Revolution Remains: Literature, Thought, and the Politics of Emotions in Reform China

革命猶存：當代中國的文學、思想與情感政治

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Chapter One: Reconceiving “Literature”: Li Zehou and the Rewriting of Chinese Literary History in the New Enlightenment

第一章：「文」之啓蒙: 李澤厚與中國現代文學史的重寫

In the mid-1980s, Chinese literary historians and intellectuals engaged in a series of political debates about the nature of literature. The discussion centered upon the ideological agenda of the Maoist aesthetics, which regarded literature as a powerful tool of formulating class consciousness and inspiring revolutions. Inspired by the prominent philosopher Li Zehou’s (1930- ) vision of enlightenment, a generation of young scholars struggled to create a new canon of Chinese literary history no longer tethered to socialist telos. While Li Zehou projected a philosophical return to the “Kantian moment” of the May Fourth era, literary scholars from Liu Zaifu (1941- ) and Qian Liqun (1939- ) to Chen Pingyuan (1954- ) and Wang Xiaoming (1955- ) strove to restore the humanistic core of modern Chinese literary historiography. The philosophy of enlightenment and humanist literary thought represent two closely allied but nonetheless distinctive movements in the 1980s. The intellectual bond between them warrants investigation, because it sheds light on the complicated process in which literary endeavor and political thinking have become almost inextricably intertwined in the post-Mao era. In delineating the metaphorical and poetic aspects of political thinking, my works reveals at the same time the political allusions to literary practice in the “New Enlightenment.” This affinity also reveals how the post-Mao generation (un)consciously harked back both to the May Fourth literary tradition and to the ancient poetics of wen that imbued literature with artistic, political, and cosmic connotations.

Chapter Two: The Liberal Imagination: the Politics of Mourning in the “Chen Yinke Fever”

第二章：自由主義的想象力：「陳寅恪熱」中的悼亡政治

The post-Tiananmen era experienced a surge of passions towards the life and work of the Chinese scholar Chen Yinke (1890-1969). A Sui-Tang historian by training, Chen devoted his last twenty years exploring the nostalgic poetry of the courtesan-cum-loyalist Liu Rushi (1617-1664), whose musings on the fall of Ming dynasty were intermingled with a spirit of resistance. Since the early 1980s, liberal intellectuals and scholars participated in emotionally charged

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1 Individual chapters available upon request.
debates about Chen’s enigmatic turn from “history” (shi 史) to “poetry” (shi 詩), a transition that conveyed his moral indignations against the political reformation of intellectuals in the Mao era. Drawing on sources ranging across memoirs, biographies, essays, journal articles, and intellectual polemics, this chapter seeks to understand how the politics of mourning have strongly influenced contemporary intellectual discussions and cultural representations of Chen’s political resistance. It focuses on the volatile emotions and moral indignations manifested in a variety of narratives about Chen’s fate under socialism, from Yu Ying-shih’s (1930-) “empathic identification” with Chen’s cultural loyalism, to Lu Jiandong’s (1960-) melodramatic account of Chen’s nonconformism. I argue that the liberal pathos transformed Chen’s image from an esoteric thinker into a scholar against politics, a cultural tradition resisting modernity, and a liberal martyr in defiance of Mao’s revolutionary mandate. In delineating the moral-psychological dimensions of liberal polemics, my work reveals at the same time the political regulation of emotional norms in the memory politics of the “Chen Yinke Fever.”

Chapter Three: Left Melancholy: Chen Yingzhen, Wang Anyi, and the Desire for Utopia in the Postrevolutionary Era

