Front with the national bourgeoisie, and moved from a class-based struggle to a national struggle against Japan’s Invasion.<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Yang’s study, for instance, understands this specific conference as a turning point of the CCP from revolutionary activism to a politically realistic policy.<sup>16</sup> It is not surprising to know that the term “Long March” immediately went down in history after the Wayaobao conference, and the event of the Long March soon became one of the most legitimate political resources of the CCP; for, the Long March, as a summit and a crucial transitional period in the history of the communist revolutionary movement in China, seemed to demonstrate both the leading role played by the CCP and the Red Army, and

the spiritual and political capital that can be drawn upon when discussing China's "Red" revolution.

### The Creation of an Epic

As early as Spring, 1936, Mao Zedong proposed to organize a compilation committee by the Political and Propaganda Department of *Hong yi fangmian jun* (Red First Front Army, also called the Central Red Army), which would collect and edit articles, local records, diaries and oral histories regarding the Long March. He also called for a number of leftist writers to narrate and compile the epic event.<sup>17</sup> Searching for material help and supplies from foreign resources was the very first and immediate motivation of the CCP behind the compilation project,<sup>18</sup> even though some argue that the aim of such a process of "tidying up" history on the part of the Chinese communists was to "portray the Long March as a fully successful result of flawless decision-making on the part of the present leadership" (Wilson, xvii). The project had to be postponed due to the CCP's launch of *Dongzheng* (the Eastern Expedition) in February 1936, and yet was brought back on track when Edgar Snow, an American journalist and writer, arrived in Bao'an in northern Shanxi in the summer of 1936 and interviewed Mao and other CCP leaders. Snow's acclaimed book, *Red Star over China*, first came out in 1938. As one of the earliest literatures that introduced the Long March to the readers in the West, the book promoted a positive portrayal of the role of the CCP and certainly attracted sympathetic attention from the western readers. Depicting the Long March as the "adventure, exploration, discovery, human courage and cowardice, ecstasy and triumph, suffering,

sacrifice, and loyalty, [...] like a flame, an undimmed ardor and undying hope and amazing revolutionary optimism of those thousands of youth who would not admit defeat either by man or nature or God or death” (Snow, 190),<sup>19</sup> Snow’s accounts provided a rather realistic and convincing picture of the Long March as “an Odyssey unequalled in modern times” (Snow, 190). In the mean time, the party historians were also effectively motivated and organized to create the narrative of the Long March, in hope of publicizing to the world the significant military event in its relation to the party leadership, and striving for outside recognition and support. Given that many official documents of the Communist Party and the historical records of the marching were lost or seriously damaged in the grasslands and in crossing rivers,<sup>20</sup> the party historians had to “re-invent” the historical facts and scenes based on the available evidence, such as memories, diaries, and certain historical imaginations.<sup>21</sup>

After 1949, numerous literary, visual, and performing artworks either serving as the party-state’s triumphant propaganda or drawing from personal memoirs and individual creative expression regarding the journey, emerged continuously, all of which further transformed the historical event into a grand heroic and romantic epic about faith, endurance, and sacrifice. The most important works include *Changzheng Zuge* (The Long March Chorus), a series of short stories depicting the ordeal marching of the Red Army soldiers by Wang Yuanjian,<sup>22</sup> and a widescreen feature film titled *Wanshui Qianshan* (Ten Thousand Rivers and a Thousand Mountains) that came out in 1959. Some of the renowned stories—such as *Pa Xueshan* (Climbing the Snowy Mountains), *Guo Xiaodi* (Crossing the Grass Lands), *Sidu Chishui* (Four Crossings of the Red River),

and *Feiduo Luding Qiao* (Taking over the Luding Bridge)—were included in primary schools' textbooks and taught nationwide. According to the observation of Zhang Enhua, “every decade since the 1930s witnessed at least one historiography of this event controlled directly by the Communist Party” (Zhang, [www.longmarchspace.com](http://www.longmarchspace.com)).

Since the late 1950s, the focal point of any narrative on the subject of the Long March has, to some extent, shifted from propagating the revolutionary heroism and utmost fortitude of the Red Army to theorizing the historical experience and the development of the CCP through its long journey.<sup>23</sup> The history regarding the Zunyi Conference in Guizhou Province, held on January 15-17, 1935, for instance, was deliberately developed into a central scene of the narrative, with the intention of highlighting Mao's masterful leadership during one of the most difficult chapters of China's “Red” revolution. Whereas the revolutionary movement led by the CCP that seemed to sweep up the entire nation was, as a matter in fact, as some scholar has put it, “a process made up of myriad local struggles with their own dynamics and ultimately their own meanings,” [...] and “some (local struggles) only loosely linked to national-level goals” (Schoppa, 105),<sup>24</sup> the narrative of the Long March has been unquestionably shaped into a remarkable national-scaled storyline, threading its way through the representation of the revolution. It has effectively integrated the subsidiary accounts into the central body of the narrative, thereby unifying a congeries of ideological discourse, social context, historical contingency, and human agency.

### **The New Long March in 2002**

Responding to the historic journey of the Long March, *the Long March, A Walking Visual Display* was initiated in 1999, launched in Beijing in 2002. The project somewhat resonated with *Peredvizhniki* (“travelers” or “wanderers”)—one of the earliest modern art movements in Russia, formed by a group of artists whose goal was to rebel against the rigid conservatism of St. Petersburg’s Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. This group of plebeian intelligentsia also aimed to make art accessible to the majority of people by organizing traveling exhibitions throughout the countryside. Taking the form of traveling exhibitions as well, the major group of curators, artists, and two camera crews of the new Long March headed to Jiangxi Province by train on June 28, 2002. The first stop of the new journey was Ruijin (Jiangxi Province), where the central government of the Chinese Soviet Republic (1931-1934) was located. Along the way, a number of local and international artists also joined the marching and presented/created their art pieces in specific locations. Temporally and spatially speaking, the 2002 Long March was inherently a multifaceted project of huge dimensions. This ambitious five-month traveling art show spanned three months and five provinces, involving more than two hundred and fifty artists from China and other countries to exhibit their art works along the route of the 1934 Long March. Many of the art pieces were intentionally created to respond to the historical, political, ideological, geographical, or artistic contexts of the original Long March. This contemporary revisit of the past journey of China’s “Red” revolution, as proved later, invoked a mixed assortment of forms of representation that resignify what has been articulated or elided by the state-endorsed and commonly-perceived mythical and legendary narrative(s) of the 1934 Long March.

Perhaps precisely due to the impossibility and paradox intrinsically embedded in the project, arguably designed and desired by the curators from the very beginning, the new Long March has been shaped into a project filled with viable actions and multiple interpretations. More specifically, whereas the new Long March can be understood as a constellation of social practices and relations, “a massive performance” that triggered cross-historical dialogues between what was conducted in the new walking display and in the past journey, this new journey, as I will further illustrate below, also constantly brought incongruous ideas and actions into play; it enabled, if not celebrated, the coexistence of different temporalities and spaces, of distinct artistic materials and techniques, and of a variety of perceptions and conceptions with regard to the 1934 Long March. As a matter of fact, the collective re-enactment of the historic marching performatively injected the existing narrative with plenty of paradox and doublespeak. While some artists and scholars imagined the new visual display to be a utopian re-embodiment of the revolutionary legacy, others found clear traces of anti-utopian irony. As the history of the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, or other turbulent social and political campaigns, which were also rooted in revolutionary collectivism and utopian ideal of eventual Communism that still haunt us today, the question is to what extent the contemporary marchers were willing to truly arouse the very memories of the 1934 Long March and search for the alleged promised land.

### **The Orthodox Narrative of the Long March**

The party-endorsed, official narrative of the Long March can be used as an example in understanding the fundamental structure and function of narrative historiography. While Hayden White's elaborate examination and categorization of narrative historiography describes a number of models of historical narrative as systems of meaning-production from distinct perspectives,<sup>25</sup> my study focuses on the semiologically-oriented historical representation of "reality" and its particular mode of emplotment. Neither being registered within a chronological framework of the historical occurrences alone, nor functioning as a general integration and configuration of the sequence of "real" events, the narrative of the Long March as a whole is structured within a set of "propositionality," seeking completeness and continuity to govern the articulation of the particular history. In my view, three major characteristics of the historical discourse of the Long March endowed with logical structure of narrative historiography can be observed.

First, the official narrative of the Long March effectively creates a totalizing epic of an ultimately triumphant utopian journey and unifies the given empirical portraits into a singular and homogeneous discursive cluster based upon the negation and omission of certain historical accounts. For instance, even though the expeditions of the Second and Fourth Front Armies were included within the official narrative, they were to a great degree marginalized within this heroic human drama. Benjamin Yang points out that "the starting date of the Long March remain[ed] the date when the First Front Army (the Central Red Army) set forth from the Jiangxi Soviet," even though the Third Front Army led by He Long and the Fourth Front Army under the leadership of Zhang Guotao

embarked on their expeditions as early as October 1932.<sup>26</sup> Gao Hua considers that, since both the Central Committee Politburo and the Central Military Commission marched along with the Central Red Army, this “central unit” undoubtedly constituted the nucleus of the marching, receiving acknowledgement from the international communist movement, and therefore became the perfect orthodox and justified subject of the Long March. Furthermore, with a group of intellectuals and a younger generation of Soviet-educated officials joining the Central Red Army, the subject of this marching army played an important role in terms of providing and circulating historical documents and memories of the marching, both during and after the event.<sup>27</sup> Such an effort further helped unify the narrative and strengthen the uniform discourse of events.

Second, the historical events of the Long March were hierarchically endowed and interwoven into the narrative in response to their historical significance. Whereas the central narrative of the Long March evidently manifested a set of collectively-experienced difficulty, sacrifice, and violence, and whereas some heroic figures were represented as the ones who embodied the forward historical movements culminating in victory, Mao’s leadership in the marching was deliberately choreographed within the revolutionary discourse and was projected in the form of essential texts. According to David Apter and Tony Saich’s analysis of the relationships among the real events and the political discourse of the Chinese communist revolution, the establishment of the discourse community in Yan’an in the early 1940s as a “revolutionary simulacrum” and “a symbolically orchestrated tutelary regime” was regarded as a central event, by which the party and Mao were carefully positioned into the narratives of revolutionary history.<sup>28</sup>

Apter and Saich further argue that the narrative of the Long March, especially after being fashioned by the Yan'anites, positioned Mao as the one chosen and recognized by the revolution, and reinvented him as the Odysseus of revolutionary history: “(the narrative) put Mao on stage, telling stories [...] he was a master of the second-order discourse” (Apter and Saich, 85). What is more, I would argue that, in virtue of the narrative of the Long March, Mao's image has been enriched and developed, from a master strategist of peasant uprisings and guerilla warfare, to a prominent charismatic and idealistic leader of the communist revolutions, and further to a politically realistic figure and an ideological icon. If, as some scholars suggest, the image of Mao in the early phrase was promoted and used in a more practical manner,<sup>29</sup> the Long March narrative has to some extent successfully mystified Mao's representation and imbued it with significant symbolic dimensions, transforming the image into a sacred and fateful symbol of the political rituals that forcefully captured people's emotions and beliefs.<sup>30</sup>

