

The Making and Remaking of China's "Red Classics"

Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture

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Castration for the People

The Politics of Revision and the Structure of Violence in Hao Ran's Short Stories

Xiaofei Tian

In a famous treatise entitled “On the Self-Cultivation of a Communist” (Lun gongchandangyuan de xiuyang 論共產黨員的修養), the author delineates the image of an ideal Communist. Among other things, “he may well be the most sincere, honest, and cheerful person, because, without any selfishness, he has nothing to hide from the Party, doing ‘nothing that he cannot tell others about’” (他也可能最誠懇、坦白和愉快，因為他無私心，在黨內沒有要隱藏的事情，“事無不可對人言”)¹ The quotation at the end of the sentence is a remark made by a well-known neo-Confucian statesman and historian, Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), who had once proudly asserted, “There is nothing I have done in my life that I cannot tell others about” (平生所為未嘗有不可對人言者)² The remark not only implies the uprightness of one’s behavior but also advocates complete transparency of the self.

The author of the modern treatise was Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇 (1898–1969), the chairman of the People’s Republic from 1959 to 1968. Liu and his treatise were violently denounced in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), but the fight against *si* 私, a word that encompasses a wide range of meanings from selfishness and self-interest to anything personal and private, had remained a crucial part of the agenda of socialism and of the Cultural Revolution movement itself. With one of its most widely known slogans being “Battle hard against the flickering of the word *si* in one’s mind” (hen dou si zi yi shannian 狠鬥私字一閃念), the Cultural Revolution, “a revolution touching the soul” (chuji linghun de geming 觸及靈魂的革命), represents a climax of the obsessive quest for the transparency of the self, a quest that constitutes the core of the spiritual violence of the mass movement. The economic system of socialism characterized by the rejection of private ownership of the means of production was translated into the social and cultural realm, in which anything

1. Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇, “Lun gongchan dangyuan de xiuyang” 論共產黨員的修養, *Liu Shaoqi xuanji* 劉少奇選集 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981), 1, 133.

2. Tuotuo 脫脫 et al., comp., *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 10769.

personal and private was considered potentially subversive and must be eradicated. There could be no opaqueness in such a social system: everything, and everyone, must be transparent to allow for maximum surveillance and control.

The Sisyphean fight against *si* in human nature and indeed against human nature itself is one of the major themes of the works of Hao Ran 浩然 (1932–2008), the socialist writer laureate. Born as Liang Jinguang 梁金廣 into a poor peasant family in Hebei, Hao Ran was orphaned at a young age, joined the Communist Party in 1948, and published his first short story in 1956. Hao Ran is best known for his novels *Bright Sunny Sky* (*Yanyang tian* 艷陽天) and *The Great Road of Golden Light* (*Jinguang dadao* 金光大道), both of which sold millions of copies and were made into movies in the 1970s, turning Hao Ran into a household name and the most eminent writer of the Cultural Revolution period. And yet, with only three and half years of schooling, Hao Ran probably had received less formal education than any other prominent modern writer. He was not only saved from destitution by the Communist Party but also owed his literary success entirely to opportunities created by the socialist regime.³ Premodern Chinese writers would often romanticize farming life in their writings, admiring the farmer's freedom from the pressures of public life; but the farmer had always remained the object of the scholar-official's fetishizing gaze and never talked back—until Hao Ran. An antithesis of the traditional Chinese cultural elite, Hao Ran wrote from within the peasants, as a peasant himself, not the gentleman observer standing on the outside looking in. Quite aware of his unique place in the Chinese literary tradition, Hao Ran justifiably refers to his story of success as a “miracle.”⁴ In many ways, Hao Ran epitomizes the cultural revolutions of modern China, which began with the New Culture Movement of the early twentieth century and culminated in the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution of the socialist regime.

Focusing on stories published between 1958 and 1960, this essay explores Hao Ran's treatment of the epic fight against all forms of *si*, from material self-interest to private feelings regarded as potentially conflicting with the larger goals of the socialist nation, through a discussion of the politics of his revisions of his early stories. From literary works dominated by a strong political ideology, one might expect to see simple, straightforward portrayals of a struggle with a predetermined outcome, but nothing is further from the truth: Hao Ran's early short stories often turn out to be unintentionally complicated representations of issues of gender, social class, desire, and sexuality. The stories discussed in this essay, except for the last one, are all from the following collections: *Magpies on the Branch* (*Xique dengzhi* 喜鵲登枝), published in 1958; *Apples Are About to Ripen* (*Pingguo yao shu le* 蘋果要熟了), published in 1959; and *Song of New Spring* (*Xinchun qu* 新春曲), published in 1960. As Hao Ran's

3. Hao Ran, *Hao Ran koushu zizhuan* 浩然口述自傳 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2008), 111–60.

4. *Ibid.*, 303–4.

first three story collections, they possess a fresh energy, exemplifying the author's newness on the literary scene that is matched only by the newness of the rural life he depicts. More than a decade later, he stated that these three collections "basically belonged to an unself-conscious phase" of his literary career: at that time, "I wrote however I liked, without thinking and crafting; as long as it read smoothly to myself, I would pass it."⁵ He thought that his earlier literary language "lacked precision, and was interspersed with many obscure dialect words and slang, even containing some naturalistic elements that hurt the images of the characters."⁶ And yet it is exactly those "unself-conscious" first attempts at fiction writing that bring out a fascinating mix of socialist ideology and a raw sexual energy that refuses to be entirely subsumed by the revolutionary discourse. Hao Ran's subsequent revisions of his early stories reflect not only changes in contemporary politics but also the gradual transformation of his identity from a peasant writer to an aspiring member of the cultural elite; more important, they paradoxically bring our attention to precisely what he desires to suppress.

