PROMISES OF MODERN RENAISSANCE:
ITALIAN PRESENCES IN CHINESE MODERNITY

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by
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ABSTRACT

Following the re-opening of China to the outside world in the late 1970s, scholarship exploded with attempts to write and rewrite China’s modern history. In seeking to define Chinese modernity, many of these studies have taken a comparative approach sensitive to the international influences and forces informing developments in China in the twentieth century. In the American academy, attention to external influences has focused mainly on the major world powers of the nineteenth century that were involved in China’s semi-colonization (England, the United States, Russia, Japan, Germany, and France). This study explores an unduly neglected portion of China’s modern history, its appropriations of Italian literature and culture. To date, outside of Italy, few have attempted to push beyond the iconic commonplaces of Polo and pasta to understand the cultural history of Sino-Italian relations. This project demonstrates that just as Italian culture influenced the evolution of modern art, thought, values, education, economies, and governments in the West, it was also used to fashion China’s projects for modernization.

The principal topics analyzed in this study include China’s understanding of the Italian Renaissance, Liang Qichao’s 新羅馬 Xin Luoma (New Rome) (1902), Chinese theorizations of the Petrarchan sonnet, and Chinese decamerons. Chapters on the Italian Renaissance and the Petrarchan sonnet describe important intellectual discourses and local debates into which notions of the renaissance and the sonnet were drawn during the early Republican period (1911-1930s). Research on the New Rome and the Decameron analyzes
how the figures of Dante, Boccaccio, and Risorgimento heroes were employed in competing models for modernity in the late Qing (1900-1911) and Communist periods (1949-).

These case studies verify the importance of borrowings from Italian culture in Chinese modernity. More importantly, they contribute to a fuller understanding of China’s modern literary history. In order to see Chinese modernity more clearly, it is imperative to look through the Italian lenses that Chinese intellectuals had once chosen to help perceive themselves as subjects in a modern world system. This study demonstrates how Chinese writers articulated and elevated the regenerative power of the Renaissance, the patriotism of Dante Alighieri and Risorgimento heroes, the normalizing function of the Petrarchan sonnet, and the *Decameron*’s lessons in sexuality and nationalism, as integral parts of their projects for China’s cultural modernization.
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Looking Over Vesuvius

都会二千年，英雄战事酷.
德法与奥班，争霸来逐鹿.
近起烧炭堂，竟成统一局.
虽历火山灾，岂舍胜地曲.

This city of 2,000 years,
and the travails of war heroes,
where Germans, French, Austrians and
Spanish tore at the throne,
melds now into a single chimney of smoke.
The fire and rock are terrible.
What can rival their thunderous song?

Kang Youwei, *Italian Travels*

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INTRODUCTION

China’s Italian Borrowings in a Modern Global System

Long Santiao’s 龙三条 recently published fictional memoirs about a young Chinese bride’s life in Rome, 罗马天空下 Sotto il cielo di Roma (Under the Roman Heaven) (2010),¹ like most travel diaries is part reportage and part bildungsroman. For the novel’s protagonist, coming of age is intimately connected to establishing what it means to be modern and Chinese. Nestled between monuments of European curiosities, Ying Xi 樱溪 discovers a space where she can be herself—and “想穿什么样的袜子就穿什么样的袜子” (“wear whatever socks I want!”).² At the same time, she experiences the crux of having to reconcile that quest for individual freedom and meaning with the desire to be Chinese. At one point, her individualist streak is attacked and pressed into patriotic service by blogger friends at home, who push her to denounce publically the West’s spurious coverage of the 2008 Olympics and the flash boycotts of Chinese products in Europe.³ The fictional Ying Xi thus finds in Italy a place to work out two important aspects of her identity: her individuality and her sense of national belonging. These grand values reflect two of modernity’s most cherished and contested concepts, individualism and nationalism, which had collided a hundred years earlier in China’s most intense debates over the role of individuals and the arts in society.⁴ Are an individual’s life and the expression of her talents valuable ends in and of themselves, or, as implied in Zhou Dunyi’s 周敦颐 (1017-1073) oft recycled credo, “文所以载道也” wen suoyi zai dao ye (“letters carry meaning”), must they become tools of a meaning-
producing superstructure? Are individuals and the arts good only to the extent that they reinforce social values and collective projects? That Ying experiences this dilemma via a collision of her Chinese and Italian realities may seem, to some readers, either serendipitous or exotic, but if placed within the long history of Sino-Italian exchanges, her modern revelations do not appear so casual. Long before, some of China’s key modernist figures had looked to Italian culture and history to reform, promote, and sustain Chinese culture precisely in terms of such core competing modernist values.

The present study explores the use of the Italian Renaissance and some of its major figures and literary texts in the construction and support of Chinese modernisms across the twentieth century. Though views inevitably varied, Chinese modernists shared a fairly consistent understanding of the Renaissance’s significance in world history. Its developments pertaining to a money economy, economic expansion, political centralization, philological precision, secularization, and intellectual and scientific curiosity were rarified into the general conception of a revolutionary spirit and period of cultural florescence that had severed the old ties with a repressive dark age of tradition, an idea wholly advantageous to progressive modernist schemes in China. In her groundbreaking study on the topic, Irene Eber explains:

Here, then, was the idea that China was caught in a medievalism similar to that of Europe of several centuries ago, and that a renaissance is the means by which modernity (modernity juxtaposed to nonmodernity in terms of medievalism) can be achieved. […] Renaissance, as rebirth, is therefore not a harking back, but a forward-looking transformation. […] The
transition from medievalism to modernity, in this sense, means entering into, or becoming part of, the world.\textsuperscript{5}

However, the characterization of the European Renaissance as a revival of classical culture and literature coupled with a new humanist discipline was largely ignored by Chinese intellectuals, who were eager to liquidate their own classical past and what they perceived as its suffocating and stagnant scholarly tradition. For this reason, a figure like Dante Alighieri, typically categorized by western historians as belonging to the (High) Middle Ages, came to be celebrated in China as an initiator of Renaissance glories. In an article about the modern novelist Lao She’s relationship to the Florentine poet, Chen Yuan describes Dante in the following formulaic terms:

但丁作为西方文艺复兴运动的先驱者，曾对20世纪初中国的思想启蒙运动产生了重要而直接的影响。\textsuperscript{6}

[Dante was the herald of the western Renaissance, a poet who produced important and direct influences on the enlightenment movement of early twentieth-century China.]

Everything and everyone seen as having contributed to the subversion of traditional cultural and power structures (e.g. Latin, Classical Chinese, the Catholic Church, monarchy, feudalism, etc.) was hailed as taking part in a glorious spirit or age of modern progress.

This study builds upon the foundational work of the Italian Sinologists Giuliano Bertuccioli, Federico Masini, Anna Bujatti, and Monica Piccioni, and the Chinese
Italianists Bi Shutang and Zhou Haibo, who have traced the genealogies and offered initial interpretations of important moments in the history of Sino-Italian cultural exchange. Bertuccioli and Masini’s co-authored study *L’Italia e Cina* (Italy and China) (1996), provides the most far-reaching and thoughtful survey of Sino-Italian relations from ancient Rome down to the fall of the Qing empire, a valuable reference source of examples, citations and testimonies, many unfamiliar in the West. Collectively, these scholars’ work documents the ancient ties between Italian and Chinese civilizations while demonstrating how China’s active interest in Italian literature began in earnest only after the early Republican period (1911-): Chinese translations of iconic Italian works by Marco Polo, Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Francesco Petrarca did not appear before 1913, when Polo’s voyages were first published by the Zheng Meng Press. Translations of the *Comedy* and the *Decameron* would arrive years later in the 1920s and 30s. Supported by the pioneering efforts of these scholars, this study aims to move beyond assemblages of facts or examples, to establish Sino-Italian cultural interactions as vital aspects of Chinese modernity. The following chapters each present a case study with a historical weight that makes it crucial to the unfolding of literary and cultural developments in modern China: (1) the appropriations of the Italian Renaissance in Chinese intellectuals’ early formulations of modernity; (2) the late Qing monarchical reformer Liang Qichao’s Italian *exempla* in his political philosophy and theatrical work; (3) the orchestration of the Chinese *New Poetry* movement to the universalized rhythms of the Petrarchan sonnet; and (4) the catalytic function of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* in the sublimation and liberation of Chinese individual and nationalistic passions. Throughout
these chapters, I will emphasize the agency and creativity with which Chinese modernists performed their calculated adoptions of Italian culture.

Illuminating the objects, motives, rationalizations, and naturalization of China’s early Italian borrowings serves to highlight the active postures Chinese intellectuals assumed in realizing their own modernization. In this way, this study sheds light on an area overshadowed by continuing attempts to understand China’s modern history in terms of its victimization as a semi-colonized nation. Because the qualities of our attention shape their objects, it is necessary to regard China’s activities in modernity from different angles. Focusing on China’s exercise of autonomy, thus, aims to parry the discursive haunts of derivation and belatedness that continue to menace comprehensions of Chinese authenticity and sovereignty in the modern (and contemporary) world. In other words, the attention this study pays to the agency, as opposed to the trauma or reactiveness, of Chinese writers assists in rounding out both China’s own real history of oppression as well as the lingering historiographies that persist in confining it to narratives of externally imposed suffering.

Despite (and in light of) the conditions of intercultural exchange that invariably favored the West, China’s borrowings from Italian culture ultimately asserted local distinctiveness and authority as the nation entered onto the world stage. The translation of Italian concepts and figures as universals, alongside all of the localized motivations, human cohorts, conceptual accouterments, and transformations they acquired, brings into relief the rich, detailed histories of the contexts in which they came to be naturalized. Even as such cultural borrowings threatened to neutralize and homogenize China’s cultural distinctiveness, in terms of other and more powerful brokers, the creativity,
rationalizations, and manipulations of power employed by China’s appropriations of Italian culture demonstrated quite the opposite effect. As Alexander C.Y. Huang has recently demonstrated in a new history of China and Shakespeare (2009), the global circulation of commanding Western icons always succeeds in vividly registering the creativity, histories, and contexts of local artists and participants.¹ The kinds of knowledge and the ways in which they circulate among cultures, while inevitably bearing the mark of uneven power relations, ultimately reveal how participants in intellectual commerce register their uniqueness and assert their agency through active cultural negotiations. Consequently, China’s selection and naturalization of Italian matter in the early twentieth century is not to be understood as a predominantly reactionary endeavor (certainly not to the extent that borrowings from British, Japanese, German, or other imperialistic cultures were), but as an active effort to answer pressing local questions about how to modernize and claim sovereignty and authenticity in a global context. The usage of Italian matter, unlike that of English, never threatened to reproduce a “total control of Western hegemony,”¹⁰ but provided a creative gateway to the imagination of China’s modern rebirth. Drawing on the work of Eric Hayot, Lydia H. Liu, and Prasenjit Duara, this introduction details the nature of intercultural exchange in modernity and offers some preliminary examples of how the translation and interpretation of Italian culture helps to clarify the active role of Chinese intellectuals in the pursuit of global knowledge in a modern world system.
The Exchange of Global Knowledge in Modernity

Sino-Italian exchange in the early twentieth century is best understood by first exploring the nature of global cultural commerce under which such transactions fell. The thoughtful selection and calculated appropriation of Italian matter in the construction of a new Chinese national culture was inevitably subtended by the enlightenment premise of knowledge’s universal translatability and applicability. This premise offered the hope to all of access to and use of knowledge and structures deemed by reason, science, and political praxis to be superior and advantageous. Such a premise, however, hid very poorly, even in its own time, the inequalities inherent in its promises. The biased western origins, directional flow, and conditions of assumption of these forms of knowledge and institutions were always intuited, when not physically felt as material coercions. Eric Hayot has recently demonstrated the biased origins of intellectual exchange in his supple exposition of the dispensability of Chinese exempla in the West’s sympathetic philosophizing. The net of western, modern humanistic values was often spread wide by means much less than egalitarian or affectionate: “lamentably, civilization so often has to be imposed at gunpoint,” a statement echoing the blunter observation by Prasenjit Duara that universal brotherhood is the handy bludgeon of imperialism.

At its very foundations, the intellectual sympathy required to power modern values and ideas was born of the unequal terms and standings that existed between cultures and nations. Furthermore, the conceptual distances to be traversed in pretensions to universality often followed privileged routes of economic power and the flow of capital. Though not material forces per se, sympathetic discourses of universal knowledge and structures were invariably historically collusive with political, economic,
and intellectual claims to superiority. What permitted and fueled these discourses’ appeals to imagine a new order of intercultural relations that would be free of material and cognitive inequities was precisely a prior condition of necessary inequality. Western theorizations of universals and modern human subjects at varying literal, sentimental, and philosophical distances were always weighted in favor of those who suggested rationales with which to pursue their economic and political privilege, or had the freedoms with which to challenge such practices domestically. To engage in discussions concerning global knowledge or universals was already to have occupied and assumed positions of collusive material and cultural privilege in a world system.

In addition to their privileged origins, the actual terms of exchange or translation of global knowledge were also weighted with bias. Every exchange entailed the threat of loss and hope of gains that largely favored, at least upfront, the western brokers of universals. In “The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign” (1998), Lydia H. Liu appropriately represents the combined linguistic and economic nature of knowledge exchange in the representation of the “token,” a trope that encompasses “not only verbal and symbolic exchange but material circulations as well.”\footnote{12} Wolfgang Behr’s etymological study of the word \(\text{yi}\) (translation) historically reinforces Liu’s trope:

\begin{quote}
Just like in the case of Latin, where one of the two competing etymologies for \textit{interpres} ‘translator’ explains the word via \textit{inter-pretium}, and thereby etymologically links it to the sphere of commercial and juridical transactions in which the word is encountered in the earliest attestations, \textit{yi} ‘to exchange’ in Chinese is strongly associated with the domain of gift-
\end{quote}
giving, land and title bestowal, and all sorts of investiture transactions in inscriptional Archaic Chinese, via *ci* 賜 [to gift or bestow].

Foregrounding material conditions and their consequences, Liu poses a central question with regard to linguistic equivalences that directly addresses the translatability of universal ideals in modernity: “How does reciprocity become thinkable as an intellectual problem when predominantly unequal forms of global exchange characterize the material conditions of the exchange?” The “tokens” of our linguistic exchanges embody the imbalance between the universalizing logic of modernity and the invention of hypothetical linguistic equivalences among world languages, all the while perpetrating cultural differences. The supposed reciprocity of languages and the cultural ideals and concepts that they house is the direct product of an historical economy of exchange marked by political struggle and international power dynamics. Liu offers a ready example of how the claimed universal reciprocity of meanings functions to veil difference in a critique of Saussure’s facile equation of the French word “*mouton*” with the two English words “mutton” and “sheep.” This example proves how the surplus value of words is too often willfully forced under the banner of equivalence, a slanted economy masquerading as a desirable ideal. Words cannot be broken down into different objects of use-value and exchange-value. If the values of words and ideas, in fact, function differently in their local contexts, then it follows that their meanings and exchange-values are incongruent, making it necessary to isolate and to weigh the circumstantial encounters of one sign with another that facilitates exchange. In the most common of such cases, unequal linguistic exchanges (or translingual practices) are not perpetrated directly upon a colonial victim, but, in fact, are coauthored by different agents
with the understanding that equivalences are possible and that values and profits are readily and equally transferable, while, actually, they are not, at least not without the incurrence of gains and losses.\textsuperscript{16} The global commerce of ideas and their words is by nature slanted. Nonetheless, the desire to accrue economic, political and cultural profits—at the very least, to represent oneself in a modern world system at all—subtends this institutionalized faith in the exchangeability of equivalences and universals:

Translation need not guarantee the reciprocity of meaning between languages. Rather, it presents a \textit{reciprocal wager}, a desire for meaning as value and a desire to speak across, even under least favorable conditions. The act of translation thus hypothesizes an exchange of \textit{equivalent signs} and makes up that \textit{equivalence} where there is none perceived as such.\textsuperscript{17}

This position goes far in explaining why Chinese intellectuals, along with so many others of non-western, emerging nations, dared to participate in the acquisition of western ideas as universal knowledge: at the most fundamental level, the exchanges permitted these figures “to speak,” to represent themselves at all as unique voices across currents of foreign concepts, even under unfavorable conditions.

In spite of the biased economies of modern knowledge and value exchange, Chinese intellectuals accrued distinct advantages by transferring universal ideas to native soil. While the losses of their wagers were undoubtedly many, the acquisition of authenticity and sovereignty at home and abroad were, without a doubt, colossal gains. Joseph Levenson passes over this observation too quickly in his masterful study, \textit{Confucian China and Its Modern Fate} (1958). Instead of interpreting the pivotal late
Qing and early Republican debates—内 nei (China) and 外 wai (the West); 体 ti (Confucian essence) and 用 yong (Western usefulness), 天下 tianxia (the Chinese cultural world) and 国家 guojia (the Chinese political nation)—as creative discussions to position China in a world system, Levenson largely laments the intellectuals’ syncretic rationales as apologetic, recursive and contradictory efforts to combat psychologically “cultural defeatism”\(^{18}\) and either preserve a Chinese essence or deculturize it in a new nation-form.\(^{19}\) He sees Chinese nationalism as having eviscerated its culture’s value and tacitly bemoans its employment of traditionalism as a hollow support for its own discursive and institutional survival:

For modern nationalists, however, traditionalism was no longer necessary in the primary sense of the word, as axiomatic, but in the hortatory sense: it must exist if an end is to be achieved. Traditionalism was no longer an end in itself, self justified. Its end is nationalism. It must exist in nationalism, shorn of its claim to values as it is, in order that nationalism may exist. The sense of community which is essential to nationalism depends on people’s acknowledgement of a common past. And the common past must be prized if a man is to let it forge a bond between himself and his fellow-nationals. Otherwise, why should it matter?\(^{20}\)

Levenson’s assessment rings true, but he stops short of formulating the next step that would reveal how nationalism and culturalism are, in fact, a false dichotomy, as he did earlier in his resolution of the ti and yong debate: a national essence (i.e. culture) is indivisible from the perception of its political and social usefulness; nationalism is a form of culturalism. To speak of Chinese nationalism is to invoke an essence—a national
culture—not to speak of some soulless form inimical to a prior cultural ontology. Culture matters just as axiomatically (or ideologically) to a nationalism as it does to a culturalism. As a result, the provocative query, “why should it [i.e. culture] matter?” is not one that registers any specific quality of a modern nationalism. It is invariably true that the Chinese intellectuals involved in intercultural negotiations and borrowings met with problems of continuity, but only as a natural consequence of pursuing national culture as the most compelling solution to the situations they faced in a world system. Their wagers were meant to preserve a Chinese essence (however retooled) as a nation-form, and thus should not be regarded solely as the unfortunate contradictions of an apologetic or dejected people. Active engagement in a globalized circuit of knowledge demonstrated China’s ability and desire to command and represent its own national culture.