Third, while the basic narrative model of the Long March presents a number of legendary and dynamic fighting and marching scenes, the aesthetics of the narrative consciously accentuate the objective and the process of the collective painstaking search for a new subjectivity, or, a form of class consciousness. This narrative, as a matter of fact, embodies a crucial transition from May Fourth and New Era Literature to the Left-Wing Literature of the 1930s (including both the Literature of the Liberated Areas and Resistance Literature). As the key creative subject, the May Fourth intellectuals worked with the didactic materials in their narrative imagination to make an outcry against imperialist incursions and social injustices through May Fourth and New Era Literature,

as well as carefully exploring the dynamics and tensions between the critical, narrating observer (as themselves) and the mass. Lu Xun, for instance, as a representative May Fourth writer, assumed a rather reflexive attitude toward himself when creating literary representations based on his observation of Chinese society. The well-known narrative of Lu Xun's slide-viewing incident in his microbiology class in Japan depicts a crucial moment at which he detected the lack of the spiritual apathy among the Chinese crowd as they seemed to "enjoy" the scene of the decapitation of a Chinese spy by the Japanese authorities. In the moment that eventually triggered Lu Xun to quit medical studies and turn to the modern literary movement, a multiple viewing / being viewed tension was profoundly established.<sup>31</sup> In the narrative, on the one hand, Lu Xun critically viewed the indifferent crowd of Chinese onlookers documented in the slide show, who apathetically viewed the scene of the execution; on the other hand, Lu Xun understood that he was simultaneously viewed by his Japanese classmates, and hence had to "join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students" (Lu, 1995, 4). The critical, struggling observer's alienation and complicity revealed in this story is astutely analyzed by Marston Anderson to explore a triadic relationship among the Chinese enlightenment intellectuals, the crowd, and the society's victims,<sup>32</sup> which precisely demonstrates an intricate subjectivity and identification system embedded in May Fourth "enlightenment literature." Compared to that, the narrative of the Long March, which paved and developed the literary movement in the liberated areas, helped "us"—a newly established and continually formed subjectivity and class consciousness—to be able to envisage not only political revolution and modern nation-state building, but also the narrative structure

and discursive approach to history-making. Whereas the historical marching indeed provided the new narrative subject with a wealth of historical materials and interpretative impulses, the multitudinous narratives of the Long March emerging from modern Chinese literature and history that were integrated to promote a complete and coherent project of history-making, in turn, further ensured and strengthened the formation of the narrative subject. This grand historical narrative concerning “searching for and perfecting the self” helped establish a symbiotic and congruous relationship between the narrative subject and object. Moreover, some scholars point out that, some of the well-circulated Long March narratives such as *Shisong hongjun* (Ten Farewells to the Red Army) and *Shanshan de hongxing* (Sparkling Red Star)—the stories that integrate discourse of national salvation and collectivism with *minjian* (from the people, among the people) discourse arising from the multiple,<sup>33</sup> local cultural geographies—effectively facilitated the proletarian workers and peasants to create a unifying class subject with the fundamental attribute of self-consciousness and consciously position their subjectivity in relation to history, nation, and revolution.<sup>34</sup> This class consciousness is theorized by Georg Lukács in his *History and Class Consciousness* as “[a] sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class” (Lukács, 73).<sup>35</sup> The narrative of this form of class consciousness also resembles what Barbara Foley regards as “proletarian *bildungsroman*.”<sup>36</sup> The classic German concept and novelistic genre of *bildungsroman* involves rhetoric and optimism of the Enlightenment and implicates an individual’s psychological journey from innocence to maturity.<sup>37</sup> In the Long March narrative, in the process of the protagonists (soldiers)’s acquisition of a militant or revolutionary class

consciousness, they are not so much “changed” as “tested” through the ordeal. Their physical and psychological journey is never simply individual and self-valuable, but embodies a transformation in which a collective subjectivity emerges and gradually possesses greater strength, and ultimately entrusts increased collective consciousness and stabilization of power to the hands of the party leadership. The narrative of the journey also reflects the key ideas of “revolutionary hegemony and cultural revolution,” an important aesthetic discourse placed at the front line of the revolutionary and political battlefield, formulated by the Marxist literary theorists such as Qu Qiubai and Mao Zedong.<sup>38</sup> Such an aesthetic discourse considers that, as the Chinese communist revolution was forced to move into the impoverished rural hinterlands, it was imperative to constitute a modern, revolutionary subjectivity in the making of revolution by fostering revolutionary class consciousness in the overwhelmingly illiterate and politically unmotivated peasant population. In the process of forming this kind of collective bildungsroman, the Long March narrative was “naturally” and legitimately transformed into a party myth and ultimately a national myth.

Above I briefly summarized three features of the official narrative mode of the Long March, including narrative unification, mythologization of Mao and the party’s leadership, and galvanization of class consciousness. If Hayden White is correct, we understand that historians endow the past with meaning by imposing a narrative structure upon it,<sup>39</sup> where the choices of narrative structure in every representation of the past are implicated by aesthetic judgment, or, simply, ideology. White also points out that “the authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself; the historical account

endows this reality with form and thereby makes it desirable, imposing upon its processes the formal coherency that only stories possess” (White, 1980, 23). In the process of emplotting facts and events into narratives and transforming “natural time” into “narrative time” through literary endeavors and figurative expressions, the completeness and fullness of the Long March narrative is effectively imagined, although never quite experienced. Still, this particular form of revolutionary journey is constructed and construed as a “fateful” and intelligible whole, which leads to not only a productive imagination of the utopian future, but also a process of mediating and constructing the present for a “desirable” ideological-political structure. Borrowing Paul Ricoeur’s explanation, the *endpoint* of the Long March narrative is actually the point from which the epic story can be grasped as a whole.<sup>40</sup> Also, it is from this endpoint that the re-enactment of this particular pastness, with the events as metaphor and the political commitment to theoretical discourse as *praxis*, allows a “backward” reading to *fix* “randomness and whimsicality to offer a teleology” (Apter and Saich, 99), and to serve the structured narrative coherence.

In this case, the narrative logic of the historic event—the origin, nature, and promise of the Long March, as well as the revolutionary journey of twists and turns—is canonized to ensure completeness and continuity of the historical discourse, which is, as Roland Barthes posits, “in its essence a form of ideological elaboration” (Barthes, 1997, 121). That “concealed” objective utterer (the historian), in Barthes’s consideration, works out a seemingly realist historical discourse based not as much on the collection of facts, as on the strong structuring of all-powerful signifiers and referents. In such a

structural domain of the real—history in the form of the signified—history is performative in nature, “through which the utterer of the discourse [...] ‘fills out’ the place of the subject of the utterance (a psychological or ideological entity)” (Barthes, 1997, 121). Apter and Saich’s work on the historical and political discourse of the Chinese communist revolutions precisely echoes Barthes’s ways of approaching facticity. They state in the preface of their book:

“Indeed, in all major revolutions a certain reciprocity will obtain between violent actions choreographed within master narratives and master narratives realized in the form of essential texts. [...] *Body acts become anchored in language acts. Then, in the peculiar alchemy of transcription, violent events become experiences, experiences become sequences, estrangements and intimacies become the marks of punctuation, and a surplus of signifiers becomes embodied in a logic of meaning.*”

(Apter and Saich, ix. Italics by the present author)<sup>41</sup>

That is to say, the mythologization and mystification of the narrative of the Long March is twofold. First, the Long March is turned into a myth based on the “violent actions choreographed within master narratives,” with dilemmas and conflicts of the human kind in general and of the revolutionary marchers in particular being dramatized and mythologized. Second, in this case, the narrative mode of representation in historiography is itself an “alchemy of transcription”—a “mythical” process through which historical events are transformed into a system of meaning-production based on elaborately composed magic realism, dialectical logic, and historical teleology. This process directly responds to the poststructuralists’ view of narrative as not only an instrument of ideology but the very “paradigm of ideologizing discourse.”<sup>42</sup>

### **The New Performative Historiography**

As explored above, the 1934 Long March is far from being, nor simply read as, a mere historic event; it essentially exists and is grounded in the form of a cohesive and well-formed narrative, with the past events selected and emplotted within an ideological context, which endows them with truth value and intends for them to be further interpreted for higher signification and valued ends. This narrative was once used to help establish the political legitimacy of the young CCP and consolidate its political power, and it keeps successfully justifying the visions of historical necessity of the Chinese communist revolutions.

If the sign system of the 1934 Long March brings every aspect of ideology, politics, and everyday life into the grand revolutionary narrative, the 2002 Long March is a representation that precisely resignifies and reinterprets the formal representation. At this point, it is important to note that the new representation should be distinguished from a particular form of cultural products that has demonstrated an increased commercialization of revolutionary narratives since the 1990s.<sup>43</sup> The latter often dramatizes and repackages violence and romance that are associated with revolution; their tensions and entanglements are made into one of the most salient features and favorable selling points of any story about the communist revolution. In the commercially-oriented reconstructed version of memories of the revolutionary history, revolution simply becomes the recurring gag of the show. In comparison to that, the new Long March project still works in parallel with the past events, the process of myth-making, and the established narrative of the journey that still plays an important role in the official ideological discourse. The performing subjects discussed in this chapter can

be seen as the new historians who reenact and restructure the particular revolutionary history and translate the original teleologically-oriented, binary narrative into a postsocialist/postmodern one, which encapsulates a surplus of signifiers and transforms the former narrative into non-narrative and even anti-narrative modes of somatic and semiotic resignification. In the following, I will elaborate three major forms of representation in more detail.

### **Tied up by the Long March**

Some performative and visual displays of the new Long March scrutinized the relationship between the political mechanism of revolution associated with the use of violence, coercion, and persuasion, and its underlying orthodox narrative that exercised a cultural and ideological hegemonic role. Clearly anti-authoritarian and de-mythologizing, some of the new representations intentionally at once re-presented the historical accounts and effectively dismantled them.

The second site of the new Long March was Jinggang Mountains (in Jiangxi Province), a significant venue in the history of the Chinese communist revolution. In 1927, soon after the peasants' *Qiushou qiyi* (Autumn Harvest Uprising) commanded by Mao Zedong was counterattacked and defeated by the nationalist forces as well as by the local self-defense troops organized by the landlords, Mao re-organized the remnants of the Autumn Harvest Uprising and led the reformed peasants' army to the Jinggang area. This army, later joined by Zhu De's troops, was reinvented as *Hongjun* (the Chinese Red Army of Workers and Peasants). Recognizing that the Marxist-Leninist model of the

urban revolution was not suitable for the reality of a semi-colonial agrarian country and would not effectively involve the massive rural population,<sup>44</sup> Mao Zedong and Zhu De also established the first rural revolutionary base of the CCP at the Jinggang Mountains, an ideal spot to experiment with guerrilla warfare. Respectively in October and November, 1928, Mao Zedong wrote “Why is it That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?” and “The Struggle in the Jinggang Mountains.” Both articles addressed the experiences and lessons learned from the establishment of the rural armed regime, and theorized the condition and process through which a Red political power that consists of different independent regimes can survive and grow. From 1927 to 1930, the CCP continued to establish other rural revolutionary bases,<sup>45</sup> and established the Jinggang Base Area as the central one in early 1929. However, all the bases were under severe attack by the nationalist military forces between 1930 and 1934. Although the Red Army strained every nerve to defend the Jinggang stronghold, it was eventually crushed and the troops had to embark on the Long March to Northwest China. Chinese historians often define Jinggang Mountains as the birthplace of the Chinese Red Army and the “cradle of the Chinese Revolution.” As a memorable icon, nowadays the mountain area has become the showcase of over 30 revolutionary relics. Among the scenes most commonly depicted on Mao badges where the hagiography, biography, and myth of Mao intertwine, the image of the Jinggang Mountains as “the First Mountain in China” is often juxtaposed along with Yan’an and Tiananmen Square.

In 2002, at the site of the Jinggang Mountains, a performance artist, Wang Jin, worked on his performance piece, *Qiangshang diaodao daodao diaozhe* (Hanging

Swords on the Wall with Swords Hung Upside-Down); the title, in Chinese, had come from a difficult tongue twister. The performance piece began with an exhaustive introduction of the props to the audience. Wang Jin presented over 90 big swords, collected by him over the past few years, which were made between the Ming Dynasty and the present. Some of the swords were used during the Taiping Rebellion, the Boxer Uprising, the 1934—1936 Long March, and other revolutionary events in history—“many of the swords were rusty, and some even had visible bloodstains.”<sup>46</sup> After giving details about the props, Wang Jin insisted on leaving the audience members where they were. He and his assistants spent hours climbing up a cliff in the Jinggang Mountains, and tied all the swords together with ropes to form a 10-foot-tall “V.” Later, both the bound swords and the performer were hung down from the cliff. When Wang Jin hung upside down by his ankle for a couple of minutes, he “mirrored” the shape of the tied-up swords and used his arms to form another “V.” To the spectators who stayed at the foot of the mountain, Wang Jin’s performance piece created a perceptively dangerous spectacle and yet it was too far for them to see clearly.<sup>47</sup> From that distance, the performer’s body was probably akin to a strange blob of ink carelessly dropped on a traditional Chinese landscape painting.

Before analyzing the performance, I intend to briefly discuss the so-called “Jinggang Mountains’ spirit.” Even though this particular form of “spirit” is not seriously discussed, except in those poorly-written and vapid *dang bagu* (stereotyped writing on party doctrine) that now and then appear in a range of small, insignificant publications, one can still unmistakably connect it with the central role of violence in

Mao's practice and theory of revolution. The period between 1927 and 1935, to Mao, was a critical one, during which he searched for strategic actions and underlying discourse of seizing power by force, and interpreted Marxism-Leninism rather differently to make sense of the specificity of the "Red" revolution.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Mao's advocacy of *baoli geming* (violent revolution) relied successfully on the new intellectual and cultural resource of the May Fourth Movement in articulating and disseminating his political thoughts. It also relied on the Northern Expedition in the late 1920s which, even though not directly, created a historical opportunity for the communists to further expand their influence and stir up the Chinese peasants' revolutionary ferment.<sup>49</sup> In the meantime, Chiang Kai-shek's 1927 purge of the Chinese Communist Party members further legitimized Mao's determination that "political power is obtained from the barrel of the gun."<sup>50</sup> In short, "the Jinggang Mountains' spirit" effectively embodied the discourse that served to legitimize Mao's policies of violent revolution and class struggle.