In telling stories sanctioned by the party state, socialist literature of the Seventeen Years period (1949–1966) helped establish norms of behavior in the People's Republic. Instead of holding a mirror to material practice, Hao Ran's stories are constitutive of the material practice of the age: they were performative in the sense that they help found a new social order by proclaiming it. Yet writings can easily get out of the writer's control: on the one hand, the stories often employ rhetorical strategies and narrative patterns that are culturally familiar to readers on a deep level, and they are written with a literary language that is tainted by the very thing that the writer wants to eliminate, namely, the cultural past; on the other hand, wayward impulses and repressed desires return to the surface of the revolutionary writing, both in the form of unconscious revelations and in the form of revisions—conscious acts of suppression that expose rather than conceal. Our author is thus betrayed by the medium he uses and by his attempts to bring his writings under control. As the Cultural Revolution represents a climax of the epic socialist battle against *si*, the pruning and clipping performed by Hao Ran to his early stories are ultimately paralleled by the violence committed within a text. The last part of the essay will analyze a Hao Ran story written at the end of the Cultural Revolution period; I argue that it demonstrates what I call a discursive structure of violence, which embodies the obsessive quest for transparency and the spiritual violence of the Cultural Revolution itself.

5. Sun Dayou 孫達祐 and Liang Chunshui 梁春水, eds., *Hao Ran yanjiu zhuanji* 浩然研究專集 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1994), 106–7.

6. *Ibid.*, 107.

Covered Nakedness and Displaced Penetration

In contrast with the observation that in pre-Cultural Revolution agricultural novels “there are no female heroes at all,”⁷ women feature prominently in Hao Ran’s short stories. Many are positive characters embodying the ideal socialist womanhood: strong, cheerful, public-minded laborers working for the collective good. Upon closer examination, however, we find numerous fissures and cracks disrupting the glossy surface of the socialist pastoral scene. Gender stereotyping and conventional gender roles persist despite the newness of the socialist new woman, and the structure of male authority never changes in the larger family—that is, the agricultural co-op—beyond her immediate family. In a story that focuses on the conflict between daughter-in-law and father-in-law, “The Control Commissioner” (Jiancha zhuren 監察主任), Bai Guihua 白桂花, though criticizing her selfish father-in-law as the “control commissioner,” nevertheless plays the conventional role of a filial daughter-in-law by personally making amends for *his* misconduct.⁸ When social hierarchy is mapped onto family hierarchy, the new woman suddenly finds herself in a double predicament, because she must be “good” on both fronts: at home and in public.

In “Wind and Rain” (Feng yu 風雨), Liu Shuying, the wife of the head of the agricultural co-op and a new mother, is moved by her progressive husband, Xiao Yongshun, to lend a helping hand to the daughter of an old family enemy, now a member of the same co-op. Throughout the story Liu Shuying is presented as a nurturing figure: she tends to her sick husband, and, at the end of the story, decides to suckle the baby of her hospitalized enemy. When the husband volunteers to go and find a few more new mothers to help out, she says, “This is the business of us womenfolk; there’s no need for you [to intervene],” and rushes out herself into the rain.⁹ This gesture forms a neat symmetry with her husband’s earlier rushing out into the rain to make funerary arrangements for the deceased husband of the woman in trouble, but the purposes of their efforts are drastically different: while he as the authority figure of the socialist family takes care of the dead, she as a woman gives life. Each is performing a traditional gender role.

More than men, women are often portrayed as the targets of edification and transformation. This is particularly obvious in the 1959 collection, *Apples Are About to Ripen*. Of the fifteen stories included therein, eight feature female protagonists, and with the exception of one (“A Girl and the Blacksmith” 姑娘和鐵匠), the female characters in all seven stories are shown to have undergone some sort of change. A particularly noteworthy story is “Shuisheng” 水生; the title heroine Chen Shuisheng,

7. Yang Lan, “The Ideal Socialist Hero: Literary Conventions in Cultural Revolution Novels,” in *China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*, ed. Woei Lien Chong (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 191.

8. Hao Ran, *Xique dengzhi* 喜鵲登枝 (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1958), 173–89.

9. *Ibid.*, 41.

spoiled by her grandmother, is transformed spiritually and physically in the demanding labor of building Beijing's Shisanling Reservoir; the soft bruised female body, with swollen legs, is ultimately forged into "a girl cast in iron" (*tieda de guniang* 鐵打的姑娘).¹⁰ Toward the end of the story the author asks, "What difference is there between her and the forty thousand soldiers at the construction site?"¹¹ The answer is of course, "None." Gender difference and individual difference are both eliminated in the vision of a composite image of the glorious socialist: Shuisheng, a peasant girl turned into a soldier (*zhanshi* 戰士) on a construction site (*gongdi* 工地), has disappeared into an iron-cast statue embodying the perfect union of Worker, Peasant, and Soldier (*gong, nong, bing*), the three pillars of the socialist society.