In *The Global and Regional in China’s Nation-Formation* (2009), Prasenjit Duara calls this globalized network in which Chinese intellectuals operated the “globalized cognitive system,” the complex international network of institutional and discursive circulations that provided knowledge central to the imaginations of nations, their cohorts, and their others globally in modernity. Global forms of information and structures were identified and adopted world-wide as both a way to gain audience and to jostle for position in an international arena, even as they were intentionally resignified and naturalized as distinct nation-forms to consolidate national identity and power internally. In an earlier study, *Sovereignty and Authority* (2003), Duara indicates the exigency of indigenizing world cultural concepts as a way to asserting one’s authority:

> Although in the early twentieth century competition was a very important threat to the system [i.e. internal, national stability], nonconformance to
the discursive conditions of nationality—and even worse, non-recognition by the superior powers—entailed significant risks and losses that could weaken a state at home and abroad.\(^{23}\)

Stepping into the precarious arena of international politics and exchange by confronting ideas circulating in a global cognitive system was essential to obtaining broad recognition as a sovereign subject in a world in which non-sovereign groups were devoured by the imperialistic tendencies of roving nationalisms.

This hypothesis of globalization emphasizes “global circuits” of knowledge in order to explain more fully the evolution of nation-states and national cultures in modernity. Duara explains:

\[\text{[The] globalization hypothesis draws attention not only to transnational intersections that were previously marginalized, but to the idea that the histories of nations and localities have been just as significantly shaped by an often invisible (in historical writing) infrastructure of global circuits of knowledge, society, economics, culture and ideology.}\(^{24}\)\]

The global circuit of knowledge proved central to how nations saw and constituted themselves over the twentieth century, as global forms of knowledge were adopted so that a nation might be recognized internationally, even as these circulatory concepts and practices were intentionally resignified and naturalized locally as nation-forms with their own internal impacts.\(^{25}\) By engaging in cultural borrowing China situated itself within a world system in which capitalism and nation-states worked in collusion for the growth and maintenance of an international market, while nationalism functioned locally as a leverage with which to create positions of privilege at home and abroad.\(^{26}\)
Duara offers greater detail about how these advantages were structurally arranged. A nation’s entrance into the modern world system made it a participant in three discursive systems whose harmony maximized their political and economic advantages. These three interconnected, dominating systems constituted the foundation of globalization in modernity: global capitalism, the nation-state system, and the world-view of hegemonic modernity, in which progress is seen as cognitively and institutionally dominant. These systems were collusive in the perpetration of each other’s hegemony but also competitive in effecting alterations in power relations between (and within) themselves as was necessary to maximize profits and power:

The gaps between the three systems sustain and generate difference within and from the collusive structure of the whole. They help us to see alternate practices in the interstices of these imbricated systems, often in atavistically creative forms [e.g. primitivist, fundamentalist movements]. These practices represent the core of what is distinctively historical and historically adaptive in a society.27

By translating western ideas as universal knowledge and accepting the biased terms of commerce in a modern world system, China nonetheless positioned itself to participate in influencing the mutual workings of these three main systems of global modernity (capital, nationhood, and hegemonic modernity), by which it also asserted its authenticity and sovereignty, and actively negotiated its authority and placed its wagers.

Sino-Italian cultural exchange in the early twentieth century emphasizes the way in which Chinese intellectuals actively appropriated, theorized, and applied their understanding of global knowledge in the maintenance of the three main systems of
global modernity. Italian culture was understood *prima facie* as a universal substance coursing through a globalized network of knowledge that was readily available for translation into Chinese contexts. The selection and adaptation of Italian matter to suit local exigencies accentuates the activities of the electing agent and the complex processes and networks in which they operated. Though somewhat caught at a loss in this global network, late Qing and Republican intellectuals nevertheless exercised a great deal of autonomy and control in manufacturing modernity by carefully choosing Italian objects and theorizing their selection and naturalization.

As stated above, the possibility for participation in global modernity rested upon the premise of knowledge’s universal translation and applicability, an ideology embedded in global, regional, and national economic and intellectual matrices. The fact that the Italian Renaissance had for centuries been characterized in the West as the platform for many of its own modern developments and successes was something the Chinese did not overlook. Hence, contemplating Italy became a test of this universal, modern premise even as it served as one of China’s launching points in the pursuit of the modernization of its culture and systems. Nativizing the Italian Renaissance and some of its figures and texts was a demonstration of how globally circulating categories and concepts could function to make China homologous—“if not equal”\(^\text{28}\) —with other sovereign nations.

Emboldened by the enlightenment discourses of knowledge’s universal heritage Chinese intellectuals manufactured numerous rationales with which to naturalize Italian, culture into their own modernizing projects. Their appropriations of components from Dantean patriotism to Renaissance promiscuity were designed to promote precise conceptions of Chinese modernity. These were no obsequious gestures meant to
reestablish a West-above-East cultural hierarchy. Frank Dikötter clarifies this active role of the appropriator in his general appraisal of cultural borrowing:

Knowledge is never the result of passive reception, but the product of an active subject’s industry. Cultural borrowings, then, can never be explained as a passive ‘exposure to foreign influence’; they can be viewed only as the active creations of a discerning cognitive organism. There is a decision before the borrowing takes place and a decision about what should be borrowed. Foreign ideas were assessed against, and integrated within, a pre-existing framework. From this perspective, any attempt at systematic differentiation between ‘a native thought’ and ‘Western influence’ would seem to be in vain.  

Duara has similarly affirmed: “Regional and local, popular and elite groups engage, select, reject, and contest world culture, thus remaking it into local and national culture.”

Dikötter and Duara’s emphases on the integration and remaking of global knowledge into local culture forms point directly to the active role that Chinese intellectuals played in appropriating Italian matter.

More so than with its imperialistic, European counterparts, looking to Italy marked a special case in China’s quests abroad for modern global forms. Italy was not only found to be one of the most appropriate material and political models for China’s modernization, but its appropriation as a twin ancient and cultural center of the world was also a test of modernity’s power to create a spatial, temporal, and cultural convergence in China, with the collapsing of binaries such as self/other, East/West, native/foreign, ancient/modern, progress/timelessness, etc. The answer to whether or not such an
endeavor was successful is largely unimportant to this study. What is significant to register here, however, are the kinds of cultural developments revealed and formed when Chinese nationalist intellectuals employed specific terms, texts, or ideas of Italian-ness to invoke modernity in China, as well as the political advantages that such activities offered to them.

**An Illustration: Marco Polo and China**

A discussion of some stages in the Chinese afterlives of Marco Polo serves to illustrate what I build upon in greater depth in my case studies: (1) that engagement with Italian culture must be regarded as an important aspect of Chinese modernity, (2) that such engagement served in different ways, at several crucial junctures, to articulate and develop a modern Chinese culture, and (3) that such Sino-Italian exchanges accentuate the agency of their Chinese mediators. A look at Polo will demonstrate the specific, local manipulations of Italian culture that were made to serve developments in the imagination of Chinese modernity.

To this day, the figure of Marco Polo looms as a symbol for a vast array of positive modernist values. From their initial transmission to a Pisan cell-mate, Rustichello, in a Genovese prison (1298-99), Polo’s adventures across the Asian continent and his sojourn at the Mongol court in China have spread to infiltrate the clichés and cultural and academic imaginations of billions. Broadly speaking, Polo has come to represent a modern spirit of ambulant youthfulness, curiosity, cultural acumen, *wanderlust*, and friendship—attributes sought after and claimed by ambitious, ambulating bodies at work in a modern world system.
On the 700\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Polo’s birth (1954), Luther Evans, Director General of UNESCO, described “la leçon du grand Vénitien” as being a courageous labor that brings together what the “hasards de l’histoire” had to that moment condemned to mutual ignorance, an intellectual daring that dresses Polo up as a titan of global progressivism.\textsuperscript{32}

On the same date (1954), the Mayor of Venice painted the following vignette of Polo’s significance to the “civilized” world (\textit{il mondo civile}):

Venezia celebra quest’anno il settimo centenario della nascita di Marco Polo. E, con Venezia, lo celebrano l’Italia e tutto il mondo civile perché riconoscono nel grande Veneziano non soltanto il primo autentico ambasciatore della cristiana civiltà occidentale in Estremo Oriente—e di quello Orientale in Occidente—ma anche perché, oggi soprattutto, vede in lui il simbolo luminoso della fraternità tra i popoli di razza e di lingue tanto diverse.\textsuperscript{33}

[This year Venice celebrates the 700th anniversary of the birth of Marco Polo, and with it Italy and the entire civilized world, not only because they recognize in the great Venetian the first authentic, ambassador of western, Christian civilization in the Far East—and that of the Orient in the West—but also because, above all else, they see in him the luminous symbol of fraternity between peoples of diverse races and languages.]\textsuperscript{34}

Alongside overt references to Venetian and Christian cultural superiority, Polo is held up to the civilized world as the paradigm of friendship between peoples. In short, to an ever globalized society he constitutes the symbolic nexus of international relations (political,
economic, cultural, linguistic, etc.) and the projected ethics that are meant to assure the stability and longevity of such relations.

More recently, the official staging of such sentiments took the form of a massive, government-backed gala celebrating the 750th anniversary of Marco Polo’s birth, in which Italian and Chinese diplomats and scholars joined hands to promote four years (2004-2008) of public exhibitions, seminars, congresses, and intense publishing on Sino-Italian relations. The President of Italy’s National Committee in charge of these events, Sandro Schipani, reintroduced the Polian commonplace around which such activities were expected to gravitate:

Le attività del Comitato hanno avuto l’obiettivo di rinnovare studi sulle tappe del percorso della reciproca conoscenza tra l’Italia e la Cina, proseguendo idealmente l’opera di Marco Polo come promotore di relazioni tra culture diverse finalizzate alla comprensione e all’amicizia tra i popoli.  

[The object of the Committee’s activities has been to renew studies on the different stops along the road to Italy and China’s reciprocal acquaintance, ideally tracing the work of Marco Polo as the promoter of relations among different cultures realized in the comprehension and friendship among peoples.]

Just as Polo serves as the pragmatic point of departure for the National Committee’s professional and cultural activities, Schipani reveals how Polo figures more prominently as the imagined genealogical source of a history of unfolding East-West relations:
Fanno parte dell’identità del nostro Paese la figura, il viaggio, il libro di Marco Polo, che si trasformarono nell’emblema di una collaborazione e conoscenza approfondita, italiana ed europea, capace di aprire la via a ulteriori grandi esperienze: e il pensiero va a Cristoforo Colombo che studiò il *Milione*. Il viaggio del veneziano richiama l’attenzione sui già esistenti fili sottili, ma forti, a motivo dei quali avevano viaggiato, e avrebbero ancora viaggiato, ambasciatori, pellegrini, missionari, mercanti, superando il sistema dei contatti dell’unità frammentata del mondo antico da Roma alla Cina e anticipando così il momento attuale, in cui l’immediatezza degli incontri è neccesità.  

[The figure, voyage, and book of Marco Polo form an important part of the identity of our land and have been transformed into an emblem of collaboration and deepening knowledge, in Italy and Europe, capable of opening up new vistas to further grand experiences, a destiny that touched even Christopher Columbus, a student of the *Milione*. The voyage of the Venetian calls attention to the already existing subtle but strong intercultural ties, for which many had traveled, and many more would (ambassadors, pilgrims, missionaries, merchants), overcoming the communicative system of a fragmented ancient world occupied by Rome and China, thereby anticipating the present moment, in which the immediacy of such contact has become a necessity.]
Thus, Polo’s legacy is shaped into a colossal, symbolic portico onto the East by which potential Chinese relations were and are first conditioned as properly historical, ethical, and, presently, inevitable. Thought it is marked as a gateway to dreams of global exchange and international fraternity, for Schipani (and most others), that portico naturally remains one chiseled with Italian, even European, flourishes. In other words, the very imagination of utopian global relations remains underwritten by an uneven symbolic economy slanting westward.

Lest one entertain the suspicion, of course, that such melodious descriptions reverberate only in the West, the following recent comments from Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao demonstrate that Polo is not simply a cultural cover for roving occidental interests. Wen has his own praises to sing to the explorer. In the front matter to an official, bilateral governmental publication, 2006* Anno dell’Italia in Cina Zhonguo* Yidali nian 中国意大利年 (2006: The Year of Italy in China), the Prime Minister writes:

相知无远近,万里尚为邻. 写于公园 8 世纪中国唐代的故诗名句是中国意大利友好关系的生动描述.

中意两国都拥有悠久的历史与丰富的文化, 都为世界文明的进步作出过重要贡献. 虽相距遥远, 但自古以来两国人民就建立了深厚的情谊, 马克波罗作为友好使者在中国家传户晓.

[There is no distance between friends,  
Though separated by 10,000 miles, we are still close.]
These verses from an eighth century Tang dynasty poem movingly describe the friendly relations between China and Italy.

Both China and Italy boast long histories and prestigious cultures. Both have made significant contributions to the progress of world civilization. Though the distance separating them is great, since ancient times their peoples have succeeded in constructing a profound friendship; to this day the ambassador Marco Polo is celebrated throughout China as a symbol of friendship.]

Though the Prime Minister here draws attention to Polo’s symbolic value for the Chinese, the context of this recognition requires a brief examination of the shifting commonplaces or “tokens” that reveal his remarks as more than a benign anecdote in Polian reception history.

In a typical display of deference and respect, the Prime Minister confirms the grandeur and impact of Italian civilization on world history. However, while lauding Italy’s prestigious culture, he also tactfully inserts counterweights to the typical western inflection of Polo’s significance. To begin with, Wen opens not with a quote from the *Milione*, but from China’s own celebrated golden age of poetry. The portico through which the Prime Minister initiates a dialogue with Italy thus originates in a classical poem that predates Polo’s reportage by almost six centuries. Furthermore, in the same fashion that the historical figure of Marco Polo is bent into a pretense for international exchange, while all the while reinforcing regional hierarchies, Wen fashions his markedly Chinese quotation from the famous Tang dynasty (618-907) poet Zhang Jiuling张九龄.
(678-740), which historically had been understood as an intra-national reference, into an expression of friendly international relations, but one in which the symbolic premise of an official exchange retains an overt Chineseness. Lastly, when Marco Polo is finally mentioned, he is defined not in terms calculated to reproduce modern western interpretations, but in terms of what he means to local Chinese: “friendship,” an attribute refracted through their own poetic history. In this way, Polo is accepted as a token representative of intercultural East-West relations, but, as Wen’s delivery demonstrates, the gift is accepted with a sophisticated understanding of its cultural specificity and symbolic subtexts. As a dual gesture of China’s good will and an assertion of its own cultural presence, the Prime Minister offers the token of a Chinese five-character regulated 诗 shi poem, presented as it were chiastically, mingling praise for the two nations at the center of his appropriation while placing expressions of Chinese culture at its head, leaving Polo to trail as a substantiating footnote. The Prime Minister’s diplomatic gesture thus demonstrates the shifting that occurs during intercultural exchanges of so-called universals. His management of Polo is a critical invitation to bend our attention more closely to the varying postures assumed by parties gathering around global commonplaces and the numerous, often competing, histories that they bring into high relief.

Two more examples of Polo’s fluctuating value as “token” can be found some twenty-five years earlier, in the wake of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), when China temporarily threw open its doors to the outside world. Chinese translators and academics involved in the introduction, dissemination, and exposition of Marco Polo and the Milione, the first foreign work published in China after the Cultural Revolution, set the
tone for how East-West exchange and its critical history would be viewed in China. The 1981 translation of Polo’s adventures, and the commentary by one of the more vocal Polo experts of the time, demonstrate the two general attitudes that Chinese intellectuals displayed toward the Italian icon.

For the team of writers (Chen Kaijun, Dai Shuying, Liu Zhenmu, Lin Jian) involved in the foundational 1981 Beijing translation of the *Milione*, rediscovering Polo was an opportunity to express hopes for a brighter future after decades of cultural insularity and stagnation. The volume’s preface by Shang Ming defines the contemporary significance of the Venetian explorer’s voyage to China some seven centuries before. Shang emphasizes three important aspects of Polo’s history that transmit social values he deems important for his Chinese audience newly emerging from the Cultural Revolution: (1) Polo’s prominence at court, (2) Polo’s return to Venice, and (3) the incompleteness of the record of Polo’s voyage. The values conveyed by these aspects express the positive possibilities that Shang and the editors of the volume perceived awaited Chinese civilization in its post-Maoist stage of socialist history.

The first episode that Shang addresses displays the possibility of intercultural collaboration and friendship. Shang describes Polo’s passion for tending to horses and researching them, as described in one of his chapters praising the legendary white steeds 白种马 *bai zhong ma* of Shanxi. Coincidentally, another man enamored with horses also attended Kublai at court at the same time, a master painter, a descendant of the famous Tang Taizong emperor, and skilled in the painting of horses and pine trees. Impressed with both of their achievements, the Grand Khan displayed openly both Polo’s chapter and the artist’s painting, 八骏马 *Ba jun ma* (Eight Stallions); “并挂在忽必烈元世祖宫
廷内” (“both hung in the Yuan hall of Kublai’s ancestors”). 40 Shang chooses this story as an indication of the exemplary friendship established between the Chinese and their foreign visitor: “马可波罗与中国人民结下了深厚的友谊” (“Marco Polo and the Chinese people succeeded in tying the knot of a lasting friendship”). This choice of words reveals Shang’s overall evaluation of the event at court, for he writes that friendship was achieved between Polo and the 人民 renmin (people), not the Khan or the ministers and nobles at court, with whom Polo probably had exclusive contact. By Shang’s interpretive energies, the exchanges at court are translated as a future hope for friendly relations between the Chinese and other foreign peoples.

The second episode Shang focuses on expresses the possibility for difference and transformation as a result of contact with the foreign. Here he dramatizes Polo’s return to Venice, drawing out the suspense of the communicative confusion caused by transformed, hybrid identities:

[At the end of 1295, they finally returned to a Venice they’d left behind twenty-six years earlier. Because of the difficulty of the journey, their
faces were yellowed and muscles thinned. They were exhausted beyond belief. Add to this the shabby state of their clothes and the alteration of their speech and it’s of little surprise that their distant relatives living in their homes doubted the origins of these courteously elegant foreigners, refusing them entry. Seizing a moment to push open the cracked door to his home, Marco Polo would finally squeeze his way in. Only after a series of explanations and a litany of proofs did he succeed in convincing all that he was the master of the house, and that he had not, in fact, died. He was no charlatan. As a result, things in the neighborhood slowly quieted down.]

Polo’s journey had not only taken a toll on his body, but had also transformed his appearance, speech, and manners to such an extent that even his relatives were forced to make his re-acquaintance. Interest in a story of mistaken identities is often expressive of a desire for greater latitude in social and individual identity formation. Polo’s transformative experiences abroad, and Shang’s choice to comment upon this episode in the preface, reflected the hope of a new generation in China for the acceptance of cultural difference, embodied in the very Chinese translation hand. This was a marked departure from the insular and antagonistic dogma of the Maoist era, when all things western were labeled anathema and the terms 东 dong (East) and 西 xi (West), largely synonymous with China and America/Europe, had been pitted against each other as violently antithetical. Intercultural exchange between East and West was limited to verbal and martial combat alone. Any other cultural mixing was deemed suspect and criminal. A popular young adult novel of the Cultural Revolution, 杏花塘边 Xinghua tang bian (On
the Banks of Apricot Lake), illustrates this ideology in a clever accusation against a suspected counterrevolutionary, who had changed his name Xi Huaixi (Student of the Wicked West) to Ding Wangdong (Gazing upon the East), to conceal his identity:

“你真像妖怪一样会变, 一见钱就从 ‘东’ 变到 ‘西’ 了”

[You transform just like a monster! The moment you set your eyes on money you change from East to West!]