Wang Jin's performance was undeniably a significant spectacle that dramatized danger, pain, leadership, and coerciveness; it attempted to evoke a critical and perilous situation as his body stood primarily for violence and sacrifice, and his act signified heroism governed by sacred devoutness by which any form of individuality would vanish in awe and even in fear. With the singular male body hanging accompanied by the swords that were used to fight and kill in different wars at the "red cradle," this presentation, fraught with attributes of power, violence, and manliness, signified the wars and revolutions that occurred in history in general, and acted out the standardized narrative of the Jinggang Mountains spirit in particular. However, if the process of

“legitimizing the myth of the revolution requires the ritualization of symbolic capital” (Apter and Saich, 306), Wang Jin’s performative ritualization through his body also brought in a hint of awkwardness and unpleasantness.

Although situating himself too easily within the assemblage of the signifiers of the Chinese revolutions, by retrospectively showcasing a *gestus*, the performance initiated a cross-historical dialogue concerning the individual body in relation to the revolution(s) at this particular site. Bearing in mind that the body is never “with no attributes,” Wang Jin’s body was made as neither independent nor at one’s own will, simply inescapable not to be relabeled, deferred, or lost in the inexhaustibly metonymic chain. Specifically, the belonging of the body constituted an inevitable question regarding the intricate situation of an individual revolutionary actor completely subservient to a long series of revolutions in Chinese history. The revolutionary history was marked by that gestic moment through the material and visceral expression of social conflicts and human identities—a process of opening-up; at the same time, the performer’s movements compressed every aspect of the revolutionary history into a symbolic entity within which ritual came into being—a process of extraction. Placed within the resignified grid of revolutionary time and space, this body bridged the *gestus* of rituals and the ritual of *gestus*, and was turned into a manifestation of “being tied to” revolutionary power and violence. Instead of featuring “my individual body” upon which self and identity can be embodied, the performance attempted to signify a collection of revolutionary bodies constituting and being riveted to a political imagination and ideological regimen. Certainly, Wang Jin’s choice of performance only led to a narrowed

interpretation of *geming* (revolution), by which the Maoist revolution was regarded as the culmination of a long-lasting process of changes in Chinese dynasties by violent military means and radical political solutions. The ideas of the Maoist revolution, in this sense, are represented as a simplified cluster composed of Mao's early strategic formation of revolutionary consciousness through the function of violence, and the decade of the later Cultural Revolution in which both state and mass violence based on the so-called "all-or-nothing battles" became daily routines. While this bodily interpretation foreclosed a more nuanced understanding of revolution in the first place and therefore failed to bring the Chinese revolutionary discourse into a rather complicated historical context,<sup>51</sup> it did emphasize a point of departure of the individual body toward a more powerful sense of totality, informed and intensified by a discourse that made clear the historical necessity for violent revolution and class struggle.

In the meantime, Wang Jin's piece also intentionally reflected on the very nature and apparatus of discourse making; it actually managed to resignify a particular painstaking sign-making and history-writing process through which the revolutionary myth and gendered heroism came into being. The exhaustive "staging" and pedagogical preparation at the site of the Jinggang Mountains was carefully made into a crucial component of the performance. In opposition to the close proximity and direct interaction between the performer and the spectators during the preparation, was the real spectacle-making process on the cliff of the Jinggang Mountains, during which the "magic tricks and theatrical effects" used to make a significant sign were only disclosed to the performance crew. This performative scenario semiotically allegorized the ways in

which Chinese revolutionary discourse mythologized and even hijacked the nation's modern history. The performance, I would argue, invited a reading of both the ideologically charged revolutionary signs, and the well-regulated representational principle of the mythologization of the revolutionary discourse. Here, a myth should be understood as a representation of reality, which would provide the knowledge about "the heroic and the revolutionary" that already existed and functioned. In the process of "re-establishing the presence" of the myth, the deconstructive move of the performance exposed the deliberate organization and the "elevation" of the myth.

At the ninth site, Maotai (Guizhou Province), a performance artist, Wang Chuyu, performed a piece entitled *Relie qingzhu* (Enthusiastically Celebrate) in a small local restaurant by the Chishui River (Red Water), a river that the Red Army troops crossed four times during the Long March from mid January until late April in 1935.<sup>52</sup> Maotai, the place where the most famous Chinese liquor is distilled, is one of the crossing sites. The chief curator, Lu Jie, invited a group of villagers to come to the restaurant for a free lunch. In the restaurant, Wang Chuyu, with his naked upper body, tied his neck, hands, and legs to the corners of the room with red fabric ribbons. In front of an audience made up of a few villagers and other long marchers, the performer kept jumping, clapping, and excitedly and repeatedly chanting "*relie qingzhu*" (enthusiastically celebrate). This lasted for over forty minutes. While the red cloth decoration helped create an aura traditionally associated with happiness and joy, the ribboned performer looked like a stringed puppet; his movements were characterized with a heightened sense of tension and struggle, as though he was passively controlled by the ribbons and hardly disentangled himself from

them. At the same time, a waitress continually made her way through Wang Chuyu's red ribbons and his desperate "celebration," bringing new dishes out of the kitchen to serve the audience members. In the performance, Lu Jie also warmly toasted and chatted with the local guests.<sup>53</sup> More villagers came to the performance and formed a crowd at the restaurant entrance.

Wang Chuyu's performance in the new Long March manifested his persistently critical attitude toward the authoritarian political system in China, an attitude that arguably echoed the liberal-reformist-elitist ideals and appeals of China's *Xinqimeng yundong* (the New Enlightenment Movement) in the 1980s. This intellectual movement worked through to the disenchantment with the officially-sanctioned totalizing discourse of truth and history, established an awakening and elevating sense of individuality—one of the ground-breaking spiritual resources of the 1980s. In an age that began to dismiss the ideologized intellectual and artistic issues in the previous decades, the Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s, who found difficulty in overcoming their uneasiness and anxiety about transcending the May Fourth movement and establishing the historical consciousness and existence of Chinese modernity, were driven by a sense of mission of entering a more "world cultural and historical" environment and unmistakably envisaged a Western-centered, uniform doctrine of modernity as the universal truth. From the perspective of the "new enlightenment," the utopian ideal and the revolutionary legacy were paradoxically labeled as problematic "radicalism" and were replaced by the utilitarian preoccupation with modernization.<sup>54</sup>

In the performance, the long, suffocating red ribbons symbolically represented what wove the utopian revolutionary discourse and executed the oppressive and coercive state power. The repetition of the ordinary phrase “*relie qingzhu*,” a phrase that has been appropriated into official state language, stood out as a linguistic performance of kitsch. Wang Chuyu demonstrated how the ribbons tied tightly around his body, dominated his words and actions, and depleted and exhausted him physically. In the meantime, those ribbons also embellished a scene of discipline into a “socialist state ritual” of passionate celebration, a highly theatrical and self-referential signification serving the ideological function and political agenda. Such a frenetically “ritualistic” performance easily reminded the audience of the political traditions of the Cultural Revolution, during which the sanctified state cult of Mao indeed demanded highly programmed and routinized daily rituals as both public culture and everyday practices of the masses. The setting of the performance also implied the way in which the oppressive and coercive state power “sneaked into” the public arena in a celebratory environment, undertook the responsibility for public services (serving food and drink), and in return persuaded people to entrust what they have and what they long for, to the (invisible) totalizing power.

Without clearly distinguishing between ideological authoritarianism and revolutionary utopia, Wang Chuyu put emphasis on the concept of “coercion” through the representation of bondage, using the idiosyncratically repetitive movements of the body. Whereas the image of “binding” made explicit the coercive external force upon the body, the repetitive movements of the performer signified the uncontrollable and unconscious “reflex” of the body as it tried to compulsively repeat earlier behaviors when

barely remembering what was repressed in the body. This bodily phenomenon with disturbing undertones of self-punishment and exhibitionism was defined by Sigmund Freud as *repetition compulsion*.<sup>55</sup> As the body of an individual is entrapped in the realm of repetition compulsion, s/he “yields to the compulsion to repeat, which now replaces the impulsion to remember [...] (and s/he) repeats under the conditions of resistance” (Freud, 1999, 140). Failing to use the act of remembering to “normally” enter into the past occurrences or traumatic experiences, repetition compulsion only brings the individual back into the unredeemed past through obsessive “acting out,” and unconsciously creates a structured and recurring situation as a quest for the past in the present.

Performing compulsive movements of the body to signify the ways in which individuals are subject to collectivistic procedure and authoritarian coercion is not unusual in the field of performance art in China. At *Cruel/Loving Bodies*, a group exhibition that presented art works in performance, installation, video, and sculpture and that particularly tackled issues of gender and body in the context of China and Chinese diaspora, He Chengyao—one of the few female performance artists in China—performed a piece entitled *Guangbo ticao* (Public Broadcast Exercises).<sup>56</sup> The curator, Sasha Sulling Welland, recalls:

“He Chengyao’s offstage preparations [...] included wrapping her nude body in duct tape with the sticky side facing out. [...] She stood motionless, staring straight ahead, as her presence suddenly drew a throng of spectators. She began marching and then moved into a set of calisthenics familiar to many in the audience as school or work-unit exercises once done in requisite unison to music and counts broadcast on a public address system. The tape tightly bound around her limbs and torso created a pattern of horizontal ligatures in contrast with her vertical figure and caused indecent bulges of flesh to press outward between these

constricting lines. Each time one part of her body came in contact with another—hand to thigh, for example—the tape stuck and pulled apart only with great effort and a loud ripping sound.”

(Welland, 2004, 27)<sup>57</sup>

While some art critics and audience members sniffed unkindly at He Chengyao’s “unnecessary” and “unattractive” naked body, or the female body that was not-yet-fully-naked,<sup>58</sup> few explored the connotative importance of *Public Broadcast Exercises* in the context of the history of China’s nation-state building. Instituted in 1951, public broadcast exercise was one of the vital programs of the Maoist egalitarian and militaristic body culture.<sup>59</sup> Surrounded by the ubiquitous slogans such as *Fazhan tiyu yundong, zengqiang renmin tizhi* (Develop physical culture and sports, strengthen the people’s physiques)—a slogan penned by Mao Zedong in 1952, Maoist subjects were cultivated to build up their bodies to create and strengthen a healthy body of the masses, a uniform national body, a uniform national body.<sup>60</sup> In He Chengyao’s performance, the public broadcast exercise was taken as an epitome of the top-down corporal discipline and ideological indoctrination that once evoked the urge to renounce individual self-determination and to transform the individual body into an unassuming and functional part of the collective political body. Performatively re-enacting the public broadcast exercises, He Chengyao’s neurotic and almost ritualistic repetitive acts physicalized what was viscerally “imposed” upon the individual by the socialist state apparatus. The aural and visual effect of the binding also underlined a significant amount of pain, tension and distortion of the individual body as it could not help but obsessively continue what had been physically internalized. And, certainly, He Chengyao’s “indecent bulges of flesh” could not and would not ensure any compliance with the legitimated norm of female de-

sexualization, charged by Maoist women's liberation movement in which women received gender equality whilst turning in their sexual identities or assimilated themselves into the male world.

The *nakedness* of the body is another crucial question that needs to be examined here. "The social world is a world of dressed bodies," writes Joanne Entwistle, "Nakedness is wholly inappropriate in almost all social situations" (6).<sup>61</sup> Covering the body in adherence to certain social codes protects one from social censure, disapproval, and ridicule. Certainly, the nude paintings, particularly paintings of the nude female that have begun to flourish since the Renaissance, can be seen as a borderline between the aestheticization of the human body and eroticism of the aestheticized object. However, we should also keep in mind the conceivable difference between nudity and nakedness in the tradition of Western art,<sup>62</sup> that is, whereas "nude art," with a retrospective eye, looks back upon the ideal, classical body that is beyond the measure of time and merits celebration, the naked body registers a rather "contemporary" state of being. The nakedness is "characteristically accompanied by contemporary clothing, as it were recently discarded" (Smyth, 167). Moreover, John Berger's account attempts to assure the agency of the naked subject; nakedness, as he sees it, reveals itself, as opposed to nudity that is a form of dress.<sup>63</sup> Whereas there is an invisible spectator in front of the nude art that presses the undressed body into a captive object that is seen by others and yet not recognizes for oneself,<sup>64</sup> the naked body attempts to break away from the predetermined signification of the body placed on display. That sense of nakedness, when presented both in reality and in performance art, can instantly be read as an

intentionally disturbing and potentially subversive interruption of the disciplinary politics of the socially correct, “dressed” body.