第三章：左派的憂鬱：陳映真、王安憶，與後革命時代的烏托邦書寫

The pathos of loss and defeat that pervaded fin-de-siècle left-wing culture has been the subject of immense debates in Western Marxism. Whereas current discussions of left melancholy are largely confined to the Euro-American context, this essays explores the aesthetic, affective, and political dimensions of leftist pathos as it has manifested in the Chinese and Sinophone literature following the fall of Mao’s Cultural Revolution. I focus on the manifold literary and intellectual exchanges between the Taiwanese Marxist Chen Yingzhen (1937-2016) and the Shanghai-based novelist Wang Anyi (1954-), to illustrate how left-wing writers come to terms with the ruins of socialist utopia across the Taiwan Strait. As one of those veteran Marxists whose faith in socialism came to be thwarted by the exposure of the human costs of Mao’s utopian experiment, Chen’s melancholic reflections on the failure of radical politics were underpinned by a persistent, one might say outdated, belief in the messianic promise of revolution. Wang Anyi, on the other hand, sought to overcome her sense of exhaustion and ennui in the 1990s by drawing inspirations from Chen’s utopian socialism. In delineating the rifts and affinities that both created tensions and nourished friendships between the two writers, this chapter explores how the melancholy syndrome is intertwined with their efforts to confront disillusionment, resignation, guilt, and forgetting in the postrevolutionary era. Finally, instead of dismissing the melancholic as “pathological” and “reactionary” approaches to left-wing politics, it reveals that the dystopian turn of leftist literature and thinking is still animated by an emancipatory political promise.

Chapter Four: From Christian Transcendence to the Maoist Sublime: Liu Xiaofeng and the Conservatives’ Resentment against Modernity

第四章：從基督的超越到革命的神學：劉小楓與保守主義的怨恨政治
Liu Xiaofeng’s (1956-) dramatic transition from a “Cultural Christian” to the founder of the “Chinese Straussian School” in the new millennium has provoked heated debates among Chinese intellectuals and scholars. In the 1980s, Liu underscored the transcendence of Christian ethics to interrogate and exorcise the sublime myth of revolutionary utopia. The iconoclast declared that only an utterly transcendent God could truly ostracize various theological fantasies that elevated Maoist revolution above secular grounds. Since the 1990s however, Liu gradually came to a cynical conclusion that his quest for “ultimate values” beyond politics risked collapsing into secular liberalism, cordoning off religion within the sphere of private experience. Turing to the political theology of Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) and Leo Strauss (1899-1973), Liu contended that Chinese polity must overcome fragile liberal pluralism by reinstalling a fearful and immortal figure of Mao as powerful ways of grounding politics and guiding moral conducts in a post-secular world. Extant perspectives describe Liu’s conservative turn as a “regression” “break” and “intellectual betrayal.” But the problem of transcendence is a sustained theme throughout Liu’s lifelong search for ultimacy, from his youthful yearnings for Christian redemption to the utter profanation of the sacred in his recent espousal of Mao cult. Hence, I argue that Liu’s earlier search for an “other-worldly” religious ethic is continuous with his later obsession with “this-worldly” political theology. Finally, this chapter considers Liu’s transition as part and parcel of a conservative revolt that conjured up an irrationalist resentment against “modern nihilism” in contemporary China.

Chapter Five: A Religious Feeling: Death, Reincarnation, and the Making of a Revolutionary Relic

第五章：宗教之情：死亡、轉生，與革命領袖的「遺骸」

In 1977, the embalmed corpse of the Great Helmsman was displayed inside the Mao Memorial Hall at the Tiananmen Square for public veneration. This chapter investigates why Mao’s body has continued to arouse religious and political aspirations in the turbulent times following the end of his rule. What has the contemporary obsessions with Mao inherited from its revolutionary past? In particular, how have the various religious feelings towards Mao’s body survived and persisted in his posthumous cult? In life, Mao’s sublime body has been the site for assertions of sovereign power and the incarnation of mass will. But the “democratization” and “depoliticization” of Mao in the postsocialist era did not simply lead to thoroughly secularized accounts of his image. Rather, Mao’s biological remains—his most tangible and concrete legacy—has evoked powerful religious feelings among Chinese writers and intellectuals, from the fantasies of resurrection to the yearnings for redemption. My narrative begins with the Party’s controversial decision to preserve Mao’s body in a time of intense emotional grief and political uncertainties. It treats Mao’s embalmed corpse as a most primitive literary artifact inscribed with layers of meaning, from the ritualized display of political sovereignty to the ambiguous allusion to religious miracle. Then I look at the bizarre resurrection of Mao’s flesh in Liu Cixin’s (1963-) 1989 science fiction China 2185. The story features a cybernetic uprising in the distant future, when a computer engineer broke into the Mao mausoleum and “uploaded” Mao’s mind into the cyberspace. Lastly, I analyze sacrilegious attacks on the Maoist religiosity in the surrealist fictions of Yan Lianke (1958-) and Yu Hua (1960-). Their antipathy against the Mao cult is no less mingled with obsessions with the
demonic power of Mao’s charisma. In each of these works, I pay close attention to the intersection of secular politics and religious metaphors in the making of a revolutionary relic.