In the wake of the tragedies of the Cultural Revolution, the figure of Marco Polo was erected as a new monument to East-West exchange that shifted from perceiving the horrors of hybridization to acknowledging the acceptable and colorful differences that it afforded.

A facet of that desire to be other manifests itself in what Shang also describes as the shortcomings of Polo’s account of China and its people. The hope for greater room and a wider variety of contacts with which to fashion one’s identity locally was complemented by a desire to be seen as something other from without. Reading Polo, then, was more than just a good history lesson in Yuan geography and politics and the history of East-West exchange, for it provided an opportunity for Chinese readers to feel foreign through a foreigner’s perceptions of them. Shang writes: “但是，马可波罗对中国的了解还是不够深入的。他对中国劳动人民的创造了解也不全面” (“But Marco Polo’s understanding of China was not deep enough. His understanding of the creation of China’s working masses was also incomplete”). Pointing out the lacunae in Polo’s experiences and narrations allowed his Chinese readers to participate actively in and to
add to the friendship of international exchange that Polo had come to globally signify. Shang fashioned what he saw as the incompleteness of Polo into a hope for the transformation of Chinese identities in a new era of foreign exchange, negotiated by new Chinese subjects.

One of China’s most visible Polo experts during the vibrant 80s, Yu Shixiong, would take a different approach to the interpretation of Polo’s historical significance. Among the first contributors to initiate a steady growth of publications on Polo following the Cultural Revolution, Yu would see the Venetian not as anticipating a modern hope for friendly exchange, but as representing a global market of knowledge and culture that China had been historically destined to dominate. Yu paid less attention to the possibility of negotiating one’s own transformations than he did to positions of power.

His 1981 article in 《历史教学》 Lishi jiaoxue (Teaching History) reintroduced a generation deprived of contact with western literature under Maoist rule to one of Europe’s most important historical figures.44 The article’s title initiates the celebratory tone in which Yu invites readers to view the Venetian explorer as a major figure praised the world over: “East-West History’s Friendly Emissary: Marco Polo.” Yu uses most of the article to explain the biographies of the major players in the Polo saga and the complex political circumstances that set the stage for their dealings with the Mongol emperor. The occasional moment of personal reflection and commentary on Polo’s history and work reveals what it is that Yu thinks makes the merchant such a storied emissary, worthy now of the attention of a massive, Chinese populace that has been largely ignorant of his significance. Two passages from the article in particular demonstrate Polo’s value not as a western emissary to the East, but as the bearer of
superior eastern cultural knowledge to the West along a globalized network. In other words, he is constructed as an individual who transferred and propagated the technologies, interest, affection, and knowledge of China, a superior civilization at the time, to the West, and as a figure of an inclusive world history (中西方历史), a symbol transcending the confines of Italian or western symbolism and meaningful to China on its own terms.

In a later article (1989), Yu Shixiong makes this rationalized movement more explicit in tracing Polo’s status as figure of world history to his appropriation as a Chinese historical instrument:

的，这部书是中西交通史，中世纪史，亚洲史，地理学史，蒙元史的宝贵史料。早已列入世界学术名著之林，为中外许多学术界人士所重视，为各种学术著作引用。45

[In fact, this book is a precious historical resource of a number of histories: the history of East-West exchange, the Middle Ages, Asia, world geography, and the Mongol Yuan. Very early it was numbered among the best of renowned academic volumes. It was looked upon very highly by many academics inside and outsides of China and often referred to by them.]

The first citation from Yu’s Teaching History (1981) that reveals Polo’s historical significance to China concerns the Polos’ tearful reaction to news of the Mongol emperor’s death (1294). Yu’s interpretation of the event describes a deep, sentimental—almost filial—bond between Kublai Khan and his Venetian emissaries. Their sorrow and
subsequent encomium of the Khan and his kingdom give a vivid impression of how
deeply impressed the Polos were by their sojourn in China:

波罗三人在途中还得知忽必烈逝世的消息, 很是悲痛, 同时也打消了重返中国故地的打算。但仍念念不忘在中国度过的美好岁月, 向人滔滔不绝地讲述他们到中国的所见所闻。[46]

[When the three Polos heard the news of Kublai Khan’s death on the road, a profound sorrow overcame them. At the same time, they also determined not to return to China. However, they would never forget the wonderful years they passed in the Khan’s kingdom, sharing endlessly stories about what they had seen and heard in China.]

In the later article (1989), Yu leans again on this unbroken chain of storytelling to provide an explanation for the Italian title of Polo’s reportage. In Chinese, and Japanese, the work is entitled according to what it aims to convey: 马可波罗游记 / 行记 / 见闻录 (A Record of Marco Polo’s Travels or A Record of Things Heard and Seen). In Italian, however, the book is called the Milione (million), a title that offers little insight into its content. Why this title, Yu asks? One reason, he explains, is the myriad wonders of China that Polo conveyed to his acquaintances:

这是因为马可波罗回国后念念不忘他在中国度过的美好岁月, 在他应来访者之情, 讲述他在中国见闻时, 总爱用“百万,” “几个百万,” “几十个百万,” “几百个百万” 来描述我国的地大物博, 人口众多。[47]
[This title came about because after his reentry to Italy, Marco Polo could not seem to shake the memory of his halcyon years in China. When invited over as a guest, he would persist in using such phrases as “million,” “millions,” “tens of millions,” and “billions” to describe the rich territories, populations and wonders of China.]

In addition to conveying to fellow westerners his affective impressions of China, Yu points out how Marco Polo transmitted scientific knowledge to enrich the culture and economy of his own region. China transcended the confines of the sentimental, an endless impetus for storytelling, to assume the weight a marketable commodity:

马可波罗是介绍中国西方第一人。他通过游记，还把我国用煤，育蛋治丝，造纸，使用纸币和印刷术的情况，宫殿桥梁建筑艺术，城市规划，市政管理等的成就和经验，我国做面条的方法等等，向世界广为传播，尽管有个别夸张失实之处，但这部著作对中国文化，科学技术的交流和发展，起了巨大的促进作用。此后西方在科学技术上走在世界的前列，马可波罗是有着不可磨灭的启蒙功绩。⁴⁸

[Marco Polo is the first person to introduce China to the Western world. The record of his voyages broadcast to the world China’s use of coal, its method of cultivating silk, making paper, using paper money, printing books, the bridging architectural technique in palatial structures, city planning, municipal management, pasta making, and numerous other discoveries and experiences. Although his record may exaggerate in places, it remains of great importance to Chinese culture, spurring on a]
surge in the exchange and development of future technologies. Without a
doubt, Polo’s experiences sparked the enlightenment that would push the
West to the global forefront of science and technology.]

Yu’s claim here, that the recent scientific and technological ascendency of the West owes
a great deal to its historical contact with China, via Marco Polo, was followed a year later
by his critical appraisal of the 1981 translation of the *Milione*, in which he again
underlines the superiority of Chinese culture at the time of Polo’s residence at the court
of the Khan emperor. Yu remarks that some of the technologies were so advanced that
they took on mythical proportions to the early readers of Polo’s voyages:

[During the thirteenth century, the economies and cultures of western
Europe lagged far behind those of the East. The things seen and heard in
China recorded in Polo’s book, particularly China’s highly developed
market, culture, and sciences, simply exceeded the ability of Europeans to
understand them. For this reason, many disregarded the volume as being
just another propagator of literary myths.]

These observations argue for the historical importance and superiority of Chinese culture
as underlying modern western successes. Yu’s emphasis on this position conveys a
specifically tailored cultural interpretation of Polo as a disseminator of China’s successes
and wonders to Europe, precipitating a new wave of social and scientific progress there. In this way, Polo is rendered the chief protagonist of a historical radiation of Chinese culture and knowledge to the world and the expression of a hope for China to regain its preeminence in a modern global system. It is anticipated that all future agents who come to China laden with the cultural and religious baggage of the West will also depart as virtual emissaries of Chinese civilization, a concept reflecting a very old historical belief in the mysterious force of sinification (i.e. 来化 laihua, 汉化 hanhua). In a way, Yu Shixiong’s zeal is prophetic. With China’s historic rise in the twenty-first century, Marco Polo and a series of other western commonplaces that once trailed the flow of capital through the world have now become the looking glasses through which China seems to gaze back upon the West and to alter the traffic of cultural influence.

The various characterizations of Marco Polo’s importance in the past few decades help to articulate the attitudes and values expressed by Chinese reading at specific historical moments. The following chapters of this dissertation detail the contexts of particular points of contact where Chinese intellectuals in the early part of the twentieth century appealed to the history and culture of Italy to answer pressing, local questions.

Chapter 1 rehearses key moments in the history of Sino-Italian exchange that prepared the ground for the extensive adoption of the Italian Renaissance as a model and a mantra for Chinese cultural rebirth. This chapter also more fully theorizes the nature of cultural borrowings in modernity and the ways in which specific discursive practices precipitated the naturalization of Italian culture, expediting and enhancing its local impact. Modeling itself upon Italy and its renaissance was a sign of China’s entrance
into a new history of international modernity, even as it was a primary means by which to accentuate locally certain aspects of Chinese particularity and superiority.

Chapter 2 looks closely at one of the late Qing’s greatest intellectual figures, Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929), focusing on his lesser known creative works, the 新罗马 Xin Luoma (New Rome) (1902), in the context of his abundant political writings. Liang is among the first figures in modernity to have analyzed Italian culture systematically as part of the reformation that was seen as necessary to strengthen China. His treatments of Dante Alighieri and Risorgimento heroes stand as the most thorough and intricate interpretations and applications of Italian culture in China to date. Here, the New Rome is described as embodying many of Liang’s ideas in his political writings and shown to have positioned Italy to play a crucial role in fomenting Chinese national sentiment.

Chapter 3 examines how the Petrarchan sonnet contributed in conceptual and structural ways to China’s New Poetry movement during the 1920s. As part of debates about the kind of turn to modernity that Chinese poetry should take, the sonnet became an important galvanizing form in discourses about “meter” and “rhythm” (格律 gelü, 节奏 jiezou), a phenomenon echoed globally in some western poets’ comparable attention to “rhythmics” (e.g. Ezra Pound). I argue for the musical theorization of the sonnet as a vital component of the economy of translation in the modernist project for a Chinese renaissance. Discourses both of a technical and metaphorical nature concerning poetry’s musicality were made possible by, and manufactured the possibility of, the sonnet’s translation from West to East.

Chapter 4, on Chinese decamerons, shows how Boccaccio’s work has been
central in issues of sexuality, individuality and nationalism in Chinese modernity.

Sexuality, historically one of China’s most subdued cultural aspects, rushed to the surface during the first decades of the twentieth century in the general push for modernization. Powered by the imported theories of Sigmund Freud, progressivists advocated the abandonment of traditional taboos in favor of a new frankness and politicization of human sexuality, holding that representing human sexual nature in art and debating the topic openly in society were natural and necessary activities. Moreover, public engagement in discourses about human sexuality, a powerful tool to uncover the concealed nature of the sexuality inherent in China’s corrupt feudal society, was thereby essential to the reformation of social mores and the development of individual identities required to join the modern world. The initial Chinese translations and receptions of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* during a crucial transitions between the Republican (1919-1949) and Communist (1949-) periods demonstrate the ways in which human sexuality, reinterpreted as a reforming mechanism, reemerged in the guise of nationalist fervor.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate the agency with which Chinese intellectuals naturalized Italian matter in their competing conceptions of modernity. Moreover, the conditions and discourses of such cultural borrowings display Chinese modernity as arising from local interests, impulses, and activities which drew upon global knowledge as a resource. The circumstances in and means by which Italian culture was indigenized in China in the twentieth century reveal the centrality of the center kingdom 中国 *zhongguo* (China) in the thinking behind so many of its intercultural transactions.
1 Long Santiao, *Sotto il cielo di Roma* (Xi’an: Shanxi shifan daxue, 2010).

2 Ibid., ii.

3 Ibid., 83-85.


15 Ibid., 27.

16 Ibid., 21.

17 Ibid., 34.


19 Ibid., 49-117.

20 Ibid., 108


23 Duara, Sovereignty, 15-16.


27 Ibid.

28 Ibid, 3.

29 Frank Dikötter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992), 65.

30 Duara, Sovereignty, 25.

31 This is part of an effort to see modernity as a “complex field of relationships or threads of material that connect and multiply in space-time,” instead of the flattening, dualistic terms of postcolonial theory (6). See Tani E. Barlow, “Introduction,” Formations of Colonial Identity in East Asia (Durham: Duke UP, 1997).


34 All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.


36 Ibid., 1.

37 Wen Jiabao, 2006 Anno dell’Italia in Cina Zhonguo Yidali nian 中国意大利年, ed. Augusta Busico (Roma: Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2006). Other prominent political voices shared similar views:
Giorgio Napolitano (Italian President), Romano Prodi (Prime Minister), Massimo D’Alema (Foreign Minister), Li Zhaoxing (Foreign Minister) and Sun Jiacheng (Cultural Minister).

39 Chen Kaijun et al., *Milione Make Boluo youji* 马可波罗和马可波罗游记 (Fujian: Fujian kexue jishu, 1981).


41 Ibid., 2.


43 Ibid., 5.


48 Yu, “East-West,” 34.


50 The opinion among Chinese Italianists and Italian Sinologists is that direct engagement with the Italian language by Chinese intellectuals did not really get underway until the 1970s. Before that time, knowledge of Italian culture was largely mediated through English, French, Japanese, and Russian sources.
CHAPTER 1

Naturalizing the Italian Renaissance

Alla precarietà dell’esistenza della tribù, —siccità, malattie, influssi maligni—lo sciamano rispondeva annullando il peso del suo corpo, trasportandosi, in volo in un altro mondo, in un altro livello di percezione, dove poteva trovare le forze per modificare la realtà.

The shaman responds to the precariousness of his tribe—drought, sickness, evil—by annulling the weight of his body, transporting himself in flight to another world, to another level of perception, where he can find the powers to modify reality.

Italo Calvino,
Six Memos for the Next Millenium

In the flagship avant-garde periodical 新青年 Xin qingnian (New Youth), the political economist and head librarian at Beijing University Library, Li Dazhao 李大钊 (1888-1927), expressed his belief in China’s eventual rebound from national ignominy:

白首中華者青春中華以胚孕之實也. 青春中華者白首中華托以再生之華也. ¹

[Old China is the fruit from which young China is born; young China is the renaissance (再生) resulting from old China’s passing.]

Li describes rather poetically a kind of biologically-inflected, cyclic rebirth of culture that stands at the center of all modernist discourses of progressive timelessness. The logic of
the botanical metaphor suggests that as naturally as the organic world regenerates itself, so will Chinese culture experience a reflowering from its dead past. Li’s article, alongside other writings featured in the same journal, theorized the notion of spring, youth, and rebirth or renaissance that would constitute the grounds and conditions for the Chinese nativization of the Italian Renaissance. The discourses of vitality, strength, youth, speed, etc., that were circulating globally invited comparisons to iconic historical movements and periods that reflected modernity’s vibrancy. Recognizing the Italian Renaissance as the root of all modern developments caused China’s leading figures in the early twentieth century to invoke the period as a key term and logic for the construction of a modern national culture. Moreover, these intellectuals discovered in the Renaissance a means by which to elevate the status of their national culture as well as their own positions as brokers “in the middle” (cf. Calvino’s shamans) of what renaissance was to mean for China.

The present chapter begins by revisiting some key historical moments in Sino-Italian cultural exchanges leading up to the Chinese appropriations of the Renaissance. The nature of earlier borrowings, characterized by wonder and political emulation, became altered with the larger cultural shifts in the early Republican period to form part of the intellectual schemes to erect a new national culture. Li Dazhao, Hu Shi, and Jiang Fangzhen’s articulations of a culture of rebirth in the first two decades of the twentieth century are examined here to show how appropriations of the Renaissance empowered these writers and the civilization they sought to typify. Ultimately theorized as a progressivist force, instead of a revival of classical influence, the concept of renaissance
became a tool by which Chinese culture and its cosmopolitan representatives were ushered into the modern world.

The Beginnings of Sino-Italian Exchange

* Major ex longinquo reverentia; “Viewed from a distance, everything is beautiful.” 

So begins the authoritative study of the history of Sino-Italian relations, *L'Italia e Cina* (1996), by the renowned Italian sinologists Giuliano Bertuccioli and Federico Masini, whose Latin maxim encapsulates what they see as the essence of the intercultural exchanges between these two civilizations that began over twenty centuries ago, namely a mutual romanticization. They explain:

La lontananza, sia nello spazio che nel tempo, favorisce invece il formarsi di miti e di leggende e la fantasia popolare trasferisce sovente su popoli e paesi lontani le proprie nostalgia per immaginare le età dell’oro e le proprie aspirazioni a felici utopie.³

Distance, whether it is spatial or temporal, favors the formation of myths and legends. Popular imagination often transfers upon distant lands and peoples one’s own nostalgia for imaginary golden ages and aspirations for blissful utopias.

From Plinius (23-79) and Ammianus’ (325-391) descriptions of the unusually peaceful society of the *seres* (Chinese) to the Ming era (1368-1644) fascination with Jesuit clocks, Sino-Italian relations have always been marked by superlative expressions of fascination
(though not always favorable). The Latin epigraph that begins their study sets the parameters for Bertuccioli and Masini’s prime discursive purpose, the exposure of this construction’s hollow beauty through a carefully executed historiography. This purpose is underwritten by a historical idealism and a belief in authenticity that promises grand social benefits through greater intercultural understanding, the “conoscersi meglio” (better acquaintance) of the two cultures in question. This view, of course, is a natural outgrowth of the kind of foundational work in which these scholars are engaged, that is, the initial illumination and dissemination of historical knowledge as such.

However, a historical quest to dispel myth leaves untouched the reverse exposure of the historically paramount role that fantasies and misunderstandings have played in intercultural exchange. In other words, in trying only to make “right” what is historically askew, the very nature of world history as we know it—a boundless volume of mutual imaginations and misprisions—awaits analysis. Instead of regarding this intercultural distance as something to be correctly bridged, the present study treats “misrepresentations” as crucial ingredients in the historical development of modern Chinese culture. The misunderstandings of Chinese intellectuals with regard to Italian culture and literature constituted precisely the “right” understandings for the development of a national culture in Chinese modernity. Misrecognition has always been an important ideological device and cultural resource.

and critiquing Edward Said’s model of orientalism to Chinese history, Chen described how the discourses of orientalism, until then received as unilaterally imperialistic and oppressive to their objects of modification, were often central to Chinese intellectuals’ progressive agendas (e.g. the May Fourth movement, *Menglong shi*). Similarly, Chen demonstrated how the related practice of occidentalism (the willful misrepresentation of things western) differentially served a number of groups to ends both oppressive and emancipative in domestic politics. The active misrepresentations of China and the West perpetrated from without and within have all contributed to national and cultural, official and unofficial identity construction. Thus, in the end, orientalisms and occidentalisms reveal themselves as well-traveled and versatile practices whose significance and impact follow the trends of the domestic political. In her case study of the controversial 1980s TV series *河伤* *He Shang* (*River of Hurt*), Chen explains:

> Both orientalism and occidentalism in whatever form never refer to a ‘thing-in-itself’ but to a power relationship. Whether this projection into the Other is positive or negative depends, of course, on the problematic and often paradoxical social, political, and economic condition in the indigenous culture in question—and on one’s own place in structures of power.