Situating nakedness in Chinese Art, in this case, inevitably involves further speculation. John Hay’s research reveals that there has been no lack of explicitly sexual descriptions and overwhelming pornographic drive in traditional Chinese literature and art.<sup>65</sup> And yet, when it comes to the image of the body as a whole object, as a “solid and well-shaped entity whose shapeliness is supported by the structure of a skeleton and defined in the exteriority of swelling muscle and enclosing flesh” (Hay, 51), that sense of nakedness becomes absent. Hay’s theorization eventually points to Chinese cosmology by which phenomena at all levels can be understood as transformations of *qi* rather than as geometric objects demarcated by solids (Hay, 66).<sup>66</sup> As the sense of “modern” was instilled into the society of China at the end of the nineteenth century, the new cultural and political framework also invoked an innovative representational form and a connotative possibility of the modern Chinese body, and the new ways of management of the body became increasingly central. Rather than placing the body, as a form of transformative energy, in relation to the universe, the cosmos, or a social network beyond the individual, the modern Chinese body is objectively looked upon and re-modeled from a functional perspective. Implied in the reconstruction and regeneration of the substance of the Chinese body is both a desire for a modern national subjectivity free of external invasion and a fear of racial and moral degeneration.<sup>67</sup> While it is fair to argue that the split between the Chinese and western philosophies and politics of the body has become less pronounced when considering the body in modern Chinese art, it is also relevant to

note that the representation of the naked body was seen as immoral and decadent both in the early twentieth century and in Maoist China. “In modern China,” Sheldon Lu argues, “public display of the naked body carries the stigma of being unorthodox, rebellious, and perverse” (Lu, 2007, 73).

Gao Minglu further connects Chinese contemporary performance art with the body art practices in the United States that became prominent in the 1960s and 1970s. In Gao’s view, such a connection lies in that, “almost all of the (Chinese) performance artists since the mid-1980s (have approached) their subjects from the perspective of the fine (or plastic) arts” (Gao, 2005, 162). In the meantime, the similar social sentiment shared by Chinese performance art and Euro-American body art also should be explored. Whereas the naked and semi-naked Euro-American performance art practices served to “exacerbate, perform and/or negotiate the dislocating effects of social and private experience in the late capitalist, postcolonial Western world” (Jones, 1), some of the Chinese performance art practices explored the social limits and material capabilities of the naked body to negotiate with the political structures and long-held social norms, which are rooted both in Confucian precepts about the social relations and in the sociopolitical governance of Maoist ideology.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the nakedness of the body exemplified in Chinese performance art often registers multiple layers of social and political tensions. Some performative representations of the naked body aimed to disorient spectators, destabilize social conventions, and, based on a simplified dualism of state vs. society, “stir up all the relevant components of the official system” (Gao, 2005, 164). In other representations, as I discussed earlier, nakedness was translated as one

crucial component of the self-mortifying and masochistic treatment of the individual body, by which the ritualistic performance practices were imagined as both the “allegories of the living condition of the artist-citizen in China” (Lu, 2007, 72), as well as a potential for transcendence of their own physical and political existence. These performative disruptions of the image and norm of the body through nakedness can be recognized clearly in both Wang Chuyu and He Chengyao’s half-naked representation of the body.

Compared to the metaphorical application of “binding,” used in He Chengyao’s *Public Broadcast Exercises*, Wang Chuyu’s *Enthusiastically Celebrate* interestingly “bound up” the compulsion to repeat, with the impulsion to remember, on the road of the new Long March. From the beginning of this piece, the Long March was not only recognized as either a history or a representation of history, but also as a significant and arbitrary sign system that bestowed the utopian discourse of the communist revolution and maintained the political order of the society in modern China. The orthodox narrative of the Long March was therefore perceived (by the performer) as a continuous effort that was constructive to the state ideology. As a response, the performance revealed the way in which an individual, as a part of the symbolic order, experienced pain and pleasure at the same time when striving to reach the revolutionary superego and worship the utopian ideal through a ceaseless struggle.<sup>69</sup> In the piece, the celebratory actions and words reflected “surplus enjoyment” that resulted in the very submission of the subject to ideology. Consciously presenting the compulsive repetition as a continuous return of the signifiers within the symbolic order, Wang Chuyu turned his compulsive movements into

a “continuous gestus.” He placed a critical reading upon his “acting out,” and for that reason created a subject who would, as Elin Diamond posits, “supplement (rather than disappear into) the production of (the) meaning” (Diamond, 1996, 53.)<sup>70</sup> As I discussed above, Wang Jin’s *Qiangshang diaodao daodao diaozhe* (Hanging Swords on the Wall with Swords Hung Upside-Down) deconstructed the myth-making process of the unifying narrative of the Long March. In comparison to that, Wang Chuyu’s performative and deconstructive reading of the representation of the “red” narrative, through a bodily resignification of the fervent celebration of the collective and the loss of self—the surplus enjoyment of Mao’s era,<sup>71</sup> demonstrated the ways in which the past memories and structured narratives of the Long March still hauntingly hindered and shaped the constitution of the subject.

#### **A Utopian Community Built upon the Revolutionary and the Universalistic**

A number of the performative and visual treatments of the history and local context consisted of the attempt to revitalize and continue collective utopianism exalted in the orthodox Long March narrative. The original narrative was rather concerned with the importance of attracting the impoverished and politically oppressed masses. It established and conceptualized its populist credentials in favor of the “mass line” and followed Mao’s maxim “from the people to the people.” It also carefully searched for the resources of revolutionary classics based on the creative appropriation and reformation of local customs, folklore, and popular traditions. Comparatively, in the new Long March, the contemporary artists had to deal with questions and problematics when attempting to

constitute the new gender- and class-conscious communities along the original route, particularly considering that contemporary Chinese art has often been accused of being superficially attached with *minjian* contexts and practices while actually ignoring the local populace of China.

At the end of July 2002, the Long March team arrived in Yunnan Province, where the curators planned to exhibit a number of women's artworks and feminist activities around Lugu Lake, although none of the Red Army troops had historically been to the location. There were over 2,000 female soldiers, camp followers, and wives of high-level officials who walked the 1934 Long March. Besides fighting just like their male counterparts, the female soldiers served as the work team cadres and were responsible for mobilizing the local population. In 1934, when arriving at a number of local places along the road, the villagers hardly believed that those female soldiers in their military uniforms and with short hair or shaven heads were actually women. While the male Red Army soldiers—and particularly the high-ranking ones—who survived the marching developed into both the powerful generation of the post-1949 era and the visible protagonists in the orthodox Long March narratives, fewer narratives were concerned with the history and life experience of those ordinary women under the tremendously extraordinary circumstances. As a response, the sixth site of the new Long March was primarily designed to commemorate the largely overlooked women marchers as well as to develop a critical consciousness regarding the gendered revolutionary subjects forgotten by the official history.

Lugu Lake is a place known for its careful preservation of the matrilineal culture of the Mosuo and its unique sexual custom in the Mosuo society—*zouhun* (the walking marriage).<sup>72</sup> The visual and performative projects conducted at the site, as a result, inevitably intended to invoke questions regarding the relationship between the Han majority of China and the southwestern ethnic minority group of the Mosuo, and between, as Sasha Welland astutely observes, “the power dynamics of an international art world still largely driven by a moneyed West” (Welland, 2002, 71).<sup>73</sup> The curator, Lu Jie, invited the well-known feminist artist, Judy Chicago, to participate in the exhibition at this site. As the invited leading artist and guest curator for site six of the new Long March, Chicago chose “What if Women Ruled the World” as the exhibition theme for the site. Her proposal, which encouraged artists to take the Mosuo culture and practice as a feminist inspiration, was sent out a couple of months before the launch of the new marching. The proposal was initially met, with a number of contemporary Chinese female artists, to whom Chicago’s fame and art was received without much controversy or critical baggage. Here, it is important to note that, although some scholars have challenged Chicago’s essentialist approach to the feminine and the hierarchical, if not exploitative, process of creating *the Dinner Party*,<sup>74</sup> the contemporary art scene in China has not yet been fully informed about the development of feminist activism in the realm of visual culture in the Anglophone world in relation to the theory or criticism that has engaged it. Later on, Chicago invited 12 Chinese female artists and 12 local Mosuo women to create a joint project with her at Lugu Lake, a piece entitled “Dialogue with Judy Chicago.”

The “infrastructure” of the “dialogue project” at Lugu Lake is unsurprisingly reminiscent of Judy Chicago’s best-known 1974-1979 creation, *The Dinner Party*—a large-scale, multimedia installation that represents a symbolic history of women’s roles and achievements throughout Western civilization. The installation was originally composed of 13 place settings, each of which exemplified exquisitely crafted painted china and designed stitchery.<sup>75</sup> The 13 place settings were placed on a 48-foot-long table, representing the feminist “Last Supper” attended by 13 female guests composed of historic heroines and goddesses—the number 13 arguably invoked a religion of witchcraft.<sup>76</sup> Later on, Chicago expanded the number of female dinner guests to 39. Following that, she arranged three long tables with the place settings in a triangular formation, for, “the triangular form refers to the ancient symbol for both woman and the Goddess” (Gardner, 846). Interestingly, as some scholars see it, the triangular form would also invoke Christian Trinity symbolism.<sup>77</sup> Two additional numbers would immediately reveal the “grandeur” of Chicago’s dinner party: first, the names of 999 oft-forgotten women were inscribed on a white tile floor; second, the creation and assembly of the project was conducted under Chicago’s supervision, assisted by a team composed of nearly 400 workers. All these individuals, both in reality and in historical imagination, were summoned by Chicago’s dinner invitation and added to her reputation. While the 999 names of women in the monumental *Dinner Party* symbolized, according to Chicago, “the many thousands of heroic women all over the world who have struggled for freedom and dignity” (Chicago, 1), these names and the corresponding visual significations were

brought in and later repeatedly showcased through one woman's feminist perspective and artistic interpretation.

At the site of Lugu Lake, Chicago's role, presupposed in the exhibition infrastructure and curatorial objective, was also central. She was assumed to, by introducing her feminist perspectives and interpretations, stimulate and "integrate" artistic exchanges and collaborative creativities among the Chinese female artists and the local Mosuo women. Similar to how Chicago attempted to signify women's natural and cultural heritage and create a feminist mythology in *the Dinner Party*, the "dialogue project" at Lugu Lake decisively placed the dominance and uniqueness of the matrilineal lineage and related cultural practice at the center. Given the fact that Lugu Lake has been exoticized and eroticized among anthropologists and tourists alike, both from China and abroad, for the Mosuo matrilineal tradition, the curatorial choice of using this particular location to explore feminist art was noticeably problematic. Placing the majority of the female artists into a segregated, "gendered" locale only made the situation less satisfying because so few women were invited to participate in the new Long March. And, not so surprisingly, the Mosuo people's courting dance in their excessively colorful costumes and their singing in the Mosuo dialect were still treated as one important part of the site activities, in introducing an alternative, if not indigenous, cultural and geographical ecology to the new urban marches.<sup>78</sup> Judy Chicago was nevertheless in favor of the concept of retracing the historical journey with artistic steps, planning to explore the history, myth, and reality of a matriarchal society through art. She insisted upon the importance of a joint pilgrimage to a place she romanticized as a form of feminist

utopia.<sup>79</sup> In the meantime, from the side of the Chinese female artists, such a feminist utopia never truly existed. As the dialogue project moved forward, this group of female artists was increasingly troubled by the reality that the event was completely designed by male curators, which paradoxically mirrored the gender power structure of the original march. In addition, “the first-over-third-world executive decision” also provided them with an uncomfortable gendered environment to begin with.<sup>80</sup>

The underlining concept behind the “Dialogue with Judy Chicago” was quite straightforward. At the site, Chicago exhibited 12 Tibetan-style prayer flags, which demonstrated the labor intensive nature of her textile work. The piece, entitled “What if Women Ruled the World,” was based on Chicago’s proposal of the site exhibition and the corresponding proposals from the Chinese female artists. A number of “what if” rhetorical questions, as the response to the central hypothesis about how the world might be different if women ruled, were selected and woven into the multicolored prayer flags. These flags were visibly hung from the entranceway of a wooden guesthouse in the western shore of Lugu Lake, a place decorated into the major exhibition space. Chicago proposed to use this guesthouse to mirror the 1972 “Womanhouse”—a feminist, collaborative site installation in an actual house in Hollywood organized by Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, and their students, to explore the issues of domesticity and gender roles.<sup>81</sup> The questions, in both Chinese and English, concerned the Mosuo matrilineal culture in particular, and women’s social and cultural conditions through a universalized lens, including “Would God be Female?”, “Would Men and Women be Equal?”, “Would Sexual Freedom Prevail?”, and “Would there be War?”<sup>82</sup> These questions, to Chicago,

were the conceptual stimuli that would entail innovative feminist methodologies and formulate a critical and artistic community among the Chinese participants.