Hao Ran claims that his stories are created not from "writing" but from "revising" (*bushi xie chulaide, ershi gai chulai de* 不是寫出來的，而是改出來的).¹² The revisions of his early stories are often much more than mere stylistic changes, revealing a changing ideology and underscoring the fissures and cracks in the original texts. A simple instance is "Double-Bloomed Lotus" (*Bing di lian* 並蒂蓮), in which the heroine, Dong Chuntao 董春桃, and her husband, Peng Xinghan 彭興漢, are a loving young couple.¹³ One day, when Peng comes home in the evening to find his wife not in, he goes out to the co-op's canteen to buy dinner for her. Later, after she comes home, he asks her whether she has borrowed a copy of *Stormy Years* (*Fengyun chuji* 風雲初記)—a famous novel about the Sino-Japanese War by Sun Li 孫犁 (1913–2002)—from the county library as he has requested; the wife answers that she has got him a copy of "On the Self-Cultivation of a Good Communist" instead. In the revised version, *Stormy Years* is replaced by the vague reference, "some novel," and "On the Self-Cultivation of a Communist" by the disgraced Liu Shaoqi has been changed to "Serve the People" (*Wei renmin fuwu* 為人民服務) and "The Foolish Old Man Moves the Mountain" (*Yugong yishan* 愚公移山), two essays by Mao Zedong that rose to the status of red canon in the Cultural Revolution years.¹⁴ More interestingly, instead of buying dinner from the co-op canteen, the ill-fated institution founded in the late 1950s, Peng in the revised version cooks dinner for his wife.

"The New Bride" (*Xin xifu* 新媳婦) furnishes a more intriguing example. In the story, a "middle peasant," Huang Quanbao 黃全寶, clashes with the progressive new bride, Bian Huirong 邊惠榮, on her wedding night because, with a feminist consciousness, she resists the wedding guests' attempts to "roughhouse in the nuptial chamber" (*nao dongfang* 鬧洞房), an old local custom that subjects the bride to various forms of physical abuse. Later on, the new bride publicly criticizes Huang Quanbao

10. Hao Ran, *Pingguo yao shu le* 蘋果要熟了 (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1959), 52.

11. Ibid., 52.

12. Sun and Liang, *Hao Ran yanjiu zhuanji*, 110.

13. Hao Ran, *Xin chun qu* 新春曲 (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1960), 97–114.

14. Hao Ran, *Chun ge ji* 春歌集 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1973), 130–31.

for the sloppiness of his work in the field. On the next day, Huang Quanbao works side by side with Bian Huirong in the field; at the end of the day, unwilling to walk home with the others, he takes an alternative route and thus cuts his foot on a broken willow branch. Bearing no personal grudge against him, Bian Huirong helps him out by dressing his wound and carries him back home, and the young man is moved to tears by her generosity and implicitly becomes a morally reformed man.

When the story is reprinted in a 1973 selection of Hao Ran's stories written from 1956 to 1966, *Songs of Spring* (*Chunge ji* 春歌集), Hao Ran revised it heavily. Many of the revisions try to repress the sexual tension in the original story. In depicting the custom of "roughhousing in the nuptial chamber," the original version states that sometimes wedding guests would even "rip off the new bride's clothes, or spray pepper powder in her nostrils."¹⁵ In the revised version the guests are said to "spray pepper powder in the new bride's nostrils, or pour cold water over the new bride's head."¹⁶ The sexual violence inherent in the phrase *bo yifu* 剥衣服 (rip off clothes), as opposed to the more neutral *tuo yifu* 脱衣服 (take off clothes), and the speculative nakedness of *this* bride, Bian Huirong, are edited away, though they resurface, transformed, in the bride's voluntary stripping of her blouse to dress the wound of Huang Quanbao. While the consummation of Bian Huirong's marriage is quickly dismissed in one sentence, "the young couple spent a sweet night together," we have a long passage about a very different sort of bleeding: that of Huang Quanbao's foot "almost pierced through" by the willow branch.¹⁷ The description, "Blood stained her pants and sullied both of her hands," is revised to "Blood flew onto Bian Huirong's pants and made a large red blot." The avoidance of the mention of hands seems to be an attempt to downplay the physicality of Bian Huirong's care of Huang Quanbao. Earlier, as they work side by side in the field, she is said to be "chatting and laughing with him like nothing had happened [between them],"¹⁸ but the revised version deletes "with him."¹⁹ The deletion, another attempt to distance Bian from Huang, tones down a classic example of "unresolved sexual tension" between a male and female character.

There are, however, always perverse elements that are out of the author's control and cannot be edited away no matter how hard he tries. The sexuality and the penetration of the new bride are not repressed, but displaced, onto her tension-filled interaction with Huang Quanbao, the wedding guest who teases her the most mercilessly, and with her father-in-law, Liang the Elder, another man who becomes incapacitated because of conflict with her and is subjected to her tender loving care and reduced to tears by her. The revisions undertaken by Hao Ran in the last years

15. Hao Ran, *Xique dengzhi*, 2.

16. Hao Ran, *Chun ge ji*, 23.

17. Hao Ran, *Xique dengzhi*, 18.

18. *Ibid.*, 17.

19. Hao Ran, *Chun ge ji*, 37.

of the Cultural Revolution are the author's struggle against the immaterial forms of *si*—romantic love and sexual desire, the most selfish, personal, and private of human emotions—which parallels the battles against *si* in the stories.

Love and Desire in the Agricultural Co-op

Many of the stories represent the author's attempt to reconcile romantic love with revolutionary ideology. The young man and woman in "Spring Silkworms Spin Cocoons" ("Chuncan jiejian" 春蠶結繭) find a solution to their budding love by devoting themselves to the common enterprise of sericulture. The silkworms producing silk threads, *si* 絲, which puns with *si* 思, love-longing, is a classic image of faithful love in the classical tradition, borne out by the Tang poet Li Shangyin's 李商隱 (c. 813–858) immortal line that has attained the status of a common saying in the Chinese language, "The threads/longing of a spring silkworm will only come to an end with its death" 春蠶到死絲方盡.²⁰ Hao Ran's story ends with a scene of reunion and transference: while the young man grabs the girl's hand, "wanting to say something, and yet unable to utter a word," his mother calls out to the girl: "Lanfen, Lanfen, I have missed you like crazy!"²¹ The expression of longing becomes acceptable only when displaced.