This perception, a significant adjustment of Said’s unequivocal castigation of the imperial vicissitudes of orientalisms, constitutes a caution to those intent on correcting them. The engagement in orientalist or occidentalist practices by different parties in diverse times and places has and will continue to employ “strategies of bondage in one world, yet strategies of liberation in another.” In other words not all “misunderstandings,”
alternative views of texts or cultural events, are regrettable and ripe for scholarly
redress—some are, in fact, emancipative:

Such a perspective, in contrast to the traditional quest for “correct” reading
and the commonplace privileging of understanding, views
“misunderstanding” as a legitimate and necessary factor in the making of
literary history and of cross-cultural literary relationships.9

In this way, the usually reproachable term “misunderstanding” is transformed from a
target into an object of literary history; misunderstandings become symptoms of
convoluted acts of reading cross-culturally. Bertuccioli and Masini’s study of Sino-
Italian relations is correct to describe that history as being one based almost entirely upon
fantasy. What remains to be examined, of course, is how these imaginations in specific
times and places reveal local Chinese cultures, apart from the always given conclusion—
a tautological premise of our own profession—that they inaccurately describe some other,
authentic history. The following pages briefly describe significant instances in which
Chinese readers sought for and manufactured answers to local questions via comparable
“misunderstandings” of Italian history and culture.

Possibly the earliest first-person description of Europe by a Chinese was written
by Fan Shouyi 樊守義 (1682-1735). From 1708 to 1720, Luigi Fan, as he was known
in Europe, traveled from China as an attaché to a Jesuit company that Antonio Francesco
Provana (1662-1720) led to Italy. There Fan studied the cultures and languages of the
West. Of greatest interest to him were, of course, the learning of Catholic doctrine and
the study of Latin. In 1720, he returned to Qing China as an ordained Catholic priest and
a valuable receptacle of western knowledge. Upon his reentry, officials from Canton
commanded him to make formal oral and written reports of his voyage, and Fan accordingly wrote a memorial in which he described his journey to the West, 身見録 Shenjian lu (A Record of Things Seen), a volume that would eventually make its way back to the Kangxi imperial court.

Fan’s record is a colorful blend of descriptive reportage and religious mirabilia that shares curious resemblances to medieval and Renaissance European travelogues.\(^\text{10}\) For instance, his rhetorical insistence upon the reliable and personal nature of his experiences (親歴亦竟末嘗筆載)\(^\text{11}\) as a means to enhance the impact of subsequently divulged miracles (e.g. the still bubbling blood of St. John at San Giovanni a Carbonara, Naples) indelibly recalls the justifying topoi of Marco Polo’s *Milioni*. Overall, Fan’s record paints Italy as a land of wonderful weather, friendly people, charitable nobles, luxuriant architecture, and paradisiacal ceremonies:

禮日各堂音樂大成時洋洋充滿恍若天國難三言語形容.\(^\text{12}\)

[On Sunday when the Mass is sung, music reverberates through the Churches in such a way that one thinks he is in Paradise. It is truly difficult to describe it in words.]

In the end, though, Fan’s official report suffered an ironic fate. Few probably ever read it until it was rediscovered in Rome and republished in China in the 1930s. Federico Masini recently explained: “The document was never made public, […] thus preventing it from ever exerting any influence on the knowledge of the West by Chinese.”\(^\text{13}\) A drought of two centuries would pass before Chinese intellectuals would return to Europe as ambassadors and students to record their own impressions and experiences.
With Fan’s record lost to memory, the slanted summaries of European Catholic and Protestant missionaries remained the sole foundations upon which the Chinese would imagine the West. The following works circulating from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries were the most influential in this regard: 坤與萬國全圖 Kunyu wanguo quantu (Mappamondo) (1552-1610) by Matteo Ricci; Giulio Aleni’s 職方外紀 Zhifang waiji (A Geography of Foreign Lands) (1623), 西學凡 Xixue fan (A General Knowledge of the West) (1623), and 西方答問 Xifang dawan (Questions and Answers about the West) (1637); 坤與圖説 Kunyu tu shuo (Explanations of the Mappamondo) (1623-1688) by Ferdinand Verbiest; and the four different editions compiled by Lin Zexu and China’s first organized team of English translators called 海國圖志 Haiguo tuzhi (Maps and Documents of the Maritime Nations) (1844, 1847, 1852, 1895).\(^\text{14}\) Jesuits of the caliber of Aleni (1582-1649) produced fantastic descriptions of a peaceful Italian countryside where the water flowed like honeyed milk.\(^\text{15}\) In contrast, the Protestant English sources from which Lin and his team cited with abandon in the nineteenth century presented Italy as a politically inept and morally corrupt society, confounding the centuries-old Jesuit impressions of the country as a religious, cultural and scientific center, a *culla del Rinascimento* (a cradle of the Renaissance).

Notwithstanding the wide impact of Lin’s work, this negative impression of Italy began to roll back in the late nineteenth century, when Chinese emissaries and political reformers again experienced the peninsula first-hand.\(^\text{16}\) Descriptions of the Italian people and its government, such as the following in the widely circulated 瀛寰全志 Ying huan quan zhi (Complete Geography) (with seven editions between 1903-1906), provided a base from which modern reformers would imagine the peninsula:
Italians have splendid features and quick minds. They are adept in the arts and all manner of thought. Since ancient times they have excelled in sculpture, painting, architecture, music and other such skills. However, in empirical learning they are inferior to other states. Their people are rather suspicious and fear many gods. They neglect farming and leave many fields fallow and overgrown […].

In ancient times, Italy was the imperial Roman state, exerting its dominance over the world. During the middle ages, however, that power slowly declined, splintering into numerous competing factions. At that time, the Pope arose to exert his power over the land. The Papacy held a number of provinces. It was not until 1861 that a number of brave
nationals rose up to remove this oppressive regime, unifying the small city-states into a single monarchy. They strengthened the state and established a constitution. Executive power was placed within the chambers of the monarch and legislative rule was entrusted to the parliament, which was further divided into an upper and lower chamber. 337 representatives were chosen from the ranks of the nobles and imperial ranks, while the lower chamber was manned with 508 representatives chosen from amongst the people.]

Italy’s artistic legacy and its recent break from the bonds of political tyranny served as the two principle aspects upon which modern Chinese intellectuals would focus their energies, when looking for answers to their modern dilemmas.

Two of China’s most celebrated political and cultural reformers, Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and his student Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), would establish the first hermeneutic templates for understanding Italian history and culture. Both Kang and Liang, dedicated reformers of the Qing monarchy, identified a mirror-image of China in what they saw as this battered, but resilient ancient civilization of southern Europe. In his 意大利游記 Yidali youji (Italian Travels) (1905), part of his larger work 欧洲十一国游记 Ouzhou shiyi guo you ji (A Record of Travels Through Eleven European Countries), Kang carves hopeful comparisons between a downtrodden China and a recovering Risorgimento Italy:

概而论之, 北欧各国,皆胜于我。意国与我国平等相类。[...] 民之贫富亦相若。我国求进化政治之序, 亦可比似意大利, 采其变法之次序而酌行之。他国则新旧贫富皆不相类, 驹难仿似也。18
In short, the northern European countries are all superior to our own. However, Italy and China are rather similar. [...] The gap between the rich and the poor is also comparable. Our government’s need to implement a sequence of political modernizations reflects the case of Italy. We should ponder over and adopt the order of her political reforms and then implement them. The disparities between what is new and what is old, the poor and the rich of the other European countries, do not correspond. It would be too difficult to imitate their models.

Italy, like China, has numerous tracts of uncultivated land and a huge population; like China, it is poor and without machinery; like China, it is an ancient civilization with ancient habits; like China, it is constrained to force its people to emigrate; like China, it has a thriving commercial culture. Consequently, our country can imitate the way in which Italy has reformed.] (my italics)

Kang’s pragmatic affinity for the bel paese was the product of personal observation and thoughtful cultural, historical, political, and economic comparisons between Italy and his native land, with expediency of the times guiding his gaze primarily to sites of political
import. Italy’s recent progress since unification inspired Kang to urge his countrymen to embrace it as a western reflection of themselves and as a proximate model by which to direct China’s much needed reformations.

Kang’s prodigious pupil, Liang Qichao, would extend his teacher’s interest in Italy by making the Italian revolutionary spirit a focal point of his creative and political writings:

當時意大利愛國志士中，凡分三派。[…] 其愛國之熱誠也同，其以意大利民族之一統獨立為目的也同。20

[At that time in Italy there were three camps of honest, nation-loving patriots. […] They all shared the same fervent loyalty to their homeland, making the unification and independence of the Italians their singular goal.]

Liang’s fascination with Italian history and its heroes grew into two important early works that established the patriotic tenor of his renowned political activities: 意大利建国三杰传 Yidali jianguo san jie zhuan (A History of Italy’s Three Founding Heroes) (1902) and 新罗马 Xin Luoma (New Rome) (1902). In this way, Kang and Liang’s political enthusiasm concretized the practice of Sino-Italian comparisons in order to mobilize local forces to enact modern reforms, resembling those implemented some decades earlier in Italy’s reunification.

The kind of comparisons that intellectuals in the subsequent Republican era (1911-49) made, however, fundamentally differed from the political focus and panegyric of Kang and Liang, largely as a consequence of radical shifts in political culture. After
the dissolution of the Qing monarchy, China passed through a period of violent
ambivalence about its own new-found freedoms. The ideals of republicanism and
democracy suffered greatly under the persecution of local warlords, the corruption and
ineptitude of government officials, and the apathy and aggression of foreign forces. All
this turmoil served to disillusion the intellectuals, many of whom bent their efforts to the
work of culture, which they accepted as the indispensable prerequisite for good
government. The pursuit of a refurbished, modern culture ensued, with lively debates
about the kind of national culture that should be created. Radical changes required a
reassessment of traditional culture and the stipulation of terms by which to define,
diagnose, and dispense it. These high-stakes battles gravitated around iconic modernist
binaries: 新旧 xin jiu (old and new), 活死 huo si (living and dead), 状弱 zhuang rou
(strong and weak), 康病 kang bing (healthy and sick), etc.

It was during the 1910s that the concept of a renaissance emerged as a competing
metaphorical paradigm, destined to give form and force to the promotion of progressive
evolution. A number of translations for the European term circulated, each with its own
particular emphasis (e.g. 文艺复兴 wenyifuxing [artistic revival], 再生 zaisheng [rebirth],
复活 fuhuo [resurrection], 再造 zaizao [re-creation], 新潮 xinchao [new tide], 新产 xinchan [new production], 复兴 fuxing [renewal], 启蒙 qimeng [enlightenment]).
However, as a collective symantic grouping these terms promoted the notion of a Chinese
renaissance as a continuance of past glories through the advancement of a new national
culture, by which China’s authenticity and sovereignty were asserted in a modern world
system. Li Dazhao’s call for a Chinese renaissance, cited above, provides a prominent
example of the kind of progressivist discourses into which the Italian Renaissance was
incorporated. His article “青春” Qingchun (“Youth”), which appeared in the first installment of the journal’s second year of publication (1916), focused on the literal, psychological, and abstract aspects of the terms “youth” and “rebirth,” following the lead of other articles published the previous year.

The first issue of the journal, printed on September 15, 1915, had begun an earnest the theorization of youth and analogous concepts, with critical reflections by Chen Duxiu (the journal’s passionate editor and subsequent founder of the Communist party), Wang Shuxian, and translations of excerpts by W. F. Markwick, W. A. Smith, and Ivan Turgenev. The split-page Chinese-English translation of a selection from Markwick and Smith’s The True Citizen, revealingly entitled “A Message to the Youth and the Issue of the New and the Old,” helped prepare the stage for Chen and Wang’s assessments: “the child makes the man; and the foundation of all greatness and usefulness is laid by the impressions of youth.”

The opening lines of Chen Duxiu’s inaugural article “青春” Qingchun (“Youth”) inject the cultural critique and political implications of valorizing the modernist catachresis that is youthfulness: “竊以少年老成。中國稱人之語也。長而勿衰。英美人相勗之辭也” (In China, we praise the young by saying “despite your youth you show the signs of old age and maturity.” But the British and Americans encourage each other with the words “grow old but stay young in spirit”). Chen’s comparison of idiomatic expressions subtly explains what it is that the West has grasped which led to its florescence, while China withers by the wayside. The answer is made explicit in a series of analogies that culminate in an appropriately modern, scientific allegory of society:
青年如初春. 如朝日. 如百卉之萌动. 如利刃之新发於剑. 人生最可寶貴之時期也. 青年之於社會猶新鮮活潑細胞之在人身新陳代謝. 陳腐朽敗者無時不在天然淘汰之途與新鮮活潑者以空間之位置及時間之生命人身遵新陳代謝則健康.24

[Youth is like the onset of spring, like the rising sun, like the sprouting of a hundred buds, like the edge of a newly sharpened sword. It is the most precious period of human life. Youth is like an energetic cell in the body of human society. The new organism replaces the old. The old and corrupted cells are rapidly selected out of the body and the fresh vibrant cells fill their vacancies. Only at times when the body privileges the new does this natural replacement sustain the body’s health.]

This scientist celebration of death and birth as a metaphor for national health was a carryover from the immensely popular concepts of social Darwinism and evolutionism at the turn of the century, which had caused Liang Qichao to offer the following panegyric:

So death is the mother of progress and a great event in human life. By virtue of death everyone can make himself profitable to his race, by virtue of death the existing race can make itself profitable to the future race.

How great is the use of death!25

In 1916, in the same journal, Li Dazhao deepens Chen’s analogies with explications reminiscent of Daoist and Neo-Confucianist philosophizing, as he theorizes youth as a kind of hegemonic, universal principle that syncretizes all dichotomies.

Drawing on the works of Zhuangzi 莊子 (369-286 BCE), Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037-1101
ACE), and Luo Mi 羅泌 (1131-?), Li builds the concept of youth into one of modernity’s central, paradoxical convergences, in which cultural authenticity is ratified by appeals to both perennial progressivity (the expectation of constant rebirth) and universal timelessness (China the forever young). Youth is made out to be one of the principal reconstructive symbols that negotiate progressive change, as required by the material and political conditions of modernity, with the aura of a national, sanctified, and timeless authenticity necessary to participate in a competitive world system. All phenomena thrive within youth’s parameters and wherever it is invoked, there the world and the universe reside: “吾人之青春一日存在即地球之青春一日存在” (“The day my youth exists is the day the world’s youth exists”).26 Youth is equated to modernism and modernism to youth: “夫青年安心立命之所循今日主義以近” (“The establishment of youth depends on its moving with the tide of modernism”).27 From here it is but a small step to youth’s apotheosis as an eternal, universal force of nature:

其變者青春之進程其不變者無盡之青春也. 其異者青春之進程其同者無盡之青春也. 其易者青春之進程其周者無盡之青春也. […] 推而言之生死盛衰陰陽否泰剖析復屈信消長盈虛吉福青春白首健壯頹老輪廻反復連續流轉無非青春之進程. […] 以其不變應其變.28

[Change is the changelessness of the processes of an eternal youth.
Variations constitute the sameness of the processes of an eternal youth.
Transformation is the completeness of the processes of an eternal youth.
[…] In summary, life and death, prosperity and decline, ying and yang, discord and peace, loss and recovery, crooked and straight, atrophy and
growth, fullness and emptiness, auspicious and ominous, calamity and blessing, youth and age, youthful strength and weak senility forever cycle in an uninterruptable flow of youth. [...] It answers to constancy with its eternal change.

While Li promotes youth as the grand principle of the modern age and the demiurge of all phenomena, at the same time the philosophical zeal he enlists in his analyses belies the truth that he most urgently pursues: the givenness or organic supremacy of youth as a universal force. His much protesting ultimately reveals that the nature of youth is a product of the intellectual mind, a symbol constructed for its time.

Li’s insistence on the natural supremacy of youth and its promised revolution of rebirths is, in fact, largely hortatory. It functions perlocutively as a persuasive promise more than as a declaration of objective reality; only when youth is believed in does its work begin. In other words, youth is theorized and offered as a concept and a discipline from which to escape social, cultural, and national extinction, nefarious ends also entirely reliant upon the conceptualization of youth. In this way, youth, like any other universalizing principle, reveals its politically inflected dependence upon rationalization.

Li was one of many leading intellectuals who sought to break free from the traditional bonds of China’s past, perceived as having caused its failures in modernity. This position is most directly evident where Li appears ironically to divorce youth from the natural order of things that it is intended organically to lord over: “雖然地球即成白首吾人尚在青春以吾人青春柔化地球之白首雖老猶未老也” (“Even though the world is already wizened, I can apply my youth to change its hoary head, so that its age is no longer old”). In this statement, “change” as a compound transitive verb x+化 hua is imposed
upon reality from which it is cordoned off by two subordinating, contrastive conjunctions 雖 sui (although), creating a grammatical condition in which youth is an extrinsic force, altering what is naturally already there of itself, ran 然 (thus).

Towards the end of his article, the discursive nature of Li’s project is laid bare when he calls upon his readers to launch the reign of youth by 理性 lixing (reason) and 努力 nuli (effort). He exemplifies this cerebral labor by tacitly rewriting one of China’s most iconic classical texts, the 大學 Daxue (The Great Learning), which for centuries was required memorization for all literate subjects of the empire. In Li’s revision, youth is substituted for the once great regulating principle of Confucian self-cultivation that had always ensured social stability and cultural predictability. The acquisition of correct knowledge and its attendant regulated heart are no longer perceived as the conduit through which one’s home, people, and country are established. Li writes: “以青春之我 創建青春之家庭. 青春之國家. 青春之民族. 青春之人類. 青春之地球. 青春之宇宙” (“I use my youth to create a home of youth, a country of youth, a people of youth, a humanity of youth, a world of youth, and a universe of youth”). Finally, that the project of naturalizing youth relies almost entirely upon reasoning is demonstrated by a play on, in which Li incorporates 华 hua, a reference to one of the names for China/Chinese people/Chineseness (中華 zhonghua), as a synonym for “youth” or “flourishing,” also 华 hua: “宇宙有無盡之青春. 斯宇宙有不落之華. […] 青春在於華” (“The universe enjoys an endless youth, one whose flourishing will never wane. […] Youth is flourishing”). A simple substitution of terms will achieve the effect that Li intended his readers to perceive: “The universe enjoys an endless China, one whose flourishing will
never wane. Youth resides in China.” Consequently, Li redefines and rewrites the history of China in terms of the modernist paradigm of youth, by which he hopes China will be reborn and rejoin the world system as a respected culture and power. As the intricacies of his article demonstrate, though, being part of an intrinsically youthful modernity and youthful universal order is not as natural a process as it is asserted to be. Being modern and youthful, in fact, requires a great deal of reasoning, effort, and even selective substitution and surveillance performed by knowing progressivists: the Chinese character for “flourishing” (華 hua) can also be read as “grey” or “wizened.”