While some of the Chinese artists' works presented at Lugu Lake were derived from or developed upon their earlier art pieces, the other ones were improvisational happenings. Chicago's reclaiming of women's essential identity and integrity in *the Dinner Party*, through both the recurring representation of the vulva-like imagery and the encouragement of worship of a mythological Mother Goddess, was also quite palpable in the new Long March.

Guo Fengyi, for instance, a woman from the city of Xi'an (Shanxi Province) who was never professionally trained to be an artist, began to paint after her retirement. Initially, Guo turned to painting to assuage the pain of her illness in 1989. Her journey into art was also a journey for her to vision the transcendence of her physical (sick) body into a metaphysical liberated realm, as well as to "detect the distance between truth and representation."<sup>83</sup> The subjects of her paintings—including *Luoshu* (the Diagram of the Luo River), Bodhisattva, and *Jiugua kongtu* (the Image of the Ninth Hexagram) from the Daoist *I-Ching* (the Book of Changes)—lie somewhere in between the historical and the mythical. Moreover, the creative process of her painting is intentionally manifested as a meditative self-inquiry and only at the end will the acquisition of awareness and healing power be found. Arguably, the viability and marketability of Guo's art is often tied to the contrast between the ordinary, regional, middle-aged, self-taught creative subject, and the extraordinary, unpredictable, universal journey into the mystical and sacred.

In the new Long March, Guo presented a number of old paintings and some new drawings on rice paper created particularly for the Lugu dialogue project, such as “Lugu Lake,” “The Mosuo,” and “If Women Ruled the World.” The old and the new paintings actually bore a strong resemblance in technique and style. For instance, in the piece entitled “Lugu Lake,” a mysterious two-headed half-human, half-goddess shape was drawn into the central piece of the painting, made of the dispersals of lotus-like curving and swirling lines indicating, as the artist often claims, an energy-transfer circle. In the painting, one head of this figure is on the top and the other is at the bottom, with two bodies merged in the middle, which indicates the ways in which *yin* and *yang* merge and complement one another into a being in its totality. Guo’s pieces here might present a rather straightforward answer to Chicago’s question—“Would God be Female?” If Chicago’s effort to create a feminist mythology remains the same as it was in the past, Guo’s visual “answer” seems to directly retrieve and preserve the essentially “timeless” images of a goddess from ancient mythology of the feminine. While such a valorization of the feminine easily rules out “revolution”—the theme of the bigger project—and creates the maternal into a universal and ahistorical dominance, Chicago’s comments as the curatorial guidance and advisory feedback show her complete appreciation of the goddess: “The work makes me think of a woman powerfully emerging from underneath the shoes which have been stepping upon her.”<sup>84</sup> Here, in exploring “women”—an identity category that was problematically essentialized in the first place when the theme for the Lugu Lake exhibition was proposed—both Guo and Chicago insistently sought to invoke a feminine imagery. This imagery was derived from a particular contingent

aspect of the feminine but would also hold for “women” in a universal sense. Consciously or unconsciously, in creating the abstract images of the feminine divine(s) based on imagined cultural mysticism and spiritual experience, with the emphasis on “the mythical” rather than “the cognitive,” Guo replaced the Chinese women’s epic and long-fought revolutionary transformation (that was mobilized by and appropriated into the national liberation movement) with a mystic transcendence that operates through immanence and self-realization.

Guo’s artistic direction was not so unique. Other female artists also showed their concerns and imaginations about sexual differences and gender relations in a universalist frame, inspired by the Mosuo gender system. Huang Yin’s photography installation entitled *Xingbie* (Gender-Sex/Distinction), exhibited on the outer wall of a public restroom in the Lugu Lake guesthouse,<sup>85</sup> was composed of graffiti images taken inside of men’s and women’s toilets in two shopping malls in the city of Chongqing. She intended to use the photographs to underscore gender differences based on her observations—whereas women usually express love through their random drawings, men only express their sexual desires. With the separated staging and underlining interpretation of the gendered graffiti images documented from the public toilets in urban Chongqing, Huang’s project quickly jumped to a huge and empty conclusion, which was about the contrasting attitudes that (Chinese) men and women hold toward love and sex, while Chicago commented that Huang’s artistic intention was not self-evident enough.<sup>86</sup> Pang Xuan, a Chongqing-based artist, presented her improvisational installation at dusk near Lugu Lake. She folded and floated hundreds of red paper boats. In the beginning, the

boats were also arranged in a large-scale, vulva-like pattern, suggestive of the shape used in the Mosuo symbol of female genitalia. This move of connecting the art piece with mythical fertility goddesses certainly echoes the setting of *the Dinner Party*. Later, the other female marchers placed one red candle in each paper boat, trying to create a more ritualistic, if not sentimental, atmosphere. The environmental installation entitled *Jianshan Jianshui* (Seeing Mountains, Seeing Water), created by another Chongqing-based artist, Li Shurui, was made of twenty large see-through mosquito tents placed in the water. The aesthetically-oriented arrangement of the private airy spaces aimed to evoke a romantic and curious imagination of the Mosuo mode of sexual tradition, with heterosexuality understood, in this project, as the very measure defining the social and personal sexual practice.

Ding Jie was among the few female artists who chose to artistically respond to a larger context of the Long March. In Ding's collaborative project, entitled *Feiyishu huodong* (Non-Artistic Activity), she began working with the local people of Naxi Village on a 2-year ecologically-based planting design. The activity emphasized the preservation of "native plants," including research of the plant species around Lugu Lake, the selection and purchase of the seeds from outside of the area, the planting, and the creation of a sustainable plan that would enable the villagers to keep the gardening activity running in the future. Later, in a local tea house in Naxi Village, Ding held a small exhibition about seeds—the central metaphor of her project—introducing the planting methods and treatments, the endangered plant species that need special protection, as well as photographs and personal notes that documented the process of the

entire non-artistic activities. In one of the photographs, Ding juxtaposed one of the transfer money receipts for seed purchases with a red star badge, the symbol of the Red Army, deliberately resignifying Mao's most famous remark about the Long March as a seeding-machine, which would both propagate the new ideas to the masses and practically translate them into actions.

Taken as a whole, Chicago's curatorial question "What If Women Ruled the World" was loosely connected with, if not purposely making a detour from, Chinese revolutionary history. While the original curatorial proposal of establishing a feminist Chinese "Woman House" reflected one of the major goals of the new Long March—searching for utopia and a collective—the theme of the exhibition was diffused, to a certain degree, into a curious romanticization and worship of the matrilineal society of Mosuo. This cultural feminist's gesture of celebrating women's reclaimed and transcendental religious and archetypal energies was responded to by the Chinese female artists with further essentialistic depiction and construction of female identity. Generally, as Meyda Yeğenoğlu astutely points out, one of the problematic western universalist versions of feminism, charged by Enlightenment rhetoric, metonymically associates the temporal lag of the Orient with its women, and calls for "unveiling and thereby modernizing the woman of the Orient" (Yeğenoğlu, 99). Interestingly enough, the ethnocentric representation at Lugu Lake picked up and re-fashioned a peculiar feminist time and place—the 1970s in the US, and it took the "re-veiled," primordial, and Shangrila-like form of gender existence as the new utopia. But this time, the mythological heritage could hardly transcend the banality of its articulation to create an

effective feminist imaginary. This is not to mention that, ironically, such a matriarchal society, repackaged into an exoticized and touristic paradise, only exists in a reality that is truly patriarchal.

Historically, in 1934, when the women chose to join the revolution and walk the Long March, they walked out of their place within the demands and restraints imposed by the conventional gender structure, establishing an unprecedented gendered version of their assumed identity beyond the Chinese traditional ideal of women as private, submissive, modest, and conscientiously virtuous.<sup>87</sup> The revolutionary journey indeed allowed for, though momentarily, a political intervention and re-description of gender norms. Nevertheless, the self-enclosed system of the “Dialogue with Judy Chicago” was noticeably disconnected from the gendered everyday practice and experience in the reality of Chinese society. The legacy of the female Long Marchers in history was to a certain degree wiped out of the exhibition. Furthermore, the oblivion of Chinese “Red” revolutionary history reflected in the “dialogue project” actually raises a new question when the new Long March is analyzed. Nowadays, Chinese contemporary art has to constantly deal with the crisis of identity and legitimacy when coming into contact with and being accommodated within the global art system—a system seen by some scholars as still a “very centralised system of apartheid” (Mosquera, 223), or, if I may add, a system whose institutional apparatus as well as the validity of its aesthetic principles rely predominately on a rather uneven appropriation of and access to symbolic goods. The process of navigating and negotiating the relationship between the new Long March and the global art system was explicit as the new journey ambitiously invited both the local

and the global to revisit and further reinvent the idiosyncratic revolutionary discourse of the historical march. On this point the crucial question is whether or not the historically- and ideologically-loaded Chinese revolutionary discourse, resignified through contemporary artistic practices, is translatable and transportable when interfacing with a global system. In other words, the problem unveiled by the dialogue project at Lugu Lake can also be seen as a disappointment of converting that particular Chinese revolutionary legacy into the general-abstract universal rhetoric. The problems and promises of the construction of the revolutionary subjects, a process enacted through the historical journey, seem to be misplaced in the search for a universalist utopia of the feminine.

Specifically, this misplacement occurs in the gap among three factors: (1) the curatorial discourse and aesthetic vision that is somehow still charged by the essentializing gender framework that asserts a generalized condition and experience of women—a controversial characteristic of the Anglo-American feminism in the 1970s; (2) the Chinese artists' reluctance to dialogue with the revolutionary history, a typical “post-revolutionary” sentiment structured by the anti-totality and anti-utopian rhetoric that aims at replacing the historical experience and utopian vision of the Chinese revolution with that of modernity;<sup>88</sup> and (3) a reality of *gaobie geming* (farewell to revolution) in which the revolutionary and socialist past has been suppressed to the unconscious by the new ideology of the market-economy with the major objective of economic growth.

Another chief curator of the new Long March, Qiu Zhijie, decisively states that his major concern of the new Long March is about “if ‘we’ [as Chinese contemporary art

scenes] have something to offer rather than just receiving what others have to offer.”<sup>89</sup>

This local or national desire of “offering,” as a conscious effort to connect with the universal via the legacy of revolution and socialist modernity, was somewhat hijacked halfway in the Lugu Lake project. This not only reflected the problematic guidance and agency practices of Chicago’s dialogue, but also revealed the lingering collective acquiescence to and social desire for a cosmopolitan cultural and political orientation based problematically upon a dehistoricized and deterritorialized “western” knowledge. (In the following part, I will keep exploring the problems embedded in the battle of the universal vs. the particular.)

In the last performative piece at Lugu Lake, an artist, Zhang Lun, decorated a traditional female ancestral hall into her exhibition studio, a space later submersed by the her oil-painted flower photographs. Zhang Lun invited Chicago to sit in the place reserved for the local female elders and asked her to serve tea for the coming local female villagers. The tea ceremony was supposed to serve as a warm-up activity, followed by the conversations among the artists and the villagers regarding their understanding and experience of matrilineal identities. After pouring a couple of teas, Chicago claimed that “no one in America would believe I’d poured tea for anyone.” Then, she left the room with a group of her “cultural others”—both the Mosuo villagers and the Chinese female artists—all surprised and disappointed. The sudden exit of Judy Chicago marked the end of Zhang Lun’s performance as well as the entire Lugu Lake dialogue project. As Sasha Welland comments, “just as no Chinese women have a place set for them at her famous *The Dinner Party*, her absence now also troubles this hearth and all essentialist visions,

no matter how well meaning, of a single universalist feminism” (Welland, 2002, 75). The “what if” utopia, established upon the danger of making a public art practice based on an individual narrative of the artist’s identity and intention, as Hal Foster cautions us, unfortunately marched from the collaborative investigation to the ethnographic self-fashioning” (Foster, 306).

### **A Thin Line between the Universal and the Particular**

During the *xianchang pipan hui* (literally translated as “onsite criticism meeting”) of the new Long March, held in Beijing in 2003,<sup>90</sup> a number of scholars and artists questioned whether re-walking the original journey of the Long March would lead to a new historical opportunity, and how the new journey would critically evaluate the orthodox narrative. Wang Hui, the editor of *Dushu* (Readings) at the time, a central figure of the Chinese New Leftist intellectuals, “polemically” argued that, currently there were only two historical readings of the Chinese “Red” revolution: one is the official one, and the other is from the rightist perspective. “While many people are looking for a historical trajectory to understand the revolution, few people are actually familiar with the story, so there is no way for us to interpret it.”<sup>91</sup> To Wang Hui, in an era of *gaobie geming* (Farewell to Revolution), the so-called rightist or revisionist interpretation holds an unhesitating manner to negate and exclude the revolutionary history. As a result, a “claimed to be” utopian project such as the new Long March, according to Wang Hui, has embraced a great deal of material and sentiment that are in fact anti-utopian.<sup>92</sup> Is that

so? Is the new Long March a project that is intrinsically anti-utopian, with a utopian disguise?