The artful ending of the silkworm story exemplifies the charm of Hao Ran's early stories; however, few early stories about love and courtship made their way into the 1973 collection of his selected stories, and, for those that did, drastic revision ensures that romantic elements of the stories are reduced to the minimum. Of the nine early stories included in *Songs of Spring*, only "By the Arrow-Shaft River" ("Jiangan he bian" 箭桿河邊) is originally a love story proper.²² After misunderstandings and mishaps, a middle-aged widower, turned misogynist because of his painful experience with his ex-wife in the "old society," and a widow with three daughters, finally come together when they work side by side on the levy during a flash flood. Thunderstorms and flash floods are frequent in Hao Ran's stories—they are a convenient device to build a crisis and a dramatic climax in rural fiction—but in this story the swelling river takes on a symbolic value, signifying the sexual desire of a mature man and woman. Near the end of the story, there is a scene in which they stand together talking on the riverbank, and the man begs for the woman's forgiveness and for a second chance. In the original version, the woman said she would raise "a new condition." When the

20. Although he had not received much formal schooling, Hao Ran had been a passionate reader of China's classical novels as well as an avid fan of traditional operas; the novels and operas are rich sources of cultural lore and classical literary, particularly poetic, references. By his own account, Hao Ran's first literary education consists of oral storytelling tradition, live theater performance, classical vernacular novels, and, among other things, *chantefables* and opera play scripts. Hao Ran, *Hao Ran koushu zizhuan*, 25–26, 47–57.

21. Hao Ran, *Xique dengzhi*, 61.

22. Hao Ran, *Xin chun qu*, 75–96.

man, surprised, asks her what it might be, she “lowered her head and walked forward a few steps,” reviewing her whole life in her head and commenting on the impossibility of love in the old days when a woman married only for livelihood. Ignoring her comment, the man urges her to clarify her “condition,” and she replies emphatically, “You must truly love me, and I you, and we work together for the good of our commune. Understand?”²³ In the revised version, however, she “walked forward, looking at the infinitely stretching earth, the grains growing from the earth, and their golden and fiery red fruits. Her heart felt incredibly uplifted and glad,”²⁴ and this is all that is left of the scene. The dialogue about mutual love is deleted, and the image of the woman holding her head high and gazing into the distance, with the man eagerly nodding at her words, evokes the typical visionary pose struck by the hero, often surrounded by the admiring “masses” whose eyes are fixated upon the hero’s face, in revolutionary Beijing Operas and propaganda posters from the Cultural Revolution era. The revision gives the final scene a strong sense of tableau devoid of animation and movement.

Two stories dealing with love triangles form an interesting pair for comparison. “Morning Clouds Red as Fire” (Zhaoxia hong si huǒ 朝霞紅似火) describes a young farmer Ding Dachuan’s love entanglements with two girls during the “steel production” initiative.²⁵ The increase of steel production was part of the Great Leap Forward movement, during which many so-called backyard furnaces were set up across urban neighborhoods and rural areas, tended by people with no knowledge of metallurgy, to produce steel from scrap metal and double China’s steel production. In Hao Ran’s story, Ding Dachuan falls in love with a girl named Jin Huazhen when learning from her how to produce steel. Resisting his adoptive mother’s attempt to match him with his cousin, Qin Yuzhu, a lively and pretty girl, Ding sets his wedding date for October 1, the National Day. Right before their wedding, Jin is severely wounded in an explosion accidentally set off by a fellow worker. Ding is tormented. He asks himself, “Is a person whose body is damaged lovely no more?” He never answers the question directly, but later he states, “I love her not because of her looks, but because of her heart that is only concerned for the collective, not individual, good.”²⁶ Supported by his cousin, who is also in love with Ding but selflessly feels no jealousy, Ding reaffirms his love for Jin, even if she has lost her right hand and part of her left hand.

The plot reveals, certainly unintentionally, the dark side of the “steel production” initiative, which mobilized hundreds of thousands of people to handle something they were not ready for. The charm of the story lies in its intricate web of symbols and

23. Ibid., 95.

24. Hao Ran, *Chun ge ji*, 123.

25. Hao Ran, *Xin chun qu*, 1–33.

26. Ibid., 21 and 26.

symmetries of images and colors that produce a pattern of meaning underneath the surface moral message. Dachuan's name literally means "Great River." As the story begins, we are told that he has once saved his village from drowning by blocking a hole in the levy with his body. His sweetheart's surname, Jin, means "Gold," and her name, Huazhen, is "Splendid Gem." Saving the lives of more than a hundred people by throwing her body over the explosives, she is spiritually, if not in physical body, the true gold that cannot be melted by fire. It is only right that the two, each fighting a dangerous element of nature, should be united in the end against the morning clouds "burning like flames," which stands for a safe sublimation of the threatening furnace blaze.²⁷ The shadow of the story is the lively, charming cousin Yuzhu, "Jade Pearl," who is also a precious gem, and with whom Dachuan "had always gotten along excellently."²⁸ Yuzhu is conveniently the best friend of Huazhen; at one point in the story she tells her, "It is no longer fashionable in our present society; otherwise I would certainly form sworn sisterhood with you."²⁹ In a premodern narrative it would have made perfect sense for two "sworn sisters" to both marry the man they love, but we all know that it is no longer "fashionable" in the new society.