At the same time Li and Chen were developing the discourses of youth, spring, and rebirth in modernity, they and some of their colleagues were also contemplating how the concept of a renaissance could be made to contribute to China’s modernization. As Irene Eber has pointed out, the circulating meanings of renaissance in the May Fourth era (1919-) reflected major tensions in China’s thinking about its future and past and facilitated the way “China’s intellectuals viewed their and China’s relationship to the world.” In his critique of repressive and linear nationalist history, Prasenjit Duara suggests more cogently how the modified idea of the European Renaissance was used as a way to promote a unified nationalistic sense of local sovereignty and evolution, even as it suppressed other discursive avenues toward modernity (e.g. feudalism, Confucianism, etc.):

Both the threefold periodization and the idea of the Renaissance are of great significance in ‘re-dressing’ the problems of the nation-state rhetorically. In the simple version the ancient age is the age of the creation of a people and culture. It is a foundational trope of purity and
originariness. The medieval age is one of decay—inner ills and outer barbarians vitiate the purity of the people or culture. Efforts to renew the spirit or purity work only temporarily. The modern period is one of renewal—often through struggle—and change, change—it is hoped—toward progress. The modern period may or may not come with a renaissance; certainly the idea of the renaissance dramatizes the general disposition of the modern era to recover a lost past—the problem of reconnecting with the past even as one sheds the accretions of a middle age, whether this be Confucianism, barbarian rule, or superstition—as one forges into a new world. The entire apparatus then works to recover the continuity of culture and people even whilst it permits the historian to reject that against which one will fashion the future.34

This European model of social evolution was embraced by late Qing and early Republican intellectuals who sought to redress their lack of history (i.e. their destiny to arise as a modern nation-state). To its Chinese mediators, the Renaissance was not understood solely as a recuperation of the past, as Duara implies above, but also as a strategic break with it, in order to be amenable to the reforms requisite to being born again into modernity.

A significant moment in the formation of Chinese concepts of a renaissance occurred in 1915 via a letter from Huang Yuanyong 黃遠庸 (1885-1915) to his colleague Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962):

In my humble opinion, politics is in such confusion that I am at a loss to know what to talk about. Ideal schemes will have to be buried for future
generations to unearth. [...] As to fundamental salvation, I believe its beginning must be sought in the promotion of a new literature. In short, we must endeavor to bring Chinese thought into direct contact with the contemporary thought of the world, thereby to accelerate its radical awakening. And we must see to it that the basic ideals of world thought will be related to the life of the average man. The method seems to consist in using simple and simplified language and literature for wide dissemination of ideas among the people. Have we not seen that historians regard the Renaissance as the foundation of the overthrow of medievalism in Europe?35

Huang’s somewhat crestfallen letter to Hu introduces a number of interrelated concepts that would come to shape the way in which the renaissance concept was understood by Chinese intellectuals in their push for modernization: (1) the creation of a new literature, (2) the invention of a simplified language, (3) the education of the population at large, and (4) the “we” role of cultural leaders whose agency would be required to articulate and translate the basic ideals of world thought to a broad Chinese audience. Huang affirms that the implementation of these conditions, a veritable reproduction of a European renaissance, would bring about the salvation of the nation. In conjunction with other modernist discourses on youth, etc., the implicit comparison between Europe’s historical and China’s imminent rebirths succeeds in transforming the renaissance from a restoration of things classical to a forward-looking and outward-moving force that accords with the premises of perpetual motion and translatability. For China, cultural renaissance became a means by which to enter into the world system of the twentieth
century, as Eber observed in writing that for China “the transition from medievalism to modernity, [...] means entering into, or becoming part of, the world.” That world, aside from being marked by modern science, technologies, and weapons, was constructed by modernist discourses and slogans, which drew upon the legacy of the renaissance idea.

The key role of intellectuals in implementing China’s cultural rebirth has been further examined by Gang Zhou, who, carrying forward Eber’s work, focused upon the context, time, and “men who use[d] the word” “renaissance” in modernity, principally Hu Shi,37 whose assumption of the European Renaissance as a transcultural phenomenon facilitated the very possibility of contemplating China’s own cultural rebirth. In what Duara would term an act of national naturalization through resignification, Hu’s Chinese translation of the concept aimed to redefine a national history while propelling it into a world system that had already assumed a renaissance as an indispensable stage in social evolution. The pursuit of its own renaissance promised to liberate China from the western perception of its historical stagnation, which had been codified by Hegel in his prejudicial appraisal of world civilizations,38 instead catapulting China into the forward thrust of modern history.

Gang suggests that specific “contact zones” for this process of cognitive globalization lay in Hu’s knowledge of the major studies on the Italian Renaissance that were circulating in America while he was studying at Cornell and Columbia (1910-17): Jacob Burckhardt’s The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1904) and Edith Sichel’s The Renaissance (1914). The ideas predominating in these studies little resemble a faithful depiction of the period. Instead, they offer ideologically motivated assessments designed to reinforce modernist values. For both Burckhardt and Sichel, the Italian
Renaissance was not about the rediscovery of the ancient world and its subsequent effects on western civilization, but a monumental leap in the development of the individual and the discovery of subjectivity. Burckhardt writes:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness—that which was turned within as that which was turned without—lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such.\(^3\)

The value that Burckhardt and Anglo-American civilization placed on this ascendance of the individual from the depths of collectivity must have had a particularly profound effect on the young Chinese scholar whose nation’s recent tragedies were often blamed on its reluctance to break with the past.

A privileged contact point for the Chinese naturalization of the Renaissance presented itself, no doubt, in the West’s highest stage of individual development, the so-called renaissance man (\textit{l’uomo universale}). Burckhardt chooses as his most convincing paradigm of the enlightened individual Dante Alighieri, master of a vast array of subjects and interests; Italy alone, Burckhardt remarks, produced such polymaths. However,
Gang suggests that these modernist values of individuality and the charismatic command of knowledge were not what caught Hu’s eye. Instead, the invention of the vernacular was what most fascinated him. Though that subject takes up only a small part of Sichel’s book, Hu’s diary entry of June 19, 1917, written during a train ride through the Rocky Mountains, shows that the modernist fusion of renaissance, vernacularity, and individualism had, indeed, made an impact on him:

[On the train, I read Edith Sichel’s book on the Renaissance. The Renaissance is the designation for that period of European history spanning the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Traditionally, it has been translated as the Age of Artistic Renewal. [But] my referring to it as the Age of Artistic Renewal does not quite grasp the entire essence of it, coming up short to a more direct conveyance of its meaning. In the book, Sichel narrates the establishment of Europe’s several vernaculars, which provides me with sufficient resources to investigate. [...] In addition, though the beginnings of the German and English vernaculars were very small, their growth has become boundless. For those champions of the
Chinese vernacular in our day, looking upon these developments is a clear inspiration.

What Gang sees in this pronouncement, the singular importance of the vernacular in Hu’s mind, also carries an implicit faith in the individual forces needed to bring such a state about. Hu clearly understood that the realization of the vernacular in China was inevitably bound up in the activities of its grand historical advocates. Vignettes of renaissance men such as Burckhardt’s Dante, who opened their “streams of force” to irrigate a “promising future,” provided a paradigm that Hu could have used for the incorporation of rebirth in the persons of Chinese modernists. As Burckhardt wrote:

Dante, who even in his lifetime was called by some a poet, by others a philosopher, by others a theologian, pours forth in all his writings a stream of personal force by which the reader, apart from the interest of the subject, feels himself carried away. What power of will must the steady, unbroken elaboration of the Divine Comedy have required! And if we look at the matter of the poem we find that in the whole spiritual or physical world there is hardly an important subject which the poet has not mentioned, and on which his utterances—often only a few words—are not the most weighty of his time.  

With the publication of Chen Duxiu’s “文學革命論” Wenxue geming lun (“On Literary Revoltion”) and Hu’s “文學改良芻議” Wenxue gailiang chuyi (“Some Modest Suggestions for Literary Reform”) in New Youth (1917), soon after the appearance of Li Dazhao’s article (1916), the idea of renaissance was firmly sold as a notion of cultural progress and national beginnings, the “ushering in of a brand new age” in China that
was destined to be as brilliant as the European Renaissance. Hu’s article, known later as the 八不 ba bu (the eight don’ts), because it stated propositions about practices to avoid in writing, provided a formula that he foresaw would deliver on the promise of a renaissance that Dante had performed centuries ago for Italy and Europe. Because he perceived the Dante’s period as being the root of western modernity, Hu sought to become a figura dantis who would lay the grounds for the modern Chinese renaissance. In the section of his article dedicated to not avoiding the vernacular (point 8), Hu uses the Renaissance as a way to rewrite Chinese literary history, to celebrate Buddhist translations, plays, and novels, and to resurrect the practice of vernacular writing. For Hu, China’s problem was that it appeared to lack a Dantean figure with whom to solidify the brilliant gains that vernacular literature had made since the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368):

使此趋势不受阻遏，则中国几有一“活文学”出现，而但丁、路得之伟业。

[If only this trend had not met with obstacles, China would have its own “living literatures” [toward vernacularity], having become a Dantean and Lutheran Cathay [China].]

From this citation we observe again how Hu describes China’s hypothetical age of vernacular rebirth in terms of great individuals. Moreover, at times, he reveals an implicit desire to himself be one of those 文豪 wenhao (literary giants) poised at the threshold of a vernacular age. Lin Yusheng’s definition of the cultural-intellectual approach of certain modern thinkers describes well Hu’s relationship to the Renaissance: these intellectuals felt a “deep-seated traditional Chinese cultural predisposition” that
presupposed the superiority of right ideas and morals designed and diffused by the few.\textsuperscript{44}

It would be inaccurate, however, to describe Hu’s ambitions solely as a traditional inheritance. An elite, global web of critically positioned intellectuals and organizations was largely what proliferated the rise of nation-states and their intricate regional relations in modernity. A cultural agent, such as Hu, was intimately involved in the two kinds of mediations at the heart of the East Asian modern: the translation of global categories and techniques into historical or vernacular expressions and the recasting of existing cultural objects, practices, and traditions into the aura of the nationally authentic.\textsuperscript{45}

Focusing on the international facet of cultural globalization, Hu exerts his cultural-intellectual approach in a way that eschews traditionally conceived, ethnic Chinese origins. The universality of certain values and ideas is taken for granted as the essential properties of modern culture, irrespective of the historical forces and privileged cultures that condition them. In this circumstance, the appropriation of a renaissance becomes only a parenthetical rationale in the larger formation of a modern national culture. Defined by leading intellectuals, the renaissance notion maintains a secondary profile while aiding the work of subversion and revolution required of modernization.\textsuperscript{46}

Ultimately, what is important is not any real coherence between the Chinese, European, or Italian understandings of renaissance, but the way the idea of renaissance allows for the refashioning of China’s history and identity and the prospect of its glorious future.\textsuperscript{47}

An important scholarly study, published only a few years after Hu’s “Modest Suggestions,” served to solidify the conceptual relationships between Italian and European Renaissance history and Chinese modernity. In 1921, Jiang Fangzhen published with the Shangwu press one of the first in-depth studies dedicated to the
subject: 欧洲文艺复兴史 Ouzhou wenyifuxing shi (A History of the European Renaissance). As part of a team of traveling scholars, Jiang had visited Europe and studied its history. An indispensable part of his experience, providing the basis for his book, was his attendance at Smédée Britch’s lectures on the Renaissance in Paris. Jiang and his colleagues extracted from these lectures a conception of the Renaissance’s primary role as the origin (发祥地 faxiangdi) and engine of all modern values and developments, which they perceived their own nation as sorely lacking. Jiang wrote:

以近世之文化言，则各种事业，皆以文艺复兴为其发祥地. 49

[With regards to modern culture and society, all industry finds its beginnings in the Renaissance.]

研究文艺复兴; 即研究欧洲现代文化之由来是也. 50

[To research the Renaissance is to study the origins of contemporary European culture.]

Like Li Dazhao and Hu Shi, Jiang pursued a deeper historical understanding of events that happened in Europe centuries ago chiefly as a means to a nationalistic end: China’s modern cultural and political rebirth (再生 zaisheng), as is evident in the rhetorical question that he asked in the volume’s opening pages: “吾民族其已有此发现耶? 否耶?” (“Have my people experienced such a discovery?”). 51 Driven by this query, his project became a search to determine how to apply the revolutionary impacts of the European Renaissance to China’s present cultural metamorphosis (蝉蜕 chan tui). 52
Jiang distilled the essence of the Renaissance into two fundamental discoveries that directly informed modernity: the discovery of man and the discovery of the world (人之发现, 二曰世界之发现).\(^{53}\) Because neither had organically grown out of China’s historical earth, it became Jiang’s task to pursue them as a matter of active, discursive implantation. Touching upon what he was as the right conceptual commonalities between East and West would ensure that the western Renaissance was properly translated, received, and nativized in China. Thus, Jiang begins his call to learn from the Renaissance with a reference to the Confucian classic, *Mencius*:

不求而得，未之前闻; 求而不得，亦未之前闻. 欧洲之文艺复兴，则追求之念最热烈之时代也. 追求相继，如波斯荡光华烂漫，迄今日而未有止. 我国人诚欲求之，则彼之前躅在在可师已.\(^{54}\)

[I’ve never heard of someone getting what he didn’t ask for. Conversely, I’ve never seen a case where someone didn’t get what he asked for. The European Renaissance was the period of most earnest searching. Those searches multiplied one upon another like brilliant waves of accumulating light down until the present day. If China will earnestly seek as well, she too will find that it is eventually within her grasp.]

The seeking Jiang spoke of, of course, coincided precisely with his own scholarly efforts to make sense of the parallels between such a distant age and the present tumult of his society, confirming his privileged place as mediator for modernity. The concept of a
renaissance, like Li’s “youth,” was cast as both the origin and teleology of a modernizing China.

One of the chief scientific metaphors Jiang uses to capture and to universalize the European Renaissance is to compare it to 光 guang (light) traveling through 空气 kongqi (air); light is ubiquitous but its waves exhibit different properties when traveling through different substances. Linking the constituent ideas of the Renaissance to the rays of the sun instantly justifies its accessibility to the all worlds of thought and civilization. It is Jiang’s task, as a nationalist intellectual, to describe the attributes of the historical substances through which this light previously has passed, so as to predict and guide its immanent transit through Chinese space:

光之波动, 依其透过之空气之不同, 而异其色彩; 思想之发展, 亦依其环境之不同, 而异其趋向。明乎地理, 则识流之所以异; 即可以知其源之所以同也。55

[Waves of light traveling through different substances account for changes in light’s color and luminosity. The development of thought in different environments explains differences in tendencies. By an understanding of history and place, we can approach an understanding of these flows of differences. At the same time, we’ll also be able to discover the origins of their similarities.]

This metaphor highlights the boundless circulation of universal ideas with respect to a negligible conception of time that further facilitates the translation of its terms. Light, strictly speaking, does travel at a certain speed, but because nothing can match or rival it,
it becomes quite literally the standard for time itself. Perceiving it in this way, Jiang subtly shifts a diachronic concept of history as events occurring in temporal units of measurement to a more synchronic model that marks the circulation of thought through space as history’s true metronome. History is no longer what occurs in reference to time, but what occurs in reference to place. As an essential and universal measure of history in modernity, China was an heir to the Renaissance’s light, irrespective of the clock. After all, Jiang points out, that light had already passed through Florence, Venice, France, Germany, Holland, and Northern Europe. The Italian Renaissance’s fitness for European translatability justified and assured its passage through China too as a transformative force for modernization.

Jiang’s special interest in the Italian Renaissance represents both a simple question of understanding an origin (源 yuan), in order to better grasp its subsequent iterations, as well as fashioning cultural correspondences. He reports how time and time again Britch’s lectures mention the need to look away from Italy to observe other important attributes and products of the Renaissance in Europe. Directing the line of sight away from its origin naturally encouraged Jiang’s hope for China to be accounted as the next culture reborn.

At the same time, however, Jiang (reporting Britch) always appears to return to the artistic origin in Italy, from which all renaissances flourished. In spite of the superior governments, armies, inventions, and philosophies in the North (especially France), those areas were constrained to turn to the South (Italy) for their full enlightenment. Speaking of France’s political prowess, Jiang recounts how only after its cultural affiliation with Italy did it succeed in breaking loose from the chains of the stagnating middle ages:
It was, thus, after the fifteenth century that France turned completely to the assimilation of southern culture. This resulted in two things: (1) the development of an aesthetic sensibility, and (2) the popularization of classical literature. In this way, the French were finally able to sever ties with the medieval world.

Furthermore, France’s local inheritance and application of the Italian Renaissance renders more persuasive the logic of the Renaissance’s luminous translatability across all cultural territories; that the Italian Renaissance proved so useable throughout Europe encouraged Chinese intellectuals’ pursuit of it for their own cultural rebirth. For Jiang and his contemporaries, the philosophical and spiritual principles and the artistic innovations of the Italian Renaissance, expressing self-knowledge, freedom, and individualism—all elements central to the progressive modern condition—proved of most immediate value.

Distilling the Italian Renaissance into a universally cyclical force of civilization provided Chinese intellectuals with four advantages: (1) the ability to escape their destitute material and political conditions, (2) a hope in the power of rationales to transform historical reality, (3) the elevation of the socially privileged as the fashioners of such rationales, and (4) the ability to make China and themselves visible participants on a global stage. At the same time, though, the impulse to naturalize the Renaissance in terms of universalist discourses and pre-existing Chinese cultural frameworks demonstrated a will to claim agency in a world system of knowledge- and politically-
based imbalances. Making such concepts as youth and renaissance organically Chinese through abstraction was a clear exercise in control over the characteristics that had historically menaced their discourses: weakness, corruption and decline, which preyed upon national identity, stability and strength.

From the resilience and mobility of the Italian Renaissance, Gang, among others, has drawn the conclusion that the term should be understood as a translatable, transcultural phenomenon instead of a historical ontology. The resignification of the term in early twentieth-century China “shows the fluidity and mobility of the idea and reveals the power structure that directs the traffic, but, more important, it celebrates the transcultural imagination exercised by the people who participated in a complicated network of literary and cultural exchange.”

What Gang alludes to here, but does not develop, were the advantages and the discursive mechanisms that allowed for the Renaissance’s translatability and the privileged “local positions” that the mediators and possessors of such exchanges enjoyed. The broker of words always occupies a position of considerable power. As Frantz Fanon remarks, in his description of the French-speaking black inhabitants of the Antilles:

Un homme qui possède le langage possède par contrecoup le monde exprimé et impliqué par ce langage. On voit où nous voulons en venir : il y a dans la possession du langage une extraordinaire puissance.  