With this question in mind, I want to first examine two installations, which were deliberately placed one after another in the exhibition hall at the fourth site of the new journey, in the city of Kunming (Yunnan Province). The viewers were first invited to enter into a simple sound installation created by the artist, Li Chuan. The installation was a long, zigzag path paved on the floor of the exhibition hall. The path, which was made of wood, was decorated with a row of white footsteps. A number of loudspeakers were used to create a walk-through sonic experience based on the recorded sounds of specific words. When stepping on the footsteps and following their sequence set out on the wooden path, one is supposed to activate the sound devices and thus hear the sounds of the words. Each footstep, when stepped upon, would trigger the sound of only one single character in the sentence. In an extremely ideal situation, all the sounds would compose a sentence with words structured in a linear order, articulating, *Yan zhe you zhong guo te se de she hui zhu yi dao lu qian jin* (Advance along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics), which is also used as the title of the sound installation. This is a statement proclaimed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1987,<sup>93</sup> both symbolizing the theory concerning the continuation of China's economic reform as the party's primary goal, and justifying the politics of economic transition from socialism. Of course, in the exhibition, this sentence could not be easily composed in a clear and orderly manner just by a line of viewers one after another randomly stepping on the white footsteps. The untidy and repetitive piles of sounds of those words, activated by the viewers and the new long

marchers, only ended up building a disorderly and chaotic assembly of words. It seemed that the actual walking and exploring of this particular road inevitably “translated” the ideological proposal into illogical and confusing shattered fragments of articulation on the one hand, and enriched, if not exhausted, the central theme of the proposal when following the paved footpath on the other.

Passing through the hallway of “the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” the viewers were led to enter another exhibition hall, in which they found an installation created by Ma Jie.<sup>94</sup> In this space, decorated like a conference room, an 80-inch-long grass shoe made of rice-straw—a rather recognizable icon of the historic Long March, signifying the incredible hardship of the march and the “amazing feat of endurance” of the Red Army soldiers<sup>95</sup>—was hung up in the air. Under the huge grass shoe was a table covered with white cloth. On that table, there was a normal-sized grass shoe, which was installed on an electronic mobile device. The device also contained red paint, which was designed to be sprinkled during the show. A thin red string linked the shoes. So, as soon as the smaller shoe on the device moved around on the table, the bigger shoe, tied by the string affected by the device, would also begin to swing lightly and randomly in the air. In return, the moving directions of the smaller shoe on the device had to be changed constantly because the two shoes mutually constrained each other. The red paint leaked over the white table cloth and left a few layered skeins of paint behind on the table, like the unpredictable Pollockian drips. The steady mechanical sound of the device, the inharmonious interaction between the two grass shoes, and the blood-like marks bleeding on the white cloth, aimed to create an atmosphere that would

reverberate with the dilemmatic situation of the installation and foster increased anxiety among the viewers. The installation seemed to also indicate that every small footstep, implicated by the grass shoe, was constricted and overwhelmed by the big footstep, leaving an ill-defined and chaotic direction.

These two installations can be easily recognized as the ambiguous resignifications of Red history, memory, and imagination. Here, my analysis will not return to the form of ironic nostalgia. Rather, I propose to examine how some of the artworks enacted in the new Long March, by allegorizing “walking” and manifesting the unruly and adventurous journey, addressed the questions and concerns regarding the cultural and ideological sources of the earlier and continued modernization, and explored the ways in which these sources would affect the future path and identity development of postsocialist Chinese society. Let me briefly introduce another two examples to further illustrate this point. In Qin Ga’s tattoo work entitled *Weixing Changzheng* (Miniature Long March), for instance, he first had someone tattooed a map of China onto his back. In the journey of the new Long March, whenever the team arrived at a new site, he would have that site tattooed on the map of his back. The piece delivered the simple idea that “I walk the Long March and the Long March walks me.”<sup>96</sup> But, at the same time, this piece also interestingly played with the idea of “the present blends with the past, and the future lingers *at the back*.” Wei Jun’s performance and video experiment, entitled *Xingzou zhong de disi yundong dinglv* (the Fourth Law of Motion in the Walking), can serve as another example. In the performance, Wei Jun wore a Red Army uniform and walked backwards along the streets of the city of Nanning (Guangxi Province). Later, the video

that documented Wei Jun's performance was re-recorded in reverse, so it appeared that the Red-Army-soldier-like performer was the only pedestrian who walked forward, while everybody else moved backward. In blending temporalities, the piece created the "anachronistic" figure, "extracted" from the 1934 Long March imagery, who embodied a temporality that is inconsistent with the real-time temporality. His final "fabricated" forward motion seemed to suggest the past is injected into the present, in a penetrative and retrospective manner.

These pieces, I would argue, invented new ways to reconcile the past and future dimensions of their present. On the one hand, they paid close attention to the revolutionary and socialist past that "remains a huge presence in the collective unconscious of postsocialist China" (Zhang, 2008, 147); on the other hand, they attempted to vision a new journey toward modernization "with Chinese characteristics" in the currently unsettled socio-economic relations and cultural contradictions. Charles Jencks once writes: "All the avant-gardes of the past believed that humanity was going somewhere, and it was their joy and duty to discover this new land and see that people arrived there on time" (Jencks, 224). In contrast to this progressivist orientation toward a definite future, "the Post-Avant-Garde," continues Jencks, "believes that humanity is going in several different directions at once" (Jencks, 224). Exemplified here are the ways in which the Chinese artists in the new Long March, arguably the "post-avant-gardists," put together the retro-, the trans-, and the postmodern understanding of temporalities in which humanities stand, visually and performatively tackling the questions of walking a journey toward the undefined postsocialist future—a post-utopian,

rather than anti-utopian, imagination. Rather than following Wang Hui's argument and categorizing the new Long March as an anti-utopian project, I would suggest that the performative aspects of this artistic and social endeavor should merit attention. The new Long March should be understood as a collective cultural repertoire with no fixed structures and pre-determined scripts ahead of the actual walking. The "event-ness" itself became the very core of the new Long March, whose contingent meanings were dependent on the ongoing struggle and desire for the future, emerging from the different temporalities and historical experiences conflated in the restless walking.

In my interview with Lu Jie, he elaborated about his concern with "walking out a *third way*." He argued that, the new Long March has built up a community of people who have varied understandings and imaginations of the Chinese revolutionary history. This is also the community of people who hold different purposes and commitments about the new walking visual display. Therefore, as the curators aimed to develop the re-walking into a "re-reading" of the revolutionary history in the first place, they also intended to transform the revolutionary discourse into a renewable political resource. This "third way," Lu Jie stated, is a direction that is "neither exclusively consistent with *ziyou zhuyi* (liberalism), nor *xin zuopai* (new left)."<sup>97</sup> To elaborate a little further on the two categories, while the Chinese liberals espouse the market mechanism in economic reform and advocate institutional and legal reforms that would synchronize with further market-oriented reforms, the new leftists, emerging in the 1990s, are highly aware of the pronounced class differentiation and conflicts of interest in the society, and apply the western Marxist critique of capitalistic modernity to challenge the modernization process

of China.<sup>98</sup> Culturally speaking, while the liberals, who generally identify themselves with the May Fourth new culture tradition, associate cultural liberalism tightly to political freedom and call for a cultural innovation to challenge traditional culture “as the cause for the failure of modernization” (Zhao, 2004, 133), the new leftists are primarily concerned with cultural integrity and national identity, emphasizing the preservation of *Chineseness* in the process of reform, to “avoid the misfortune resulting from the westernization that occurred in the former Soviet Union” (Zheng, 66).

As a response to the new “right” and “left,” the “third way” explored through the new Long March aimed to not only handle the tensions and conflicts between the divide, but also bridge the existing contradictions and the underlying messages of the Chinese intellectual establishment with a broader society through contemporary Chinese art. Eventually, this effort—embodied through the sonically-oriented search for the road socialism with Chinese characteristics, for instance—is primarily directed toward, to my understanding, the renegotiation of the representation and experience of “Chineseness,” an identification question and an anxiety exacerbated in the era of postsocialism and globalization.

Shortly after the launch of the reform and open-door policy in 1978, the Chinese government decided to present pieces of *jianzhi* (folk paper-cutting art) and *cixiu* (traditional hand silk embroidery) as the representative work of Chinese art at the Venice Biennale. Such a dislocated dialogue between the so-called quintessential Chinese art and the prestigious international event of contemporary art has turned into a widely and well-circulated “innocent” joke in the history of contemporary Chinese art. Later, along

with the post-Cold War era, were the burgeoning and overwhelming exports of Chinese elements and political symbols by the contemporary Chinese artists, who have gradually been made aware of Western spectatorship and thus intended to make use of the “gaze” for artistic, economic, or other purposes. In a way, contemporary Chinese art in the post-Cold War period avidly participated in a seemingly “inward” turn in Chinese knowledge and artistic production, which was indeed a search outward for a new entry into a neocolonial and Orientalist standard of representation.<sup>99</sup> What the new Long March has been ambitiously searching for, can be seen as a “non-Left-non-Right” posture different from the above representations of *Chineseness*—either an uncritical embrace of the imagined utopia of capitalist universal, or a nationalist, if not nativist, return to an essentialized Chinese self-image.

In fact, the new Long March has been tightly bound to its own form of Chineseness, manifested through the revisit of the intricate revolutionary legacy or the search for the distinctive characteristics of China’s (post)socialism. That is to say, the new Long March, while walking along a thin line between the Left and the Right, and between the past and the future, did not fully have the capacity to establish a “universalizable” ideological alternative and emotional discourse. This was also the reason that the new Long March was designed as a performative “visual display” and was provided within an open structure that would allow for contradictions, contingencies, and alternatives. The paradigm of Walking, in the project, can be understood as what Diana Taylor defines as “scenario,” namely, the “meaning making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” (Taylor, 2003, 28). As a matter

of fact, this very scenario has provided the theoretical framework and discursive resource for the creation of a succession of Long March projects in China and abroad. At the same time, this scenario also provides “a physical mechanics of staging [...] which simultaneously keeps alive and sustains the sturdy, community-wide infrastructure and networks” (Taylor, 2006, 68). As a praxis that relentlessly engaged collective and performative activities along the way, the new Long March was able to gradually develop an organizational structure by which forms of collective practices and consciousness in relation to the particular history and the extended forms of representation came into being. The organizational structure of a “walking community,” also brought the exhibition settings and the performance pieces in the walking, beyond the ephemeral state of being. This horizontal structure, to a great extent, helped open up, as the curators expected, a space bigger than the walking community and allowed for further experiments and dialogues between artists and society, and negotiations between the local and the global.

In 2005, the Long March Project began the “Chinatown” project, an ongoing series of site-specific artistic activities that engaged with the overseas Chinese in Melbourne and San Francisco, exploring the cultural anxiety and spatial attributes of the Chinese diasporas. In 2006, 40 leading artists and scholars participated in the Long March Yan’an project, held at the historic site of the Kangda University (Anti-Japanese University) in Yan’an. The project had the very goal to revisit the principles of Mao Zedong’s Yan’an talks and reexamine the status quo of contemporary Chinese art in relation to the disappearance of the “mass line.”<sup>100</sup> The paradigm and the practice of “the Long March,” as Lu Jie once wrote, “like the journey itself, is continually developing,

marching through local and international spaces and acting as a platform for mediation, communication, discourse, and debate” (Lu, 2006, 5).

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<sup>1</sup> See Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History," in *The Postmodern History Reader*.

<sup>2</sup> See Barthes's "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," in *Image, Music, Text*.

<sup>3</sup> This information is based on my interview with Lu Jie.

<sup>4</sup> See Castells, "The Culture of Real Virtuality" in *The Rise of the Network Society*.

<sup>5</sup> Lu Jie and Qiu Zhijie are the chief and assistant curators of "the Long March, A Walking Visual Display." They state that, "As curators, our attention to contemporary art in China focuses on the relationship between artistic creation and interactive reception by its viewers inherent in the current exhibition culture. A major characteristic of art in contemporary China is that art has left the audience, has moved from the broad masses of the people toward the elite, from private studios toward hierarchical structures (things like biennials, blockbuster exhibitions, and other authoritative spaces), and from China toward the world beyond China." <http://www.longmarchspace.com/english/e-discourse5.htm>

<sup>6</sup> See Lu Jie's "Long March Yan'An Project." Lu Jie is the founder and director of the Long March Project. He holds an MA from the Creative Curating Program at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He is a Senior Curatorial Research Fellow at the Dartington College of Arts, UK. In "Visiting the Long March," Edward Lucie-Smith writes: "[the new Long March] represents an initially surprising example of US-Chinese cultural co-operation. The Chief Curator, Lu Jie, lives in New York. [...] The project has been organised by Lu Jie under the umbrella of his own tailor-made New York based foundation." <http://www.longmarchspace.com/english/e-discourse6.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> See Lucie-Smith's "Visiting the Long March."