Throughout the story a recurring image is that of fire: the flushed faces; the flames of passion, anger, or pain; the pomegranate blossoms ablaze in Huazhen's yard; the morning clouds "burning like fire"; the girl wrapped in flames; and, last but not least, the fiery glow in the furnaces all over the hilly land.³⁰ In stark contrast with the "raven black iron and steel," the rural landscape is represented in bright colors—yellow, white, and green, and yet the produce of the earth are also presented in metallic terms: "millet of gold," "cotton of silver," and "wheat field like green jade."³¹ Just as the physical body of Jin Huazhen becomes deformed during the steel production initiative, the rural landscape itself has gone through a metallurgical transformation, an engraving on which the writer attempts to trace out a meaningful design in the midst of the "billowing smoke and dust" of a feverish, and ultimately disastrous, movement.³²

As Hao Ran reminisces in his memoir years later, he had been similarly torn between two girls when he was young: a lively girl he had truly loved but could not marry and a gentle and quiet one who became his wife, with whom he felt dissatisfied but nevertheless spent his whole life. At one point he fantasized about marrying both girls.³³ "Morning Clouds," more than any other story, becomes a catharsis of the

27. Ibid., 33.

28. Ibid., 25.

29. Ibid., 12.

30. Ibid., 7, 14, 16, 15, 20, 25, and 28.

31. Ibid., 1, 3, 27.

32. Ibid., 27.

33. Hao Ran, *Hao Ran koushu zizhuan*, 80.

author's personal discontent and frustration. This story is excised from the collection in *Hao Ran wen ji* published in 1983.

The other love triangle story, "Apples Are About to Ripen," reverses direction and depicts a young woman and two men. A high school graduate from the city, Peihong starts to work with a team of young people on the apple orchard of the Back Hill Village. She has two suitors: Huang Hui, the rural technician, is described as "the only intellectual in the agricultural co-op"; Mangzhong, in contrast, is a "mountain man through and through," with a rich store of firsthand experience in tending fruit trees.³⁴ Initially attracted to Huang Hui, who indulges her sense of self-importance, Peihong has many clashes with Mangzhong. By and by, she comes to see Huang's selfish nature and realizes, to her delight, that Mangzhong is in love with her.

Hao Ran's penchant for symbolism can already be detected in this early story. Peihong's name means "Cultivating Red," quite appropriate for an orchard worker. Mangzhong is figured as an apple tree: his "ruddy face" evokes the "bright red" apples peeking from behind the leaves, and "his thick, strong arms, revealing their bulging muscles, are like the trunks of little trees." Working in an orchard since childhood, he has almost become an incarnation of the apple tree himself. In contrast, the "yellow spots" appearing on the sick apples "as if having been burned by the heads of incense sticks" evoke the surname of Huang Hui (literally, "Yellow Light"); Huang Hui also smokes cigarettes, which visually echo the burning incense sticks.³⁵

The most remarkable aspect of this story is the unresolved sexual tension between Peihong, who is ambitious and overconfident, and Mangzhong, who to her chagrin is made the leader of her team. They argue and fight, and keep distance from each other with a strained politeness. The tension is released only in the final episode. When Peihong, with a new understanding of Mangzhong's love for her, rushes to the orchard to save the trees she has sprayed too much pesticide on, she finds Mangzhong there, who has suffered a heat stroke from working on the sick trees in the hot weather:

Underneath a tree Mangzhong sat on the ground; Lichun's wife was holding him up giving him water to drink. His eyes were closed, and his eyebrows knitted together. His broad chest, exposed through his unbuttoned shirt, was heaving hard. Peihong came to a standstill as if being nailed to the ground, her heart violently shaken. . . . She went over in a hurry, grabbing Mangzhong's shoulders tightly with both hands and shaking him.³⁶

The strong, powerful male body, now incapacitated and immobilized, becomes a passive object of gaze, admiration, and compassion, made attractive and sexualized by its temporary vulnerability and humanity. And yet, in the 1983 complete collection of Hao Ran's works, this ending is excised, and the revised version ends abruptly with

34. Hao Ran, *Pingguo yao shu le*, 3 and 4.

35. *Ibid.*, 4, 18, 12, 19.

36. *Ibid.*, 22.

Peihong's rushing toward the orchard. The excision conforms to Hao Ran's general practice of rewriting his early stories into cleaner, more politically correct versions.

Hao Ran has a proclivity for depicting the compromised, sexualized male body. In "Wind and Rain," Xiao Yongshun, who is sick in bed, insists on going out in the rain to help a co-op member. After he comes home, he "collapsed on the *kang* bed, breathing so heavily that his chest was rising and falling. His face was more sallow, and his lips chapped even more. While Shuying wiped away the rain on his face with a towel, she stroked his chest gently. . . . Only after a long time did Xiao Yongshun open his eyes."³⁷ Xiao Yongshun and Liu Shuying were the real names of a real couple, and Xiao was Hao Ran's best friend. In his memoir, an entire chapter is devoted to Xiao,³⁸ who is described as a man of attractive appearances and noble character, principled and public minded at the expense of all personal relationships, including his friendship with Hao Ran. Hao Ran's chapter relates how he has changed his initial impression of Xiao as a "rude, barbaric fellow" despite his "handsome looks" upon seeing Xiao jump into a cold river to save the co-op's jammed logs.³⁹ Next summer, Hao Ran used four out of five days of his vacation cycling fifty miles and crossing a flooding river to visit his friend. He had expected a warm reunion, but, after he got there, Xiao Yongshun, returning from the field, rode Hao Ran's bicycle away without so much as coming into the house and saying hello—only later did Hao Ran learn that Xiao had rushed to a meeting in the shire. These incidents seem to have been combined and written into another early story, "Crossing the River" (*Guohe ji* 過河記), from the 1959 collection, which epitomizes several issues—selflessness versus private interest, repressed desire, and textual/sexual excision—discussed so far.