[A man who possesses language directly possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. One sees where we are headed with this: the mastery of language affords remarkable power.]
While Chatterjee’s colonized Bengali intellectuals “in the middle” of intercultural exchanges found western discourses oppressive,\textsuperscript{61} for the Chinese they most often had the opposite effect. Reasons, rights and universals were ways to resist stagnant or failed local leadership and social paradigms, and, in turn, fashion new positions of influence and authority. Thus, Hu reads in Sichel that the Italian Renaissance was a time of the “revival of man’s powers, a reawakening of the consciousness of himself and of the universe—a movement which spread over Western Europe.”\textsuperscript{62} Such an awakening always has its great leaders. The entrance of Li, Hu, Jiang, and others into this company was spurred on by the already codified description of the movement’s global translatability. In that great chain of civilizations that had been touched by the Renaissance, Hu and others aspired to add/to be one more grand link. Sichel’s description of the Renaissance as a force of both nature and the intellect encapsulates beliefs about the processes of naturalization that Chinese intellectuals would apply to Italian history and literature:

[it] seems more like a phenomenon of nature than a current of history—rather an atmosphere surrounding men than a distinct course before them.

The new birth was the result of a universal impulse, and that impulse was preceded by something like a revelation, a revelation of intellect and of the possibilities of man.\textsuperscript{63}

Returning briefly to Huang’s letter to Hu of 1915, the democratization of knowledge paradoxically implies the performance of intellectual work by elites who frequent the global market of ideas with the ultimate goals to consolidate their national
culture and to elevate its prestige internationally. This is a process that fuses “nationalism and internationalism” not as a discursive crux of modernity, but as its most compelling solution. Consequently, the practice of choosing Italy as a model and appropriating its renaissance in China reveals itself as an intellectual going-out into the world of global ideas informed by the centripetal pull of national introspection. “Hand in hand with searching for universally valid principles of human activity was the endeavor to assert principles of [Chinese] particularity.” As Kang Youwei’s culinary metaphor in the preface to his Italian travelogue suggests, what was sought for in Italy was not Italy per se, but an elixir (药 yue) for Chinese rebirth (回生 huisheng); the domestication of Dantinean “pane degli angeli” into delectable strips (一脔 yi luan) that the privileged Chinese intellectual could serve up to his public and represent back to the world:

吾为厨人而同胞坐食之。

[I am the cook for my dining countrymen.]

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1 Li Dazhao, “Youth” Qing chun 青春, New Youth Xin Qingnian 新青年 2.1 (1916): 8.


4 Bertuccioli and Masini, VI.


7 Ibid., 48.

8 Ibid., 167.

9 Ibid., 96.
A reason for these literary resemblances might be that Fan’s records were edited and censored by his religious society. See Giuliano Bertuccioli, “Fan Shouyi e il suo viaggio in Occidente,” La missione cattolica in cina tra i secoli XVIII-XIX: Matteo Ripa e il collegio dei cinesi, ed. Michele Fatica e Francesco d’Arelli (Naplesi: Instituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, 1999), 341-420.

Cited from Bertuccioli’s reproduction of BNC, Ms. Or. 264/2 in “Fan Shouyi,” 377.

Ibid., 393.


Ibid., 190-94.


Not all views of the peninsula at the close of the nineteenth century were favorable, however. China’s first ambassadors to Europe, Guo Songchou 郭嵩燾 (1818-1891) and Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838-1899), were among those who recorded jaundiced opinions of the country.

Jia Hongliu, Complete Geography Ying huan quan zhi 瀛寰全志 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1906), 288-289.


Ibid., 126.


See Irene Eber’s work for a thorough assessment of the contexts in which these different terms were employed and the accompanying advantages they brought to their translators: “Thoughts on Renaissance in Modern China: Problems of Definition,” Studia Asiatica: Essays in Asian Studies in Felicitation of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of Professor Chen Shou-yi, ed. Laurence G. Thompson (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1975), 189-218.


26 Li Dazhao, 4.

27 Ibid., 9.

28 Ibid., 3.

29 Ibid., 4.

30 Ibid., 11.

31 Ibid., 12.

32 Ibid., 8.

33 Eber, 191.

34 Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), 34.


36 Eber, 193.


40 Gang, 784.

41 Hu Shi, Hu Shi’s Diary While Studying Abroad Hu Shi liuxue riji 胡适留学日记, vol. 4 (Taipei: Commercial, 1959), 1155.

42 Burckhardt, 147.


44 Lin, 28.

45 Paraphrasing Duara, Sovereignty and Authenticity, 32.

46 Gang, 789.
In short, the Italian Renaissance is dehistoricized to the point of its commodification, a process that transfers real value to the appraisals of its users. As part of the Haskell Lecture series in Chicago in 1933, Hu makes explicit the kind of value that the Chinese renaissance held for modern China:

In all these directions the new movement which began in 1917 and which was sometimes called the “New Culture Movement,” the “New Thought” movement or “The New Tide” (i.e. renaissance) was capturing the imagination and sympathy of the youth of the nation as something which promised and pointed to the new birth of an old people and an old civilization. […] They want a new language, a new literature, a new outlook on life and society, and a new scholarship. (Hu Shi, *The Chinese Renaissance: The Haskell Lectures, 1933* [New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1963], 44, 46.)

Over twenty years later, Hu would reinforce and extend the significance of the notion. In his 1956 lectures at Berkeley, China’s modern renaissance was elevated above all other global iterations of rebirth, including Italy’s, for having been built upon a well-laid foundation of centuries of critical thought and classical scholarship. (Hu Shi, “39th May Fourth Celebration in 1958,” *The Chinese Renaissance Movement Zhongguo wenyi fuxing yundong* 中国文艺复兴运动 [Taipei: Wentan, 1961].)


48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 3.

50 Ibid., ii.

51 Ibid., 1.

52 Ibid., 1.

53 Ibid., 1.

54 Ibid., ii.

55 Ibid., 3.

56 Ibid., 2.

57 Ibid., 11.

58 Gang, 793-94.

59 Chen, 167.


61 Chatterjee, 55.


63 Ibid., 7.

64 Ibid., 198.

65 Ibid.
Dante Alighieri’s own metaphor for the knowledge he imparted to his countrymen in the *Convivio*.

Kang, 12.

Ibid.
CHAPTER 2

A Dantean Holiday in Shanghai:

The New Rome and Chinese Pietas

The reformers emphasize intellectuals' responsibility to awaken the citizens, but do they not realize that it is only feelings that can be aroused?

Liang Qichao, “A Discussion of China’s Collective Character”

In a recent communication, the contemporary poet Liang Yuan explained to me how he perceived the figure of Dante and the details of the Divine Comedy as fitting into his overall poetics. After briefly recounting how he first came into contact with Dante’s work during the Maoist era, Liang went on to describe one of his encounters with a dominant artistic-spiritual discourse in the West, that of personal salvation (拯救 zhengjiu):

迷失于黑森林从而寻找拯救,已经成为西方文学中的象征. 在神曲中, 黑森林象征着罪恶, “我”由此展开联想: 当面临罪恶的绝境, “我”寻求但丁在神曲中获救那样的经历. 此诗通过引进但丁并与但丁的境遇作对比, 来反衬出“我”的孤独无助. ¹
[As a result of losing oneself in a dark wood, salvation is sought. This has become one of western literature’s grand motifs. In the *Divine Comedy*, the dark wood signifies evil. From this interpretation, the “I” of [my] poem makes the following association: faced with the absolute threat of evil, the “I” attempts to obtain a salvation similar to the one Dante experiences in the *Divine Comedy*. However, by invoking Dante and his circumstances, [my] poem ends up forging a contrast in the figure of an “I” with no hope of redemption.]

Sharing his personal interpretation of the dark wood that bore most heavily on his management of Dantean imagery in his poem, “林中” *Lin zhong* (“In the Woods”) (2009), Liang does not see the wood or the supposed evil it represents as being extrinsic to the pilgrim, for the wood is part of the pilgrim and he cannot be removed from it. There is no salvation (i.e. escape) from reality. Therefore, whereas the *Divine Comedy* offers salvation from the self, “In the Woods” serves to re-embed the “I” within itself—a delivery from the idea of personal salvation, as it were. Liang’s Dante must remain in the wood and seek redefinition through it.

To imagine the Qing political reformer Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) as diligently studying in his Yinbing studio (*饮冰室 Yinbing shì*) in the Italian quarter of Tianjin conjures up a scenario remarkably similar to the cross-cultural context described in Liang Yuan’s recent poem. Renowned the world over for his foundational contributions to modern political, journalistic, and literary theory and practice, Liang Qichao’s erudition and involvement in Chinese politics and publications continue to cast an aura that too easily eclipses the myriad constitutive components of his education and
thought. The formative value of his interpretations of Italian history and culture, a combination of his own readings in late Qing ethnographies and the influence of his mentor, Kang Youwei, has yet to be fully explained. He was, quite literally, the precursor to the narrator of Liang Yuan’s poetic wood, seeking to reconcile seemingly radically different cultural geographies. The physical sign of Liang Qichao’s intellectual East-West negotiations, the Yinbing studio, still stands today next to his original residence on National Road 46 (民族路 minzu lu) in Tianjin, China (Fig. 2). Liang himself organized the construction of the studio as a monument to Italian Renaissance architecture, hiring the Italian architect Polonio to plan and execute its construction. Accompanied by his thoughts on Italian culture, seated within the walls of his Italian style home and studio nestled within the Italian quarter of Tianjin, Liang manufactured a new set of global commonplaces designed to affect collective—as opposed to individual—salvation. His interpretations of Dante Alighieri and other Italian heroes proved central to this plan for redemption.
One of Liang’s most fascinating but notoriously neglected works, which showcases the prominence of Italy in his thought, is the incomplete melodrama Xin Luoma (New Rome) (1902). While in political exile in Japan (1898-1912) for angering Cixi, the de facto Chinese empress, with his involvement in the Hundred Days Reform, Liang immersed himself in the nascent publishing industry. His fame as the father of modern Chinese scholarship and journalism stems from his intimate involvement in the publication of no less than four major newspapers, which set the standard for all of China’s subsequent modern periodicals: the Qing yi bao (Disinterested Talk Herald); Zhong wai gong bao (Chinese and International News); Shiwu bao (Current Affairs); and the Xinmin cong bao (New Citizen). In addition to his invaluable social and political contributions to these publications, Liang also frequently submitted some of his own artistic work. The New
Rome appeared serially in six issues of the New Citizen in 1902 (issues 10, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 20). The play was initially intended to stretch for a staggering 40 acts, an ambitious design that took aim at rivaling the stature of the early Ming kunqu masterpiece *Taohua shan* (*Peach Blossom Fan*) (1699). Liang completed only the prologue and the first six acts, though, two subsequent acts on the Risorgimento heroes Giuseppe Garibaldi and Camillo Benso, Conte di Cavour, were also outlined and preserved. As Bertuccioli has remarked, the New Rome was the first large-scale attempt by a prominent Chinese intellectual to convey the history of a foreign country in a literary work in classical Chinese. While such originality undoubtedly substantiates the drama’s uniqueness, larger questions surrounding the aim and function of a Chinese drama focused entirely on Italian history and circulating in the late Qing remain to be explored. To what purposes did Liang utilize these icons of Italian history?

This chapter will demonstrate how the New Rome appropriately defined and summoned a Chinese patriotism that Liang believed his countrymen lacked but required to redeem their nation in modernity. To participate in this Sino-Italian historical drama was a key educational exercise designed to fashion new Chinese identities that would devote themselves to the nation and a greater world order. Forging affinities with Italian history in the New Rome proved essential during this stage in Liang’s career and in China’s cultural metamorphosis, when the world was no longer seen in terms of (pan-)Confucianism but as a “global imaginary of identity.” The New Rome thus played a central role in helping to articulate Liang and other political activists’ highest cultural value: the pursuit of the national. That pursuit, above all else, entailed a “pedagogy of the people,” instruction in how to become new citizens.
Theorizing Chinese Pietas

Liang’s extensive work on defining a new concept of citizenship aimed at the heart of the classical notion of pietas, cutting through workable notions of respect (敬重 jingzhong), which the term came to signify in Chinese, to reach its sentimental core: the network of feelings and dispositions towards the family, the nation, and others. In a study published a year before the New Rome, “论中国国民之品格” Lun zhongguo guomin zhi pinge (“A Discussion of China’s Collective Character”) (1901), Liang pointed out what he believed to be the primary defect of the Chinese: a lack of patriotism (爱国之心之薄弱 aiguo xin zhi boruo). He attributed this lack of genuine feeling of responsibility to the country to China’s centuries of tyrannical leadership; the nation was thought of as the monarch’s personal property (私产 sichan) and the people had no hand in its health or survival. All responsibilities felt by the people toward their country were directed to the monarch, not to themselves or an imagined sense of national belonging. This situation bred a tribal mentality in which people sought only to preserve their and their families’ properties and positions. As a result, the Chinese, to borrow the terms of Benedict Anderson, lacked the mental and emotional bonds of affinity to imagine a community of extra-familial relations, as would be essential to the conception and defense of a Chinese nation in modernity. It was toward the reversal of this basic inability to conceive sympathetic bonds with others that Liang focused his energies.

Inspired by the recent translations of western discoveries in the modern sciences of sociology, race, and evolution (e.g. social Darwinism), Liang turned his attention to the issue of group solidarity (群主意 qun zhuyi). Much of the language he employs
throughout this section of “China’s Collective Character” reinforces ideas of spatial and spiritual togetherness. Liang floods the first paragraph on modern patriotism with the following terms: 互相 huxiang (mutual) (4x), 联 (合) lian (he) (unite) (2), 公共心 gonggong xin (social conscience) (1), 群 (心/治) qun (xin/zhi) (group [heart/rule]) (7), 团体 tuanti (group/collective) (3), 分 fen (share) (1), 公益 gongyi (public good) (4), 牺牲 xisheng (sacrifice) (1), 公德 (之心) gongde (zhi xin) (public morality [heart]) (4), and 同 (类/种) tong (lei/zhong) (same [kind]) (2).13 The rhetorical barrage was engineered to reeducate the social sensibilities of the Chinese who had for too long sacrificed their country to the interests of the clan and individual. These terms would congeal a year later into a new concept of the group (群 qun) as an indivisible nation-state in his “新民說” Xinmin shuo (Treatise on the New People) (1902).14 If only the millions of Chinese would allow their zealous pursuit of personal interests to mutually combine, Liang believed that China would rise again from the third rank of powerless nation-states to that privileged first rank of world cultural powers.15 Liang directly correlated the degree of a nation’s patriotism to its enjoyment of freedom, independence, and international success.16 How to train the Chinese to band together and to suffer with each other (哀哀同胞 aiai tongbao),17 though, posed a formidable psycho-sociological obstacle to the formation of a Chinese national sentiment.

A year later, in “申论种族革命与政治革命之得失” Shenlun zhongzu geming yu zhengzhi geming zhi deshi (“An Explanation of the Gains and Losses of Racial and Political Revolutions”) (1902), Liang again lamented the general apathy of his countrymen as inhibiting China’s advancement as a modern nation. In his mind, pain, a
psychological and emotional injury born of socio-political sympathy, was absolutely necessary for national redemption. In order for China to return to a healthy national and internationally vigorous condition, it must first fully recognize and deeply feel its collective degeneration. Unfortunately, Liang grieved, the public was callous and reactionary, blaming China’s plight on the ruling Manchus:

舆论之所以可贵. 贵其能监督政府而已. 今也不然. 舆论曰. 吾惟绝对的不认此政府. 若此政府尚在. 吾不屑监督之. 然吾所谓绝对的不认者在彼曾不感丝毫之痛痒. 而以吾不屑监督之故. 彼反得放焉自恣. 惟所慾为. 問所得效果维何. 曰不过為政府宽其责任而已. 18

[The value of public opinion is in its ability to supervise its government. Sadly, this is not the case today. Public opinion resembles more the following: “Since we reject our government, as long as it stands, we refuse to watch over it.” This so-called refusal to recognize the government by disdaining to supervise it is in essence a decision to feel none of its pain. This kind of resistant selfishness desires only one result: the removal of the powers of government.]

Displacing political responsibilities, in Liang’s opinion, was not an expression of patriotic sympathy and solidarity, but a stubborn act of vengeance aimed at the dynasty that would only ensure the nation’s destruction. Rejecting and removing an ineffective government was not the way to strengthen China, and all attempts at reformation must necessarily have as their end the redemption of China (政治革命既为救国之惟一手段). 19 This meant that a psychology of suffering and not of escapism must be cultivated.
Liang holds himself up as the paradigm of this new psychology: “吾宁含垢忍痛而必不愿为亡祖国之罪人” (“Thus, I prefer to suffer disgrace and pain than to destroy the guilty of the fatherland”).

Liang’s promotion of suffering and pain over a psychology of apathy, anger, or retaliation was in large part a calculated response to competing stratagems for national construction, all actively engaged in redefining the terms of an age-old debate: who is Chinese and who is barbarian (夷夏之别 yixia zhibie)? Kai-wing Chow’s research on the revolutionary Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1868-1936), another prominent pupil of Kang Youwei, details the contradictory positions at which Liang and Zhang had arrived soon after the failure of the Hundred Days Reform and the reprisals of the Boxer Rebellion. While Liang had adhered to his platform for internal reform, Zhang and a growing disgruntled population clamored for civil revolution. To the revolutionaries, the foreign Manchu government and people, who had governed and discriminated against the Han for centuries, needed to be removed in order for a new Chinese nation to emerge: “the revolutionaries demanded a new collective identity narrow enough to exclude the Manchus from the we-group.” What ensued was a battle of competing sentiments between the reformists and revolutionaries, with the aim of forging a new nationalist spirit. While both camps intensely employed racialist discourses to assist in fomenting national solidarity, as a reformist Liang was tasked with the more complicated and subtle work of healing internal strife, instead of seeking to violently eliminate it. His political and creative activities in 1901-1903, including the publication of the New Rome, were designed to help establish a Chinese nation/race (中华民族 zhonghua minzu) via the
invention of fraternal condolence, a sensitive patriotic suffering with internal others that would persist even through Liang’s later pro-republican years.\textsuperscript{24}

This kind of sympathy, as both the English and Chinese etymologies of the term suggest, required separate bodies to be mutually compassionate: 同情 tongqing (to feel together), to suffer together: “多血多泪先国家之忧乐而后其身之人. 斯也国家之元气” ("The vitality of the nation rests with those who shed tears with their brethren of other races, putting the sorrows and successes of the nation before and themselves after").\textsuperscript{25}

Only a systematic education (秩序之教育 zhixu zhi jiaoyu) of the mind and heart, however, would bring such needed social transformation about.\textsuperscript{26}

Italy was first featured as a component of this new emotional, social curriculum in 1901, in “A Discussion of China’s Collective Character.” Liang seems to have found in the recently reunified peninsula models for “an energetic and nationalistic Chinese nation” and national “independence and self-respect,” modernist values he drew from the Meiji thinkers Katō, Fukuzawa, and Nakamura.\textsuperscript{27} Liang writes:

意大利之中衰也. 西陷于法. 东轭于奥. 中央隶于西班牙. 山河破碎. 数百年呻吟憔悴于教政帝政之下. 意人不肯损弃其主权以服从他人. 乃树其清白赤三色之国旗. 夺起革命. 以谋国家之统一. 一败于那巴伦. 再败于桑安启罗. 三败于肥拉夫兰卡. 而卒能合并南北之意大利. 排斥异族. 建一新罗马之名邦. 一往无前. 而意大利卒以独立.\textsuperscript{28} 

[The glory of Italy had fallen. Its eastern provinces were in the hands of the French. The west was occupied by Austria and the central regions
were made subject to the Spanish. The land was reduced to shambles. Finally, after centuries of languishment in the shadow of religious and political hegemony, Italy could no longer tolerate to forfeit its autonomy and slavishly follow another. The Italians hoisted their green-white-red banner, raised a revolution and strategized their reunification. They failed first at Naples. Then again at Sant’Angelo. Their third loss came at Fasanella. But in the end, they succeeded in uniting north and south and driving out the foreigners. Thus, they established a “New Rome.”