<sup>8</sup> See Wang Hui's "Depoliticized Politics, from East to West." Wang points out that "The Chinese rejection of the Sixties is thus not an isolated historical incident, but an organic component of a continuing and totalizing de-revolutionary process." Wang's opinion apparently reflects one of the central concerns of the Chinese New Left—the China's "Red" revolutionary legacy is purposely left aside in the service of global capitalism.

<sup>9</sup> In Chinese, the Chinese Nationalist Party is Guomindang (GMD), or transliterated as Kuomintang (KMT). I will use Guomindang in the rest of the writing.

<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact, the Long March usually refers to the marching of the First Front Red Army, composed of the groups of soldiers directly under Mao Zedong. Since the CCP Central Committee and the CCP Central Military Committee were part of the First Front Red Army, and the troop was acknowledged by the Communist International, this particular army became the central protagonists of the history of the Long March.

<sup>11</sup> These numbers vary according to the different historical sources and documents. In Ed Jocelyn and Andrew McEwen's *The Long March: the True Story behind the Legendary Journey that made Mao's China*, it is said that when the Long March ended, [there were approximately] 4,000 survivors. In *From Revolution to Politics: Chinese Communists on the Long March, and Origins of the Chinese Revolution, 1915-1949*, respectively, numbers are different. According to Charles Townshend's "People's War" in *The Oxford History of Modern War*, "only some 10,000 out of the 90,000 who set out reached their destination" (187).

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<sup>12</sup> The MPR is the abbreviation for Mongolian People's Republic. Also, at the end of the Long March, the Red Army stopped in Yan'an and established its revolutionary base just 500 miles from the border of the MPR. According to Liu Xiaoyuan's accounts, Mao's concern over the Chinese communist movement's ethnopolitical origins in and ties to the Han society merits attention. While the Soviet expected that the Chinese Red Army march directly into the border of the MPR and established a close tied with the Soviet Union, "Mao still believed that the '[CCP] center should stay in an area from which it can direct the revolution of the whole country.'" See Liu, *Reins of Liberation*, 94.

<sup>13</sup> Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) became the leader of the Nationalist party in the 1930s. In 1930, Chiang launched the first major military attack against the communist force. See Benjamin Yang's *the Long March—From Revolution to Politics*. Also see Snow's *Red Star over China*.

<sup>14</sup> Some scholars argue that the conflict between Zhang Guotao and Mao Zedong in regard to the direction of the Long March finally led to the separation of the army and even a temporary co-existence of two Central Committees.

<sup>15</sup> See Brantly Womack's *The Foundations of Mao Zedong's Political Thought, 1917-1935*. Also see Benjamin Yang, *From Revolution to Politics*.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Yang's research on the historical Long March—*From Revolution to Politics*—specifically examines the power structure and strategic orientation of the CCP in the Long March. In the book, Yang argues that, "the mid-1930s were a time of transformation from revolutionary idealism to political realism in the general orientation of the CCP leadership," (Yang, 1990, 7).

<sup>17</sup> See Zhang Enhua's "The Long March across the Twentieth Century and Beyond."

<sup>18</sup> See Gao Hua, "Hongjun Changzheng de Lishi Xushu shi Zenyang Xingcheng de" (How was the Historical Narrative of the Long March Constructed?).

<sup>19</sup> Snow's *Red Star over China* was published in Chinese under the title of *Xixing manji* (Random Notes on a Journey to the West).

<sup>20</sup> See Dick Wilson's "Introduction" in *The Long March 1935—the Epic of Chinese Communism's Survival*.

<sup>21</sup> Just to name a few, *Qinli Changzheng: Laizi Hongjun Changzheng Zhe de Yuanshi Jilu* (Living through the Long March: the Original Documents from the Long Marchers), edited and annotated by Liu Tong, published by Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe (the Central Documents Press) in 2006; Chen Yu's *Changzheng Jingshen Wansui* (Long Live, the Spirit of the Long March), published by Huanghe Chubanshe (the Yellow River Publishing House), 1996; Chen Bojun's *Hongjun Changzheng Riji* (the Diary of the Long March), published by Zhongguo Geming Bowuguan (the Museum of the Chinese Revolution) in 1986; Cheng Fangwu's *Changzheng Huiyilu* (the Memoir of the Long March), Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe (Beijing: People's Publishing House), 1977.

<sup>22</sup> One of Wang's representative pieces, entitled *Qigen huochai* (Seven Matches), was included in primary schools' textbooks.

<sup>23</sup> Also see Gao Hua's "How was the Historical Narrative of the Long March Constructed?"

<sup>24</sup> Based on Schoppa's analysis of the complex natural-ecological and political situation in Xiaoshan county in Zhejiang Province, he argues that it is important to take consideration of "micro-regions" to understand the nature and scope of political and social actions in the local arenas in understanding Chinese Revolution.

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See Keith Schoppa's "Contours of Revolutionary Change in a Chinese County, 1900-1950" in *Twentieth-century China: New Approaches*.

<sup>25</sup> See Hayden White's "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory." In the article, Hayden White analyzes the significance and program of a number of major narrative modes of representation in historiography, such as anthropological, psychological, and semiological perspectives.

<sup>26</sup> See Introduction of *From Revolution to Politics*. Yang's research of the Long March defines it as a historic event spanning from the end of 1932 to the beginning of 1937. Narratively speaking, the end of the Long March was marked with the union of the First, Second, and Fourth Front Armies in October, 1936. However, another 20,000 Red Army troops were still undergoing extreme difficulties in battle and marching during the same period; they were eventually destroyed in early 1937 and as a result not considered by the central narrative, since "successes should be taken as the prerequisite for inclusion" (Yang, 1990, 3).

<sup>27</sup> See Gao, "Hongjun Changzheng de Lishi Xushu shi Zenyang Xingcheng de" (How was the Historical Narrative of the Long March Shaped).

<sup>28</sup> See Apter, David and Tony Saich. "Preface," and "Fictive Truths and Logical Inferences," in *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic*.

<sup>29</sup> See Yan's "The Image of Mao Zedong and Contemporary Chinese Art," in *Burden or Legacy*.

<sup>30</sup> Ben Xu also points out that, Mao's image as a kind and life-giving father and a paternalist authoritative figure was established and promoted in the years after the Long March, based on practical and symbolic paternalism rooted in Chinese culture and political tradition. See Xu, *Disenchanted Democracy*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> This slide-viewing experience was recalled in the preface of Lu Xun's first short story collection "Nahan" (Call to Arms). During his second year at a medical school in Sendai, Japan, he saw a slide show in his class. One slide showed an alleged Chinese spy during the Russo-Japanese War about to be beheaded. Lu Xun was shocked by the apathy of the Chinese bystanders, who seemed to enjoy the spectacles of the execution by the Japanese authority. That slide show moment made Lu Xun think the importance of spiritual transformation in the society of China. Two months later, he withdrew from medical school and joined the literary movement. A number of scholars have analyzed such a crucial turn in Lu Xun's life, changing him from a student of modern medical studies into a committed writer of the modern literary movement. In the *Preface*, Lu Xun writes: "[...] This was during the Russo-Japanese War, so there were many war films, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a film showing some Chinese, one of whom was bound, while many others stood around him. They were all strong fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians, who was to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle. Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because this slide convinced me that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they might be, could only serve to be made examples of or as witnesses of such futile spectacles- and it was not necessarily deplorable if many of them died of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit; and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement" (4-5). See Lu Xun's "Preface to the First Collecting of Short Stories, Call to Arms." Also see David Der-Wei Wang's "Invitation to a Beheading" in *The Monster that is History*.

<sup>32</sup> See Anderson, "Lu Xun: The Violence of Observation."

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<sup>33</sup> Many scholarships translate “minjian” into “civil,” and “minjian shehui” into “civil society”, although some point out the difference between the grassroots-based minjian and the elite-oriented civil society. See Kuan-Hsing Chen’s “Civil Society and Min-jian.”

<sup>34</sup> See “Changzheng Xinwenhua yu Zhongguo de Weilai,” (the Long March: New Culture and the Future of China).

<sup>35</sup> Adopting the Hegelian view of history and extending Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukács defines “reification” in relation to the process of capitalism and examines the relationship of human individuals under capitalism. In Lukács’s view, reification and reified existence already spread through the entire capitalist society, and have become one of the major constraints to the formation of class consciousness. Class consciousness should be taken, by the proletariat subject, as the organizing practice to reformulate the human social making of relations and products. Lukács writes, “As we stressed in the motto to this essay the existence of this conflict enables us to perceive that class consciousness is identical with neither the psychological consciousness of individual members of the proletariat, nor with the (mass-psychological) consciousness of the proletariat as a whole; but it is, on the contrary, *the sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class.*” See *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*.

<sup>36</sup> See Foley’s “Generic and Doctrinal Politics in the Proletarian *Bildungsroman*” in *Understanding Narrative*. In this essay, by examining two key terms—*Bildungsroman*, and, realism—Foley examines the relationship between form and politics in the left-wing fiction produced in the United States during the Depression.

<sup>37</sup> In analyzing the historical typology of the *Bildungsroman*, Bakhtin connects the individual’s journey and self-development in relation to the socio-historical significance and a larger society. He writes “the hero emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him.” See Mikhail Bakhtin, “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism: Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel.”

<sup>38</sup> Liu Kang discusses the “Qu-Mao-Gramsci lineage” regarding political and cultural views on hegemony and cultural revolution in his “The Formation of Marxist Aesthetics: from Shanghai to Yan’an” in *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries*.

<sup>39</sup> See White, “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory.” White further defines his idea of the plot of a narrative, arguing that, when examining the immanent structure of the narrative account of real events, one should realize that the kind of emplotted events is “offered as the proper content of historical discourse. The reality of these events does not consist in the fact that they occurred but that, first of all, they were remembered and, second, that they are capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered sequence,” 23.

<sup>40</sup> See Paul Ricoeur’s “Time and Narrative: Threefold Mimesis,” 67.

<sup>41</sup> See “Preface” of *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic*.

<sup>42</sup> Also see Hayden White’s “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory.”

<sup>43</sup> See Dai Jinhua, “Binghai Chenchuan—1998 Nian Zhongguo Dianying Beiwang” in *Wuzhong Fengjing: Zhongguo Dianying Wenhua, 1978–1998*, particularly the section entitled “Wenhua Fenxi Juyi 1: Hongse Lianren” (An Example of Cultural Analysis: A Time to Remember), 471–478.

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<sup>44</sup> For the most of the peasants, whereas imperialism was an abstract idea, the landlords were the real enemies. These peasants were, as some scholars put it, “both conservative and parochial in outlook and attitudes” (Beckett, 71). The crucial situation forced the CCP to reconsider their military strategy and shifted from urban uprisings to rural rebellion. See Beckett’s “Mao Tse-Tung and Revolutionary Warfare” in *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*.

<sup>45</sup> These rural bases were found in the border areas, which are Ruijin Soviet (Jiangxi Province—Fujian Province), Xiang-Exi (West Hunan—Hubei Province—Jiangxi Province), and E-Yu-Wan Soviet (Hubei Province—Henan Province—Anhui Province).

<sup>46</sup> See “Reports from the Road” regarding the activities at Site 2. Also see “Long March Project Presented at the Asian Studies Annual Conference.” <http://www.longmarchspace.com/>

<sup>47</sup> This information is based on my interview with the chief curator of the new Long March—Lu Jie.

<sup>48</sup> Also see Lucien Bianco’s *Origins of the Chinese Revolution, 1915-1949*. Bianco writes: “Between 1927 and 1935 Mao was not inventing a theory; he was finding his way along a road that had to be traveled. What he discovered cannot be separated from the act of putting it to the test. What he was following was not the model of a theoretician, but the intuition of a political leader (77-78).”

<sup>49</sup> See Li Jie’s research on *the Mao Phenomenon*: “Lun Mao Zedong Xianxiang de Wenhua Xinli he Lishi Chengyin” (The Cultural Psychology and Historical Cause of the Mao Phenomenon). *Dangdai zhongguo yanjiu* (Modern Chinese Studies) (2004) 3. <http://www.chinayj.net/default.asp> (This is the website of the journal).

<sup>50</sup> The axiom in Chinese is *zhengquan shi you qiangganzi zhong quede de*. Mao theorized and articulated such an essential idea as early as 1927.

<sup>51</sup> In mapping out the genealogy and complexity of Chinese Revolutions, Jianmei Liu contrasts Liang Qichao’s understanding of revolution as peaceful and gradual changes in all societal affairs with Sun Yat-sen’s understanding of revolution in which revolution refers to a violent overthrow of a fundamentally problematic regime. See *Revolution Plus Love: Literary History, Women’s Bodies, And Thematic Repetition in Twentieth-century Chinese Fiction*.