The story narrates how a rural youth, Li Chunyang, meets Chen Xiangqun, by a flooding river with a broken bridge. Initially contemptuous of the bespectacled young man's bookish appearances and a funny-looking half-shaven head, Li changes his attitude after he learns that Chen is a doctor who has interrupted his haircut to respond to a call to a medical emergency in a village. Li risks his life by helping Chen cross the river; in midcurrent, when they begin to sink, Chen voluntarily lets go of Li to save his life. They finally make it together. Only later does Li realize that Chen is coming to the rescue of his pregnant wife, who is having a difficult delivery.

An embodiment of the creed "Everyone for one, one for everyone" (*Renren wei wo, wo wei renren* 人人為我，我為人人), the story is charming with its lyrical simplicity and the neat plot symmetry typical of Hao Ran's fiction. Notable is the male bonding achieved through the river crossing together, mirrored by the difficulty undergone by mother and baby in childbirth, another liminal state that finds release in the ultimate safe passage and the celebration of new life. Li Chunyang first appears

37. Hao Ran, *Xique dengzhi*, 39.

38. Hao Ran, *Hao Ran koushu zizhuan*, 171–86.

39. *Ibid.*, 172.

in the story stark naked, wringing his clothes drenched by the rain. Later, there is a great deal of mutual gazing in the repeated structure of “X’s two eyes were fixated on Y.” In Chen’s eyes, Li has “a big, tall build, a ruddy face with a dark complexion, two not very dark but clearly defined eyebrows, and a few speckles on his nose: all these demonstrated his forthrightness and firmness. After just a few words he fell deeply in love with this peasant man.”⁴⁰ In the revised version, the last sentence is toned down to “After just a few words he had already loved this peasant man.”⁴¹ In Li’s view, “Only a while ago he had thought the other man’s clothes, glasses, haircut and so forth were all so laughable and odd; but now they have all become so nice-looking, so lovable. He could not help blushing for his earlier rudeness.”⁴² With an ever-so-slightly homoerotic touch, the two men are bound to each other both by their physical proximity in the river and by their spiritual affinity, as they look at each other after their crossing, “everything in their hearts having been understood in silence.”⁴³

Spring Snow

Many motifs of “Crossing the River”—selflessly helping others, potential conflict between rural and urban—reappear in a story of almost twenty years later, but with a new edge. The last section of this essay will analyze the story entitled “Spring Snow” (Chun xue 春雪), written in late 1976, toward the very end of the Cultural Revolution. In the story, Hao Ran shows himself a seasoned writer, but the political movement, with its relentless quest for transparency, has also left a deep impact. The pastoral easiness and simplicity in the early stories are gone; in their stead, we see a story about the violent quest for transparency.

The story is structured in such a way that the structure itself becomes part of the message that the author wants to convey. Like a detective story, it begins with a mystery and a question. As the story unfolds, the reader is drawn more and more deeply into the process of discovery, until the riddle is solved at the very end. The story opens with a scene of spring snow in a rustic landscape; a jeep from Beijing, with the narrator, “I,” and the driver in it, is speeding on the road. Unlike in his early stories with a first-person voice, there is no explanation of the narrator’s identity or his mission. As we read on, we realize it is important for the narrator to establish, through his implied importance, both narrative anonymity *and* authority. He is the I/eye—a spectator whose only action throughout the story is watching, which nevertheless bestows on him immense power and control.

40. Hao Ran, *Pingguo yao shu le*, 120.

41. Hao Ran, *Hao Ran wen ji* 浩然文集 (Shenyang: Chunfeng chubanshe, 1983), 321.

42. Hao Ran, *Pingguo yao shu le*, 119.

43. *Ibid.*, 123.

Watching is the first thing the narrator tells us he does in the story. “Looking outside through the jeep’s window,” he notices in a snow-covered landscape “something like a ball of flame rolling down over the hill ridge and vanishing from view.”⁴⁴ Soon afterward, he sees “that ball of fire” again flashing through a grove of jujube trees and begins to “speculate on this strange sight” when the jeep comes to a sudden stop and violently throws him off balance. There turns out to be a hitchhiker standing in the middle of the road. The driver is initially upset about the sudden stop and refuses the request. Then the narrator discovers that the hitchhiker is a young woman—and a rural young woman at that, which changes everything.

This episode sets the tone for the story. Active verbs about looking, observing, and discovering abound. The narrator repeatedly uses “only then did I find out / only then did I see clearly (這時候我才發現／我這時候才看清)” to indicate a belated recognition of what lies underneath surface. Significantly, the girl is at first difficult to recognize in terms of gender. She has “a dark complexion,” “narrow, elongated eyes,” hands with thick, calloused fingers; she wears a pair of old sneakers but no socks. The conclusion drawn by the narrator is that “she is a peasant girl from the mountain village,” which leads him to “immediately forgive her reckless behavior” and enjoin the driver to give her a ride.⁴⁵

The girl’s eccentric behavior is not immediately transparent either. She shows no interest in chitchat; when the narrator tries to start a conversation, she cuts him off rudely; she angrily mutters to herself things that the narrator finds mysterious and provocative when she sees a man wearing a yellow oilcloth raincoat riding a bicycle on the road, things such as “What a scoundrel! What a scoundrel! I guessed right—he has indeed come this way today!” Then something drops from her pocket—“a small, oddly-shaped knife glistening like snow.” When the narrator asks her why she carries a knife around, “she replies coldly, ‘This is a weapon.’”⁴⁶ Intrigued, the narrator decides to follow the girl while the driver goes off to file a report at the police station about a suspicious person. The narrator stresses that he is acting thus because of “an inescapable sense of political responsibility,” stating, “I made up my mind to get a complete clarification about this person and never allow a serious incident such as this to slip away from under my eyes.”⁴⁷

What happens next is a series of unveilings of the mystery girl. First, the narrator loses track of her in the crowd in the marketplace, where he overhears a conversation between two men:

44. Hao Ran, *Hao Ran duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* 浩然短篇小說選 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1981), 380.