Their indomitable will won Italy its independence.

Italy’s modern condition presented a convenient model for China. Like Italy, China was once an illustrious civilization that was currently suffering setbacks. Like Italy, it was presently the target of a number of imperialistic campaigns, its territories occupied and its government and markets threatened by a number of warring foreign parties. What Liang wished his readers to learn, however, was how the Italians finally joined together to repel their invaders, unite their country, and resurrect their civilization. The title “New Rome” that he attributed to a unified Italy expressed his understanding that the Risorgimento was a species of interior renaissance, the rebirth of a former glory, a perception of Italian history that was mediated through Liang’s own hope for China’s recuperation of its former cultural, political and military prominence. Just as each of their classical titles—小秦 Xiaoqin (China) and 大秦 Daqin (Rome)—had been mutually derived from a sense of their ancient historical grandeur, Liang rendered the idea of a 新大秦 Xin daqin (New Rome) and a 新秦 Xin qin (New China) as equivalents within an aspiration for modern renaissances. In an artistic attempt to amplify this correlation and to diffuse its influence,
Liang composed the 传奇 chuanqi libretto known as the New Rome. On the opera’s virtual stage, Dante and the heroes of the Risorgimento were ushered in to instruct melodiously their Chinese audience on how to feel properly its nation’s pain as a gateway to its reconstruction.

The New Rome and the Performance of New Citizenship

What remains of the New Rome today is a testament to the formative nature of Liang’s appropriations of Italian history and culture in the promotion of modernization in China. Liang attempted to distill and to transform Italian history into a hope for China’s national redemption within the parameters of a national operatic form, 昆曲 kunqu (1530-), and the classical Chinese language. Liang intended to use the work to evoke a proper form of Chinese pietas (真爱国 zhen aiguo) that would help to reform late Qing China from the inside, within its own selva oscura (黑森林 hei senlin). The staging of Italian matter in the New Rome was a summons to restore what had always been China’s grandeur. The nominal correspondence between China and Rome, implied in the drama’s title, was intended to convey what the play dramatically developed: the mirroring of a foreign historical representation and a local reality. The imagination of Italian historical geographies made to resemble native ones figures as a prominent motif throughout the work and is also its greatest conceptual theme.

The generic casing in which Liang housed his paradigm for nationalist sentiment played a significant role in his modernizing activities. In addition to his involvement in politics and journalism, Liang was also a theoretical specialist and practitioner of kunqu drama, a kind of opera completa, a deftly controlled pageant of song, writing, dance,
costume, acrobatics, and acting. Besides the impressive visual spectacle it offered, *kunqu* was also widely regarded as producing some of China’s best literary works in the form of carefully crafted libretti. By Liang’s time, the genre had largely fallen out of favor with the court and had to survive on its own, migrating to the south and gravitating to cosmopolitan Shanghai, where it mixed with other local performing styles. *Kunqu’s* enjoyment by the influential urban middle-class of China’s most modern metropolis explains largely why Liang took such an interest in the genre.

The fate of *kunqu* in the late Qing exemplified processes of modernization which China faced on every front. Rejected by the imperial court as a subversive menace to feudal society, as *kunqu* was constrained to migrate and reckon with the volatile and transformative forces of a globalizing market, its hybridization with Beijing and other local styles was a necessary metamorphosis. Playing up both its recent reputation for political declamation and facility for generic elasticity, in several works Liang pushed *kunqu* in the direction of international hybridization, demonstrating his desire to modernize both an endangered classical genre and the society that still enjoyed it. In the words of narrator Gong Duzhuan 公杜撰 from Liang’s own 劫灰梦 *Jie hue meng (The Theft of Ashen Dreams)* (1902), Liang expresses a modest hope for a new kind of theater that would take its cue from the French Enlightenment:

你看从前法国路易十四的时候，那人心风俗不是和中国今日一样吗？
幸亏有一个人叫做福禄特尔 (引着按: 今译伏尔泰), 做了许多小说戏本，
竟把一国的人从睡梦中唤起来了. 想俺一介书生, 无权无勇, 又无学问
可以著书传世, 不如把俺眼中所看着那儿桩事情, 俺心中所想着那儿片
道理, 编成一部小小传奇, 等那大人先生, 儿童走卒, 茶前酒后, 做一消
Can we not see that in the former times of King Louis XIV the spirit and customs of the French people were similar to our own? Fortunately, along came a man called Voltaire whose numerous novels and plays eventually awakened the nation from its deep slumber. Well, a lowly scholar, such as myself, having no station, courage, or learning, would do better to write a little play here and there than to try his hand at producing a classic. Youth comes before age and tea before wine. Thus, to exert myself in this trifle impelled by a sense of national duty is preferable to reading over those more famous works, *The Record of the Western Chamber* and *The Peony Pavilion*.]

The critical comparison is subtly woven, but Liang leaves little doubt that his so-called dramatic indulgences are poised to replace, however humbly, the *kunqu* classics. Those earlier, canonical works are mature and revered, but because they lack the ability to arouse the people from the slumber of the past, it falls upon the lowly scholar to jolt the nation awake with some of his own “inferior” libretti. Driven by this mission, Liang released to the public serially all three of his representative *chuanqi* dramas in the year of his Japanese exile (1902): *The Theft of Ashen Dreams*, *New Rome*, and *侠情记 Jia qing ji* (*The Record of Chivalrous Love*). Though none ever saw completion, their influence breathed immediate life into the withering *kunqu* genre and played an active role in the modernization of Chinese letters. *Kunqu* historian Zou Pengjun writes:
It was only through the indomitable efforts of a group of literary scholars headed by Liang Qichao that opera experienced a revival. The renewal of *chuanqi* and mixed theatre cast its glorious light for a time. Within the reformation of modern theatre, Liang Qichao’s creative implementation and theoretical direction provided key standards and points for emulation.  

The most salient characteristic of Liang’s operatic works was their commitment to social and political reform. The *New Rome* was wholly innovative, in that Liang selected icons and crafted lessons from Italian history into translatable commonplaces from which an educated, contemporary Chinese audience could reestablish a sense of their own national identity, learning the type of *pietas* that new national subjects should feel and the nature of the political restoration that they should seek. Though there are many characters, the figures of Dante Alighieri, the Carbonara, Mazzini, and Garibaldi especially demonstrate the kind of individual pain and collective cure that modern Chinese patriots should pursue. Liang also provides a few glaring *exempla in malo*; Metternich, Alexander, and Fredric stand at the negative extreme of what an enlightened modern monarchy should be to serve its subjects and to fortify itself in modernity. (The unfinished acts on Vittorio Emanuele II would have certainly provided stirring evidence *in bono*. Liang’s laudatory appraisal of the monarch in chapter six of *A History of Italy’s Three Founding Heroes* give us an idea of what tone those acts might have struck: “留光芒萬丈於歷史上之英。瑪努埃皇帝是也” [“That hero shedding the light of his eternal splendor on history was King Immanuel.”] All of these figures would have seemed fairly new to Liang’s
First and foremost, Dante Alighieri’s appearance in the prologue as narrator contextualizes the plot of the *kunqu* and educates the intellectual and emotional sensitivities of the opera’s intended audience. The *New Rome*’s modifications not only of Dante’s appearance and gesticulations but his very vision and place in world history reveal the type of modern consciousness and reformation that Liang advocated. Almost twenty years before Dante’s works were first made available in Chinese by Qiang Daosun (1921), Liang had already chosen Dante to be a spokesman for the modern age.³³

In the *New Rome*, Dante is the first to glide onto the stage wearing the solemn vestments of a Daoist immortal (Fig. 3). His first words to the audience are pronounced

![Fig.3 Chen Yuexi’s “The Daoist Immortal Magu with a Crane”](image)
clearly and crisply as becomes his role as the 老生 laosheng (old, wise man) of the play. The opening lines are not delivered normally as prose, however; Dante sings them in the play’s first aria, which is set to the traditional tune of the Butterfly Enamored with Flowers.

遼鶴千年再來處

成郭人民

花錦明如許

一笑掀髯聊爾爾

三生遺恨今償矣

細數興亡還獨語

多少頭顱

換此莊嚴土

布地黃金教歌舞

謝他前度風和雨

[After a thousand years I now return on my magical crane.

The city and its people appear as splendid as a brocade!

For this reason, I smile and stroke my beard.

The trials of yesteryear have come to fruition.

I will tell you just how they changed:

Oh, how many heads have rolled

for a kingdom so worthy and noble!
Now, this gilded land overflows with dance and song
in celebration of the tempestuous events of our recent past!]

Liang preserves the religious aspect of Dante’s character by having him play the role of a Daoist sage. However, unlike the Dante of the Commedia, this privileged spirit is not en route to any heavenly empyrean. He has, in fact, returned from his magical voyages across the seas and through the ether. Furthermore, he descends from the clouds with a different type of tale to tell, for divine insight and doctrine do not encumber the worldly message he seeks to convey to his listeners. Dante focuses exclusively on the history of man and rejoices at the political and social successes that his old Rome has experienced in recent decades (1860s-). He explains his passionate interest in terrestrial matters by a notably selective recasting of his original biography:

俺乃意大利一箇詩家但丁的靈魂是也．託生名國．少抱天才．夙懷經世之心．粗解自由之義．叵耐我國自羅馬解鈕以後．只雄割據．豆剖瓜分．

[I am the spirit of Dante, an Italian poet. I was born in an illustrious land and from a tender age excelled in intelligence and in my interest for all matters political. Upon gaining a general idea of the values of liberty, I could no longer tolerate that our former Roman Empire should be sliced up like a melon, shredded like a bean, divided and occupied by so many tyrants.]
After suffering with the political injuries of his nation, Dante takes up the quill as his chosen retaliatory weapon. His turn to literary production animates Liang’s own revolutionary ambitions in late Qing China.

In an intentional melding of Italian Renaissance and Enlightenment history, Dante’s self-introduction also tacitly details the purpose for which Liang wrote his drama: to redeem a State through the literary formation of patriotic fervor. In a somber moment of recitative, Dante chants:

念及立國根本，在振國民精神，因此著了幾部小說傳奇。佐以許多詩詞歌曲。庶幾布傳誦，婦孺知聞，將來民氣漸伸，或者國恥可雷。\(^{38}\)

[I was convinced that in order to lay the foundations for national independence it was necessary to awaken the spirit of the people. Thus, I wrote some stories and tales, to which I also added poems and songs, in the hope that they would be sung in the streets and markets and understood by women and children and eventually contribute to the strengthening of a national spirit that might wash away the shame of our fatherland.]

Dante’s words echo the essence of a groundbreaking critical essay that Liang published the same year, “论小说与群治之关系” *Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi* (“A Discussion of the Relationship Between the Novel and Group Rule”) (1902):

欲新一国之民，不可不先新一国之小说，故欲新道德，必新小说；欲新宗教，必新小说；欲新政府，必新小说；欲新风俗，必新小说；欲新学艺，必新小说；及至欲新人心，欲新人格，必新小说。\(^{39}\)
[If we wish to have a new national people, we must first have a new national novel. Therefore, if we wish to establish a new morality, we must have a new novel; if we wish to have new religion, we must have a new novel; if we wish to have new customs, we must have a new novel; if we wish to have new arts, we must have a new novel; this extends down to the personal level: if we wish people to have a new mind and a new selfhood, we must have a new novel.]

Two decades before such subjectivities would become the slogans of a subsequent generation, Liang had Dante convey a new nationalist fervor founded upon the development of the arts. Lu Xun’s famous words (1922) echo forcefully Liang’s earlier realization that literature must be a primary tool in the awakening of modern Chinese unity and nationalism:

我 们 的 第 一 要 著 , 是 在 改 变 他 们 的 精 神 , 而 善 于 改 变 精 神 的 是 , 我 那 时 以 为 当 然 要 推 文 艺 , 于 是 想 提 倡 文 艺 运 动 了。40

[Our first task is to change their spirit. At the time, I felt clearly that the best way to do that was through the promotion of the arts. So, I threw myself behind artistic movements.]

That Liang figures clearly as the source and target of his own literary call to arms is openly revealed in a subsequent observation by his Dante:

你 们 有 所 不 知 . 我 听 说 支 那 有 一 位 青 年 . 喝 做 甚 么 饮 冰 室 主 人 . 写 了 一 部 新 罗 马 奇 迹 . 现 在 上 海 爱 国 剧 院 演。41
[I’ve heard that in China there lives a young man called the Master of the Yinbing studio—or something like that—who has written a drama entitled the *New Rome*, playing presently at the Patriot theatre in Shanghai.]

In this way, Liang explicitly places himself in an illustrious historical line of intellectual nationalists and reformers.\(^42\) Furthermore, imagining (from Tokyo) that his drama will be played out in the theatrical hub of Shanghai, site of many other politically inflected performances of the era,\(^43\) at a venue called the 爱国 (Patriotism), reinforces the gravity with which Liang undertook the project and the serious impact he wanted it to make in China. Dante further praises and sanctions the efforts of the young dramatist by comparing Liang’s every word to a pearl (珠 *zhu*), and the drama as a whole to a spiritual balm. When asked by another character why he thinks it is that the master of the Yinbing studio has written the play, Dante paints an emotional and intellectual profile meant not only to bond the two in a global fraternity, but also to inculcate in his *kunqu* audience the kind of national sentiment they should seek:

我想這位青年. 颱流異域. 臨睨舊鄉. 憂國如焚. 同天無術. 借調蟲之小技. 寓遒鐸言. 不過與老夫當日同病相鄰罷了.\(^44\)

[I think that this youth, outcast in a foreign land, has turned his gaze to his homeland and has felt burning within him the pain of its condition. Having, however, no other means by which to succor his nation, he has taken up his limited literary capacities to appeal to his countrymen in a
forceful yet refined metaphorical language. He suffers the same fate and
nurtures the same sentiments that I once felt in life.]
The redemptive history borne upon the backs of intellectual and political figures that
Liang maps out for Italy provides an analogue for China, in which he sees himself
participating in significant ways and invites his privileged countrymen to join. His place
in this narrative of redemption is primarily that of the enlightened Confucian teacher,
whose wisdom is passed on and later implemented by an audience that eventually realizes
the targeted social change. Peter Zarrow explains Liang’s educator instinct:

Liang’s consistent interest in education and character molding reflected
his fears that the Chinese people or folk might not be capable of the
historical task they faced. Elite-led and orderly reforms were to create the
new Chinese nation-state, but the foundations of a modern state ultimately
rested on a self-renovated citizenry. 45

Liang wrote to provide models and instruction for the people to renovate themselves as a
cooperative citizenry. Thus, the appeal to the sacrifices and travails of Italian heroes
informs his invocation of a new nationalist pathos which promises to deliver the nation
through suffering into modernity.

From his recollection of pain and tears, Dante passes through a fit of joyous
laughter to proclaim the glorious regeneration of Italy as a modern nation. Because of the
efforts of great intellectuals and governors, Italy is now reborn as a modern civilization, a
proximate model for China:

哈哈. 今日我的意大利依然成了一箇歐洲第一等. 完全自主的雄國了.
你看十一萬方裏之面積. 三千萬同族之人民. 有政府. 有議院. 何等堂
[Ha-ha! Today, my Italy has become a European force of the first rank—completely independent. Behold: with 110,000 square miles of land, 30 million inhabitants, all of the same race, with a government and parliament, it is a nation to be respected. It boasts 50,000 trained soldiers, more than 200 battleships capable of engaging in battle and maintaining the peace. What prestige! And it is all the fruit of the infinite sacrifices and sufferings of my brethren, who have cried, spilled, and sweat blood.]

The references to material, political, and military measures as true signs of modern success demonstrate what is to be seen as the most important product of Chinese intellectuals’ cultural efforts. While there were movements to champion *l’art pour l’art* during the first decades of the twentieth century, they were grossly overshadowed by nationalist and revolutionary sentiment. Watching Liang’s Dante praise such things as Italy’s naval prowess is best understood in terms of China’s long history of artistic, intellectual, and political confluence. In spite of significant differences in its historical iterations, the responsibility of the Confucian scholar-official to serve, to preserve, and to better the functions of central government transferred quite smoothly across the ages and their intermittent revolutions. Literary works were not intended to manufacture illusions of a more 自然 *ziran* (natural) or 天然 *tianran* (organic) counter-existence, but were to be employed as tools in the construction of a more prosperous political reality. Thus, Liang proves his careful calculation in selecting Dante, a politically engaged artistic
model situated at a crucial historical cross-road, to represent his own efforts and to underscore their value as a means to the achievement of China’s national development and international prominence. The image of his brethren sweating and spilling blood is undoubtedly meant to include artists and intellectuals just as much, perhaps even more than, armed combatants. More than likely, those two roles combine in a personal image of one of Liang’s colleagues who was martyred for his revolutionary activities, Tan Sitong.48

With the place of the intellectual well defined in the quest for national redemption, it remained to address the roles of the people at large, Liang’s target audience. However, he first needed to take on the problem of who exactly the Chinese people were, for there persisted in the late Qing an internal racial struggle that confused the definition of the Chinese national subject. In conjunction with his other political works of the same year, Liang used the New Rome to help construct a definition that was politically advantageous to China’s redemption in modernity. This required that the grounds for interior national solidarity be stabilized. A convenient way of doing this, of course, was to displace internal rancor and divisions onto an external object: the colonizing foreigner (who valued the colonized, in the words of Liang’s Metternich, as nothing more than slaves). Dante’s earlier statement begins to focus the audience’s attention on China’s proper external target:

粗解自由之義. 叵耐我國自羅馬解鈕以後. 只雄割據. 豆剖瓜分.49
[Upon gaining a general idea of the values of liberty, I could no longer
tolerate that our formal Roman Empire be sliced up like a melon, shredded
like a bean, divided and occupied by so many tyrants.]

Dante’s distress over the invasions and oppression of the Ostrogoths, Arabs, Spanish,
French, and Austrians is intended to strike a chord with the Chinese audience, suffering
with its own history of invasion from barbarian tribes, the French, British, American,
German, Russian, and Japanese.

The initial promotion of a sentiment of suffering, tied up with ideas of foreign
invasion and colonization, needed to be fashioned carefully in order to avoid invoking
that all too raw polemic of philosophical and armed resistance to the ruling Qing Manchu
dynasty (“Anti-Manchurianism”). Since the middle of the seventeenth century,
intellectuals, such as Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613-1682) and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-
1692), had insisted on protecting their national culture, government, and ethnicity from
outside contamination. Dante’s words do not directly lament cultural and social
decadence in terms of blood or ethnicity, but they do champion a spirit approaching the
national: “Venice, Genoa, Milan, Florence, and Pisa, all once such beautiful and powerful
cities,” were being overrun by foreign forces.