<sup>52</sup> From mid-January until late April 1935, chased and ambushed by the Nationalist Army, the First Front Army of the Red Army had to move north into Sichuan from the Guizhou-Yunnan-Sichuan border area, crossed the river four times, and suffered great casualties. Eventually, the Red Army broke through the enemy’s line. The story about how the Red Army strategically outflanked the Nationalist Army by *Sidu chishui* (crossing the Red River four times, the same as *Four Crossings of the Red River*, mentioned earlier) became one of the legends of the Long March. A film under the same title came out in 1983.

<sup>53</sup> According to the “Reports from the Road,” these local people were invited to participate in a survey prepared by the Long March team, which asked questions about the identities of the villagers, how often they drink, and their thoughts regarding the relation between Maotai liquor and the town’s collective identity.

<sup>54</sup> See Liu Kang, “Is there an Alternative to (Capitalist) Globalization? The Debate about Modernity in China,” 176.

<sup>55</sup> See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud introduces the concept of repetition compulsion through Torquato Tasso’s epic *Jerusalem Delivered*—after Tancred mistakenly killed his lover Clorinda, she returned in the ghostly form of a tree. Also see *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through*. In the

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paper, Freud works on the way in which one can master the compulsion to repeat and transform it into a motive for remembering. The concept of transference is crucial in that it can create “an intermediate region between illness and real life through which the transition from the one to the other is made” (141).

<sup>56</sup> *Cruel/Loving Bodies* was curated by Sasha Welland. As the curator introduces, the project grew out of an artists’ panel proposed for an international conference on Century of Chinese Feminist Thought at Fudan University in Shanghai. See “Forward” in the catalog of *Cruel/Loving Bodies*; also see Sasha Su-ling Welland’s “On Curating Cruel/Loving Bodies.”

<sup>57</sup> See Welland’s “On Curating Cruel/Loving Bodies.”

<sup>58</sup> See Special Issue of *Dongfang Shijue* (IONLY.com.cn) “Should Performance Art be Lovely?”

<sup>59</sup> See Brownell’s *Training the Body for China*. Also see Jian Xu, “Body, Discourse, and the Cultural Politics of Contemporary Chinese Qigong.”

<sup>60</sup> This presents an interesting contrast with the way in which Beijing put 480 million yuan (US\$70 million) into elite sports in 2005, while only 270 million yuan went toward public sports venues. See “A Hurdle too High for China,” by Kent Ewing.

<sup>61</sup> See Entwistle’s “Addressing the Body” in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. Entwistle continues, “[...] and, even in situations where much naked flesh is exposed (on the beach at the swimming-pool, even in the bedroom), the bodies that meet there are likely to be adorned, if only by jewelry, or indeed, even perfume” (6).

<sup>62</sup> The opposition between nudity and nakedness, according to John Vignaux Smyth, can be seen as an opposition “aligned with ideality and reality, purity and obscenity, and other loaded categories. In this context, clothing appears not only an indication of what kind of body is at stake, but as a metalevel sign of the relation between nakedness and clothing. [The] Renaissance and post-Renaissance nude is characteristically accompanied by drapery recalling classical dress (indicating, among other things, the prestigious mediation of classical art)” (167). See John Vignaux Smyth’s “Fashion Theory” in *The Habit of Lying: Sacrificial Studies in Literature, Philosophy, and Fashion Theory*.

<sup>63</sup> John Berger argues that “To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. [...] Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display” (39). See Berger’s “From Ways of Seeing,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*.

<sup>64</sup> Berger argues that, “in the average European oil painting of the nude the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man. See Berger’s “From Ways of Seeing,” 39.

<sup>65</sup> In the very beginning of John Hay’s “the Body Invisible in Chinese Art,” he immediately raises an important question: “Why does the body seem to be almost invisible in a figurative tradition that flourished for over two thousand years in China” (42)? In this question, Hay is particularly concerned with the nude body in traditional Chinese art, as he considers taking the nude as a starting point for bodily perception.

<sup>66</sup> In the article, John Hay also considers that the very notion of Chinese civilization lies in the core of the self-image of China itself, which is understood partly as the process of ornamentation in a semiotic sense. Sheldon Lu also argues that, traditionally, “the Chinese were proud of China as a country of cloths, caps, cultural objects (*yiguan wenwu zhibang*), a country of rites and rituals (*liyi zhibang*).” See “The Naked

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Body Politics in Postsocialist China and the Chinese Diaspora” in *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, 73.

<sup>67</sup> See the dialectic of the body politic and the body corporeal explored in *The Mouth that Begg: Cannibalism, and the Politics of Eating in Modern China*.

<sup>68</sup> It is also important to point out that Chinese performance is also understood as *xingwei yishu* (behavior art). Considering that behavior is a socially defined construct, this particular form of art that tackles “how to behave” is inherently structured within a social context.

<sup>69</sup> Wang Ban explores the individuals’ absolute submission to a collective unconscious. See Wang, “The Cultural Revolution: A Terrible Beauty Is Born.”

<sup>70</sup> See Elin Diamond’s “Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism.”

<sup>71</sup> Based on Marxian notion of surplus-value, Lacan invents the term “surplus enjoyment” (*plus-de-jour*), with *plus* designating both “more” and “no more.” What Lacan defines as *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, embodies surplus enjoyment. This enjoyment, just as *objet petit a*—the inherent otherness that exists within the subject—only exists in an absent manner.

<sup>72</sup> In this form of cultural practice, the man visits the woman and walks into his date’s home only after dark. He may spend the night with permission but will be sent home in the morning. Women and men will maintain separate residences in their households. The children born of the relationships will be raised in their mothers’ houses.

<sup>73</sup> Sasha Welland, “The Long March to Lugu Lake: A Dialogue with Judy Chicago.” Some community-oriented practices and activities based on “relational aesthetics” have attempted to bridge these divides. See Hal Foster “The Artist as Ethnographer.”

<sup>74</sup> There are a number of critiques of Judy Chicago’s *Dinner Party*, such as Kuby’s “The Hoodwinking of the Women’s Movement: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party,” Audrey Farrell’s “Judy Chicago: Exploitation or Art?,” and Alison Jaggar’s *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*.

<sup>75</sup> These craft techniques are supposed to be traditionally practiced by women throughout history.

<sup>76</sup> See “A Dinner Party Celebrating Women,” in *Gardner’s Art through the Ages*, 846-847.

<sup>77</sup> See *Feminism-art-theory*.

<sup>78</sup> See the documentary of “The Long March: A Walking Visual Display.”

<sup>79</sup> Also see Welland, “The Long March to Lugu Lake: A Dialogue with Judy Chicago.”

<sup>80</sup> In responding to the Chinese female artists’ concern about the unequal financial supports and material conditions provided by the Long March project between them and Chicago, Lu Jie stated that his major concern was to “re-educate” Judy Chicago through the new march. Sasha Welland calls Lu Jie’s use of Maoist political language a “tongue-in-cheek adoption,” which only allowed him to get out of the “mess” and tone down the disagreement among the female artists. Welland writes, “[Lu Jie] stood aware of the necessity for a big name and a big issue (enter Chicago and her controversial feminism) to garner international attention, yet this need on his part was exactly what he wants to overturn in the art world.” See “The Long March to Lugu Lake: A Dialogue with Judy Chicago.”

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<sup>81</sup> See Mignon Nixon's "Femme Maison (Woman House): What's So Funny about Fetishism?" In the new Long March project, Chicago's idea of creating the Chinese Womanhouse was not enthusiastically welcomed by the Chinese female artists, particularly when many of them already chose the exhibition spots prior to Chicago's proposal.

<sup>82</sup> The major ten questions are: 1. Would God be Female? 2. Would Men and Women be Equal? 3. Would Sexual Freedom Prevail? 4. Would there be Jealousy? 5. Would there be Equal Parenting? 6. Would Children Go Hungry? 7. Would Old Women Be Revered? 8. Would Buildings Resemble Wombs? 9. Would there be Private Property? 10. Would there be War?

<sup>83</sup> See the catalog of "Retrospective Exhibition of 20 years work by Guo Fengyi."

<sup>84</sup> See "Reports from the Road" on [www.longmarchspace.com](http://www.longmarchspace.com).

<sup>85</sup> Later, Huang Yin moved the photograph exhibition to the mud wall near the village.

<sup>86</sup> This information is also from the documentary of "The Long March: A Walking Visual Display."

<sup>87</sup> Also see *Choosing Revolution*.

<sup>88</sup> See Gao Minglu, "Post-Utopian Avant-Garde Art in China."

<sup>89</sup> See Qiu Zhijie's interview, entitled "Qiu Zhijie Fangtan: Hou Ganxing yu Guannian Yishu," which can be translated as "An Interview with Qiu Zhijie: Post-Sense Sensibility and Conceptual Art." The article is published on <http://www.artsbj.com>. In 1999 and 2001, Qiu and Wu Meichun organized "Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion" and "Post-Sense Sensibility." The show "Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion" in 1999 was most notorious for Sun Yuan's sculpture piece "Honey," in which human corpses were used.

<sup>90</sup> The meeting was held on April 10, 2003, in the Café of Sanlian Bookstore in Beijing. The meeting was organized by *Dushu* (Readings), arguably the most important journal read widely by the Chinese intellectuals. A number of leading scholars and artists attended the meeting. It is interesting that the organizers used the term *Pipan hui*. *Pipan hui* (criticism meetings) is a common terminology when considering the role of *huiyi* (meeting) in the process of political and ideological mobilization of the party. See "Changzheng, yige xingzou zhong de shijue zhanshi xianchang pipan hui" (the onsite criticism meeting of the Long March, A Walking Visual Display) <http://www.longmarchspace.com/huayu/pipanhui.htm>

<sup>91</sup> See the note of the meeting. The translation is mine.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> The phrase was proposed by the general secretary of the Party at the time—Zhao Ziyang. Zhao presented a work report to the 13<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress. In this report, Zhao explained the concept of primary state of socialism and further advocated developing a planned commodity economy on the basis of public ownership. Benedict Stavis argues that, Zhao offered the ideological solution to the puzzle of how China could claim to be Marxist and socialist at a time when it was privatizing agriculture, with drawing state control from industry, encouraging private entrepreneurship and hiring of labor, and allowing free markets to shape much of the planning. See Stavis's "Contradictions in Communist Reform: China before 4 June 1989." Also, the phrase "socialism with Chinese Characteristics" was presented by Deng Xiaoping to the 12<sup>th</sup> CCP congress in 1982.

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<sup>94</sup> The English title of the installation piece is *Wondering*.

<sup>95</sup> Wilson writes, "Field Marshal Lord Montgomery called the Long March 'an amazing feat of endurance.'" See *The Long March, 1935*, xiv.

<sup>96</sup> This is a piece created by a male artist, Qin Ga. He first had someone tattooed a map of China onto his back. In the journey of the new Long March, whenever the team arrived at a new site, he would have that site tattooed on the map of his back.

<sup>97</sup> I was quite hesitant to ask Lu Jie the question about "left or right." After I asked the question, Lu looked at his watch and told me, "after one hour and 18 minutes, you finally ask me this question."

<sup>98</sup> Certainly, the mainstream intellectual circles and social lives in postsocialist Chinese society cannot be simply put into the two stark categories of new left and liberalism. There is a wide and dynamic spectrum of thoughts and schools involved. In his discussion of Chinese nationalism in relation to Chinese intellectuals, Zheng Yongnian depicts a much broader picture concerning a wide range of thoughts, including liberalism, new conservatism, the old left, the new left, modern radicalism, official nationalism and popular nationalism. See Zheng Yongnian's *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations*.

<sup>99</sup> Here I borrow Zhang Xudong's analysis of the scholastic turn in the post-1989 era. See "The Making of the Post-Tiananmen Intellectual Field: A Critical Overview," in *Whither China*. Also see "Cong Tangrenjie dao Tangrenguan: Zhe Jiushi Weinisi Shuangnianzhan Zhongguoguan de Yiyi ma?" (from Chinatown to Chinahouse: is this the meaning of Chinese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale?)

<sup>100</sup> The new Long March, from the very beginning, anticipated and received global spectatorship. The majority of the site activities were documented on a daily basis. After completing the three-month local walking, the project took a longer time to display the achievement and continued to walk, globally. It walked to the Asian Art Week of New York City (2002, November), to the College Art Association Annual Conference (2003, February, also New York City), to the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Tochoji Temple (2003), to the Tsinghua University Inter-University Program (2003), to the Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference (2003), and to the Venice Biennale (2003). The rewalking of the Long March, in this sense, will not and cannot end.

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