45. *Ibid.*, 381.

46. *Ibid.*, 382–83.

47. *Ibid.*, 383.

"Hurry up—let's go take a look at this novel show . . ."

"Really? I've never seen anything like this all my life."

"That woman is really something. One at each cut!"

"Wow, she really has the guts to do it?"⁴⁸

The narrator intuitively knows that they are talking about the mystery girl. He follows their footsteps and finds out that she is castrating piglets for the villagers.

Pig castration is universal in swine production. There are two reasons for castrating a boar: behavioral and economical. Boars tend to become aggressive as they reach sexual maturity; castrated boars are much more docile and easier to handle; more important, they are fatter and produce meat that does not have a strong odor and flavor commonly called "boar taint." Carrying out pig castration involves training, skill, and precise handling. Traditionally, this had been a male profession. Hence the villagers are surprised at seeing a young woman do the work: a large crowd begins to gather around her.

The narrator, while feeling relieved, still wonders about her earlier angry outburst upon seeing the cyclist on the road. At this moment he overhears another conversation. A bearded man, with two piglets under his arms, is chatting with a middle-aged man wearing a gray polyester overcoat lined with sheepskin.

"I heard that demoted old bureau chief has been rehabilitated?"

"Well, it was I who founded this country along with my comrades. Whoever wants to take power away from my hands—impossible! Rest assured: anyone who has defended me and supported me will have a place; how could he be left as a spectator?"

"Wonderful, wonderful. Whenever you have time, come to stay a few days in our village. You got to do me a favor."

"Sure. That son of yours has made a contribution. He got demoted for no reason—wasn't it just because he had an affair with some woman? Tell him to stand upright again. He's got me behind him! By the way, what are you doing here with the pigs?"⁴⁹

The conversation turns to pig castration. The man in the overcoat tells the bearded man to go to a Doctor Huang instead, who has come from a family specializing in the profession for generations. It turns out that Doctor Huang is that very cyclist on the road. He is "around thirty years old, with eyeglasses for deep nearsightedness, in a smart uniform, and skillfully handling the surgical knife." After he finishes castrating a piglet, he raises his head and "cordially smiles at the pig owner."⁵⁰ The courtesy and professionalism of the male doctor form a sharp contrast with the peasant girl, who is uncouth from her clothes to her manner.

48. *Ibid.*, 384.

49. *Ibid.*, 385–86.

50. *Ibid.*, 387.

Doctor Huang attracts all the customers, but soon he gets into a tiff with the bearded man over payment. In the meanwhile, the girl calls out to the crowd and explains that she desires to help develop swine production for the country and is offering castration for free. A plump middle-aged woman onlooker serves as her commentator, saying, “This girl here is serving the people [*wei renmin fuwu* 為人民服務]; she does not want people’s money [*renminbi* 人民幣]!”⁵¹ She and a tall young man also testify to the girl’s skill. Although clearly no “capitalist roader,” the girl nevertheless needs advertisement. She also gives a bad rep to her competitor by revealing to the crowd that, instead of doing his proper job as the state-paid veterinarian, Doctor Huang has falsely asked for a sick leave from the commune and is trying to make personal profit. The story thus establishes a clear economy: if the commune members put their bet on the girl, they gain in both moral and financial terms; but if they put their bet on Doctor Huang, they will lose not just their hard-earned money but also their moral capital. The reader, like the villagers at the marketplace, is faced with two choices and must choose wisely.

The choices imply more grave political consequences in the contemporary context. Behind the conversation between the bearded man and the man in the overcoat about the rehabilitation of an old bureau chief looms a larger political story. The last campaign in the Cultural Revolution was the “strike against the rightist deviationist wind to overthrow correct verdicts” (*Fanji youqing fan’an feng* 反擊右傾翻案風). The “rightist deviationist” referred to Deng Xiaoping, who had been rehabilitated in 1973. Deng’s pragmatic economic policy and his disapproval of the Cultural Revolution finally drew Mao Zedong’s ire, who decided that Deng was, after all, a “capitalist roader” and that there was a “struggle between two lines,” that is, between socialist orthodoxy and capitalism. Hao Ran’s story may be read as a fictional realization of the struggle; it creates and operates within a perfect symmetry, with the anonymous and thus literally selfless girl and the selfish Doctor Huang representing two different value systems, one good and one evil.

Underneath this immediately resonant political message, the real lesson of the story is one about reading and interpretation. Nothing is what it seems in the story. The chase ends in the final uncovering of truth. Both Doctor Huang and the girl reveal their true identities, motives, personal histories, family backgrounds, layer upon layer, until the narrator learns everything about them, including the girl being the younger sister of the party secretary of a middle school in the city—a seemingly gratuitous detail, but proving her entire family is “red” and trustworthy, thus completing her official dossier.

51. *Ibid.*, 389.

While the narrator is content with discovering truth for himself, the girl is determined to expose Doctor Huang's true nature in public. She is ruthless in her persecution of the man. He laments pitifully:

"Do you have to wipe me out like this? . . . [W]here do you want to push me now?"

The girl replied, stressing every word like a sharp ax chopping at wood:

"We want to push you till you completely collapse! We will not leave even one inch of space for you to carry on your dirty business!"⁵²

She takes him to the marketplace management "so that people here will all recognize your true face."⁵³ The man in the overcoat is in charge there and defends Doctor Huang, so the girl decides to appeal to the county committee. The narrator's chauffeur now steps up and offers a ride to the girl.

The keyword here is "expose"—*jiefa* 揭發, *jielu* 揭露, or *baolu* 暴露—one of the most common terms used in the Cultural Revolution. In close association with the imperative to expose is the necessity for labeling, as clearly defined identities in a rigidly classified society are an obligation. There were the "Red Five Categories" and the "Black Five Categories" or the "Black Seven Categories." The "struggle sessions" during the Cultural Revolution involved making "class enemies" wear a dunce's cap or a plaque with his or her name and identity written on it. Since a dunce's cap or a plaque is not a permanent part of a person's physical appearance, a more ingenious method sought to inscribe difference directly on the body with a hairstyle, such as a cross-shaped cut or the "yin-yang haircut," so named because the hair on one side of the head is entirely shaved off. The young man's unfinished haircut in "Crossing the River" has in retrospect become an uncanny omen.

In Hao Ran's story that is structured as a quest for transparency, the signs are just as physical as a dunce's cap or a haircut: the girl in red, the doctor in yellow, and the man in gray are set against a white wintry landscape, with each color indicating the true nature of the person. In accordance with the levels of their moral caliber, each piece of clothing is more opaque than the other: from the girl's translucent plastic raincoat, to Doctor Huang's oilcloth raincoat, and finally to the man's gray overcoat with sheepskin lining, which recalls the saying about "a wolf in sheep's clothing." Opaqueness indicates concealment, and any concealment points to something that needs to be hidden, which, in a world that demands absolute transparency, could mean only treachery and deceit.

In order for transparency and clarity to be maintained, the world must be sterile and static, because procreation and growth mean change, and change is disorderly. The girl plays a key role in upholding the stasis. In the jeep, the narrator comments on the unexpected snow in a season of things growing and coming out:

52. *Ibid.*, 390.

53. *Ibid.*, 391.

"A spring snow like this will surely damage the plants?"

"That depends on how you look at it. Spring snow can kill off all kinds of pestilent insects that are hiding in corners and preparing to come back to life!"⁵⁴

We realize that the girl is unnamed because she is both spring and snow in the story's title: while her movement resembles that of a "light and nimble swallow" and her raincoat is of the color of peach blossoms, she is "cold," "angry," and "fierce"; her surgical knife glistens like snow; she talks to Dr. Huang like "a sharp ax chopping away at wood." The piglets are not the only victims of castration in this story.

It is significant that Doctor Huang and the marketplace manager are both male while the pig castrator is a young woman. The maleness of the negative characters brings home the castration metaphor, but the femaleness of the pig castrator is necessary because the girl is set up to represent the marginalized social class rebelling against its oppressors and trying to rise in hierarchy, and no one could better fulfill that symbolic function than a woman from a poor peasant family who is doubly underprivileged in terms of both class and gender. To be made a rebel against authority, however, means that she can never gain true authority, because as long as her sole power comes from resistance and rebellion, she is doomed to remain marginal. Like in Hao Ran's early stories, positions of social, political, and technical authority in this story are all occupied by men; even the driver is male—he operates a motor vehicle while the girl goes around on foot. The girl is celebrated on account of her opposition to them—without them, without anything to resist and rebel against, she is nothing. This is a feminism that demands, by virtue of the narrative function, a fundamental asymmetry and inequality between women and men.

The only out-of-place character in the story is the narrator: the omnipresent I/eye. While everyone else succumbs to the quest for transparency, the narrator alone remains opaque till the end: we never know who he is, what he is doing, and where he is going. Being chauffeured around in a jeep from Beijing, he is, in some ways, a good allegory of the central government in a totalitarian regime: the authority that scrutinizes and monitors everyone but itself refuses to be monitored and scrutinized.

To sum up, "Spring Snow" is a long way away from Hao Ran's early stories in *Magpies on the Branch*, *Apples Are About to Ripen*, and *Songs of New Spring*. It is unapologetically harsh and violent, reflecting both the changed political atmosphere and Hao Ran's personal changes. It is an allegory of the violent textual excisions performed by Hao Ran on his more crude, but also much more energetic, fresh, and rich, early stories, an allegory of the paradoxical, unintended revelations and exposures affected by these erasures.

54. Ibid., 382.

The narrator of “Spring Snow” is in some ways a projection of Hao Ran himself in real life, who lived and worked in Beijing but constantly went back to his roots in the countryside. In other ways, however, he comes closer to identification with the unnamed girl. Just like the girl, Hao Ran himself was from a poor peasant family, and his mastery of the literary skills was not hereditary like many prominent modern writers who belonged, by virtue of their family and educational background, to the traditional cultural elite. He was a peasant who, in his own words, “wrote about peasants for peasants.” At his best he was good at what he did, but finer psychological truths and nuances escaped him. The aesthetic charm of his stories is that of Chinese regional opera, of which he was an avid fan when he was a child:⁵⁵ there are distinctive role types in the stories, each of which is marked with a special makeup and costume to indicate the character’s identity—the sharp-tongued girl with a heart of gold or the kind but stubborn old man; the plot and characterization are minimalist and possess a cleanness, plainness, and what Cyril Birch nicely describes as a “Biblical simplicity” that sometimes rises to a lyrical height;⁵⁶ good and bad, right and wrong are distinctly drawn with bold, thick lines of woodcut. In this world, everyone’s identity is predetermined by class and family; there is little possibility for change or complications. Such is the neat, clean, and oppressive social vision of the socialist regime, which coincides with the writer’s artistic vision. Hao Ran himself both benefited from such a social vision and was ultimately trapped in it.

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55. Hao Ran, *Hao Ran koushu zizhuan*, 22–23, 26–27.

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