One of the play’s later heroes, however, does openly make recourse to racial
discourses. Awaiting execution in Act 3, the valiant southern Italian female dissident
called the Carbonara (a member of the legendary coal-burner revolutionaries) blasts her
countrymen for doing the bidding of a foreign master:

他本是箇異族兒也. 無怪舞爪張牙迫得我土國. 憤泉秋沸.51
He’s entirely of another race! By brandishing his claws and baring his teeth he’s succeeded in oppressing my land to the point that it now boils over with indignation."

Perhaps the drama’s most sincere and convincing exponent of new nationalist sentiment, the Carbonara demonstrates just how seamlessly the issues of race and exclusivity (not to mention that of gender) informed patriotic fervor. Though not the sole fuel for the fire of political reform in China in the late Qing, racism nonetheless served as a ready logic with which to fan the flame. For Zhang Binglin and the revolutionaries, racism was key to efforts to exclude the Manchus from the Han race-lineages (汉族种姓 hanzu zhongxing) of China’s modern polity, this despite the fact that historical record bore out the extensive hybridity of the Manchus, a motley mixture of Chinese, Koreans, Mongols, and Manchurians. As a reformer, Liang was not anti-Manchu; an article he published in 1902, in fact, successfully rebuffs the efforts of the revolutionaries to accuse the Manchus of never having adopted Chinese nationality, rightly remarking that the accusation is an anachronism, for the modern understandings of neither race or nation are adequate to contest the fact that Manchus were regarded as Chinese subjects (臣民 chenmin). This notwithstanding, the Carbonara’s zealous outburst is the calculated revelation of Liang’s careful selection of his subject.

Italy in the early nineteenth century was in a comparable situation to China in the late Qing: both were perceived to be under fire from foreigners on the outside and the inside. Creating a sense of exclusivity based overtly or tacitly on notions of ethnicity was crucial to seeking political autonomy. An appeal to racial premises, however murky or contestable, was an efficient way to focus the issue and to mobilize the force to attain to...
national solidarity. Moments before being dragged away to her death, the Carbonara draws attention to her countrymen’s problem in correctly classifying and prioritizing relationships. Instead of forming fraternal and communal bonds with their fellow nationals, the people too often adopted foreigners as their familiars:

可恨你們這些狗奴才啊．將累代仇人認做重生的父母．把一國同胞當作上供的犧牲．任他踐你土食你毛還說是深仁厚澤．

[How hateful you traitors are! You treat your old enemies as if they were your parents and your fellow countrymen like sacrificial victims. You allow the enemy to overrun your land, to eat your grain and then dare to call it profoundly humane and beneficial.]

The Carbonara’s biting accusations highlight a central difficulty in nurturing nationalist sentiment. Without clarification of who one’s countrymen are and where one’s loyalties lie, the imagination and realization of a nation remains impossible. Turning on one’s own was a sure way to ensure further enslavement to outside forces.

In his treatise on revolution of the same year (1902), 申论种族革命与政治革命之得失 Shenlun zhongzu geming yu zhengzhi geming zhi deshi (“An Explanation of the Gains and Losses of Racial and Political Revolutions”), Liang challenges the role that a racial revolution (种族/民族革命 zhongzu/minzu geming), defined as one designed to overthrow a government of differing ethnicity, could have in the redemption of China in modernity. Liang fundamentally disagrees with the following argument, professed by many at the time:
盖君认种族革命为可以补助政治革命而间接一达救国之目的。故取之云：种族革命为可以救国之目的者也。随生出断案云：故种族革命吾辈所当以为手段者也。56

[If the Prince believes that an ethnic revolution can help drive the force of a political revolution and thereby indirectly serve to achieve the aim of saving the nation, he will undoubtedly adopt it. [...] To say that a racial revolution can save the nation, then, one must follow by asserting that it has become the appropriate tool for realizing this aim.]

Liang challenged the premise that racial aggression aimed at the Manchus could ever help redeem the nation, saying that violence can never result in the establishment of peace.57 His resistance to the power of racial issues in his political philosophy had very little to do with a desire to combat racism, however: “夫鄙人之为此言，识非有所爱与满洲人也” (“I say what I do not out of love for the Manchus”).58 It was a pure matter of political expediency. To admit that the Manchus were foreigners was to already confess that the nation had long ago been lost, and thus to concede that the next stage of armed civil revolution was imminent. Furthermore, the removal of the Manchus would only lead to greater national disgraces, further destabilize and weaken the nation, and invite foreigners to overrun it:

则曰：待吾放逐满人，后吾自能为之。今其屑与彼喋喋也，呜呼。此言吴已。公之放逐满洲未有其期，而今之握政权者日以公之权力畀诸外人，权力之断送也。59
Thus, they say: “Wait till we’ve run out the Manchus, then we’ll rule for ourselves. We’re planning their ruin this very day.” But these words are wrongheaded. It is no time to enforce the public banishment of the Manchus. To seize the powers of government today would mean that we would have to turn them over to foreigners tomorrow. This would be an ultimate forfeiture of power.]

The *New Rome* intended to convince its audience that the enemy from without, and not from within, was to be blamed and resisted. The Manchu, for the sake of historical consistency, national pride, and political expediency, was to be regarded as a brother-in-arms with whom to repel foreign invaders. This display of internal clemency pushed racial rancor to the margins of Chinese society, though Zhang and competing revolutionaries insisted on maintaining the racial question at its center. Liang’s position depended upon his theorization and performance of fraternal condolence, an unscientific approach intentionally blind to internal racial differences, as a means to naturalize further national and cultural differences between larger international bodies. Grasping how he modulated racialized, biological exclusivity as a function of imagined solidarity is essential to balancing an understanding of racism that is sometimes held up as the primary feature of collective identity in the late Qing. Where scientized racism works most arduously there can always be found the contradictory sites of its intentional neglect.

The *New Rome*’s figures of Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi in acts 4-6 complete the formula for Chinese *pietas* in their tearful display of historic nostalgia and their prioritization of the patriotic bond over all other traditional forms of familial and
social belonging. Both heroes spend their time remembering old Italy and pining for her splendor. The social value of their pondering eclipses the myopic utilitarianism of their countrymen’s activities, for their thought extends across space and time, reaching beyond the present in a paradigmatic modernist gesture preparatory of a new polity’s advent that refuses to be confined by present historical realities. While their fellows had become accustomed to sleeping dreamily through the night, Mazzini and Garibaldi imagined its horrors with eyes wide open; Garibaldi grieves: “天地悠悠，人心夢夢” Tiandi youyou. Ren xin meng meng (“In this world so vast, the people are still dreaming!”). Mazzini and Garibaldi dream as well, but in a way meant to transform the night and themselves. Their imaginings are sorrowful and painful, designed to inject a psychological discomfiture that demands to be delivered into a modern conception of being and belonging. By replaying in their minds the piteous fall and victimization of Italy over the centuries, the two Risorgimento heroes materialize the psychology of a sufferer whose painful state is a product of the rejection of the oppressive conditions surrounding him. The pursuit of this kind of pain, while lowering the sufferer’s morale and status in relation to his complacent or indignant peers, enables his apotheosis to a higher spiritual plane. In other words, his suffering is the sign of a tormented moral and intellectual superiority. He is a pilgrim in a foreign land, a citizen of a higher social order.

Both Mazzini and Garibaldi offer cogent examples of this type of languishment in the present. In the fourth act, revealingly entitled “The Feelings of a Hero,” Mazzini provides a model for how to mentally suffer for one’s nation:
I always think of how my Italy, since the fall of the Roman Empire, has been passed from one state to the next, divided into four or five parts, causing brothers to be separated and the people to be oppressed. I suffer because I think it a great disgrace that the people do not rebel and instead corral themselves under the rulership of foreign masters. [...] Although I am young, I realize well enough the shameful state of my land, and when I compare the present to the past, I am immediately overcome with sadness.

In Act five, “Regret for the Past,” Garibaldi experiences and articulates the comparison with the present and past to which Mazzini refers. Arriving at port near Rome, Garibaldi brims with national pride, recalling the majesty of the world’s greatest historical city, but a cold wind blasts his face, announcing his abrupt disillusionment:

呵呵. 好羅馬. 今日落到我手了. 小生向讀國史. 自注心營. 雖則未逐
狀游. 卻也已同身歷. 今日不免將心中的羅馬. 和目中的羅馬. 逐一按
圖索驥比較分明則箇．

(上岸行介)(作驚訝狀介)

[...]
Ahh! Dear Rome, you have fallen like a lover into my arms. All that I have studied of your history I see now with my own eyes and mark with my own mind. Although I have never been here before, it seems like I’ve seen this place. Now, I can compare closely the Rome of my dreams with the features now before my eyes.

(He disembarks and is dumbfounded)

[...]

Oh, no! My Rome of the past, the one so rich and bountiful, has fallen into neglect and abandon! Spring swallows no longer return. My eyes are flooded with tears. This is truly a horrible scene!

(He sighs)

[...]

If I had not come here in person to this once famous city, how would I have ever experienced the sadness of comparing the present with the past?

[...]

Oh, Rome, Rome! How you make me suffer!

自非親到名城，怎麼知今昔之感。

哎羅馬羅馬。你兀的不痛煞儂也。
Garibaldi grieves at the fall of Rome, an anguish resulting from the maintenance of a patriotic vision of former glories. The unique pain he feels is multiplied by the fact that he seems to be alone amongst masses of people who have passively watched and actively perpetrated Italy’s ruin. Through these words, Liang attempts to instruct his audience not only how to feel, but also how to see and interpret the symbols of their nation in the present. Garibaldi’s lingering over the majestic ruins of arches and amphitheatres is no doubt meant to agitate his audience’s memories of the sack of Beijing and the destruction of the Summer Palace by western forces in 1860 and 1900. Viewing such ruins of the past, in Liang’s view, should result in a surge of patriotic agony. In one of Garibaldi’s final arias of the act, set to the tune of Black Hemp, Liang suggests that any sentiment but utter anguish for the collapse of one’s nation must be unnatural:

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64

[Even if I were completely numb
I could not but feel moved!

My eyes and heart have been distraught
from the moment I placed foot on this soil.
If I look to the past, I shed tears of blood!
Oh!  My Rome!
Ruined as you are, perhaps you mourn for yourself and me!
And I,
worn out by so much singing and crying,
when I look upon the waves of the Tiber,
illuminated by the light of the moon,
I feel as if a whip has snapped my heart awake from its languor!
I want to fight for her future!
I swear that I will make this sacred, ancient city rise again!]

To transform Garibaldi’s acute pain into constructive patriotic zeal requires the shifting of priorities and social relationships. In the play’s sixth act, Mazzini articulates the final step that must lead from the painful acknowledgment of the nation’s shameful state to the implementation of measures to redeem it. That step is the construction of a new social fabric, in which the traditional bonds of kinship and utilitarian friendship are to be superseded by an expanding patriotic fraternity:

[If we succeed in uniting but a few dozen people who sincerely love this country, who value it over their lives, who are ready to share their joys and sorrows, to dedicate themselves to taking on responsibilities and to fighting for a better future, we will add so many single drops to a great river and span a thousand miles in just a few steps! Little by little the sphere of our action will enlarge and our companions will spread]
throughout the land. […] Though we are few and weak, we must see to the end our duty as citizens and shirk not our responsibility.]

Patriotic sentiment is the new common bond meant to knit together the emotions and wills of the Chinese people. For Liang, Dante and the heroes of the Risorgimento were the models for the life cycle of that sentiment, from its painful infancy to its glorious maturity.

Liang reinforces the centrality of this shift in social relationships in the waning moments of the fourth act, in a touching scene between Mazzini and his mother. While walking together and discussing the vicissitudes of the nation, the two meet a poor unknown hero, one of the exiles of the 1920s revolution against the Austrians, who suffers now alone in silence, without family or friend. Moved by the old beggar’s courage, Mazzini vows a new allegiance to the nation and its people. The oath transfers to him the mantel of an unknown hero or new citizen despite the decadence of current social relationships. What may initially seem a schismatic pronouncement is, in fact, the profession and promise of greater social loyalties:

叫一聲我國民，哭一聲我國民。怕不怕英雄氣短，柳絲長。

[…] 母親啊，從今日以後孩兒的身子都要獻與意大利國民了。66

[When I scream, I invoke the people!
When I cry, I invoke the people!
I fear: perhaps my courage is insufficient,
Being tied too tightly to familial affections?]
Mother, from this day on, your son swears to dedicate his entire being to the Italian people.

By having Mazzini pronounce this new oath to his mother, Liang emphasizes the radical break from traditional Confucian, familial loyalties that modern citizenship would require. The man who would have otherwise remained just a poor beggar, the unknown hero, must now be considered a brother to Mazzini, just as the woman who has always rightly been the source of his life and affection, his mother, must now be counted but one of thousands of his kin in citizenship.67

In an important article on citizenship published the same year (1902), Liang’s teacher, Kang Youwei, captures the redefinition of familial loyalties, inspired by foreign knowledge that is also embodied in the significance of Mazzini’s oath to his Chinese audience:

夫今欧美各国，法至美密，而势至富强者何哉? 皆以民为国故也。人人有议政之权，人人有忧国之责，故命之曰公民。人人皆视其国为己之家，其得失肥皆有关焉。夫家人虽有长幼贵贱，而有事则必聚而谋之，以同利而共其患。68

[Why is it that all of the Western nations, from France to America, tend towards wealth and power? It is because they all regard the people as the foundation of national culture. Since all have the right to participate in assemblies and all have the responsibility to watch over their country, they are called citizens. Because all the people regard the country as their own]
family, they are all involved, whether in loss or gain, in times of good or bad. Though members of a family be young or old, humble or reputable, when there are problems they bind together to deal with them and wade through the difficulties for mutual benefit.]

If governments and their peoples enjoyed a nurturing, familial relationship, such perilous breaks as Mazzini’s would have little meaning. But because of political oppression and corruption, the people were often forced into passive complacency or active treachery, and individual heroes were forced to fill the vacuum of villainous tyranny with the pietas required to redeem their nations. One of the more interesting aspects of the New Rome, in its incomplete form, is that Liang leaves us little idea of the function of a benevolent monarch in the mobilization of nationalist sentiment, although his political role as a leading reformer of the Qing dynasty suggests that he would have had much to say about the emperor’s place in such social transformation. Perhaps delaying to write up Vittorio Emanuele’s acts was evidence of his own ambivalence on the issue. Zarrow believes that Liang could not ever quite decide “if the emperor still served as a necessary symbol of unity, the core around which the Chinese nation was to be formed, or if this role was largely obsolete.”69 Vittorio’s absence from the play would appear to confirm that explanation.

Nonetheless, Liang was certain of the dangers that selfish leadership and foreign dictatorship posed, for he includes a scene from Italian history in which he presents the worst of tyrants as a foil to patriotic leadership required to nurture a new citizenry. Act I stages the nefarious back-room dealings of three major players that historically brokered the Acte du Congrès de Vienne (June 9, 1815), following the defeat of Napoleon, in
which the Italian territories were carved up: (1) Metternich, King of Austria, (2) Fredrick, King of Prussia; and (3) Alexander, Emperor of Russia. Metternich heads the gang and opens with an aria that conveys the political presumption and general lack of enlightenment of the entire assembly:

區區帝國老中堂宜樣. 攬權作勢盡橫行. 肥胖. 說甚自由與平等. 混帳.
堂堂大會俺主盟. 誰抗.70

[I wield power and add to it as I abuse it at will!
What is all this chatter about liberty and equality?!
Sheer babble!
When I will preside over this grand congress
who will dare oppose me?]

Metternich and his cohorts aim to eradicate the rights of man, the liberty and equality fought for during the French Revolution, as a way to expand their kingdoms and aggrandize their authority. Fredrick echoes Metternich’s lines later in the same act when he sings how he will “destroy the rights of the people.” Metternich lays out the principle concern of the congress as how to undo the French Revolution and to restore all political and territorial circumstances to their pre-1789 conditions. What late twentieth century historians interpret as the necessary brokerage of continental peace at the time, Liang dramatizes as a malicious act of tyranny, intended to deprive the governed of their rights. Naturally, this subject weighed heavily upon his mind in the wake of the Boxer Protocol (September 1901), and the restaging of the Congress of Vienna in the New Rome is certainly an exaggeration of his perception of the despotic tendencies of both the Eight-
Nation Alliance (Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the USA) and the corrupt Manchu government, all involved in bankrupting and fracturing the nation.

Liang’s parceling of the six great powers (列强 lieqiang) into two posses of three (Germany-France-Russia and England-America-Japan), both intent upon carving up and exploiting China financially, constitutes an interesting parallel to the play’s villainous triumvirate. In the same year of the *New Rome*’s publication, Liang printed a political study intending to elucidate the nature and form of tyrannies, which sheds light on his treatment of the Congress of Vienna in the play, where Metternich, Frederick, and Alexander all act as caricatures of the cruel despot who governs as a privilege of his ego instead of as a service to the people. In the political piece, Liang explains:

吾欲申言野蛮专制与开明专制之异同。吾得古人两语焉以为之证。法王路易第十四曰：“朕即国家也” L’État c’est Moi。此语也。有代表野蛮专制精神者也。 […] “国王者国家公仆之首长也” Der könig ist der erste Dieme des Staats。此语也。则代表开明专制的精神者也。71

[I wish to delineate the differences between a cruel and an enlightened tyranny. I draw from a couple of old sources as my evidence. King Louis XIV is to have once said that “I am the State” L’État c’est Moi. These words reflect the spirit of the savage tyrant. On the other hand: “The King is the Leading Servant of the State” *Der könig ist der erste Dieme des Staats* demonstrates well the spirit of the enlightened despot.]
Referencing examples from China’s classical philosophy, Liang emphasizes the benevolent spirit of the enlightened despot who is concerned with the welfare of the people:


[Confucius emphasized the importance of an enlightened autocracy focused on the benefits of its people. Mencius’ notions, “rule to protect the people” and “desire what the masses do and avoid what they spurn,” approximates this as well. […] Xunzi’s theoretical writings say: “Man is born with desires, though, if his desires are not met, he will search for a way to satisfy them. If his demands are without measure, struggle will ensue, followed by chaos and destruction. Thus, the kings of old despised chaos and set about to form rules of propriety to make distinctions with which to nurture and to educate the desires of men, and then grant them what they wish.”]

Liang’s three tyrants exemplify the savage autocrat, who perceives people and their desires, liberties, and laws as obstacles to his ambitions; what matters most to him is the acquisition of new privileges and territories. The ambitions of the foreign forces invading China and of the ruling Manchus fell squarely into this category. Their lack of
concern for the people had sickened the nation to the point where reforms and revolutions were inevitable:

革命党何以生。生于政治腐败。政治腐败者实制造革命党之原料之主品也。政治不从人民之所欲恶。不能为人民捍患而开利。则人民与权力上得起而革之。73

[How do revolutionary parties arise? They arise in the wake of corrupt governments. A depraved government is the principal fuel for revolutionary resistance. When it fails to heed the needs and opinions of the people, it is unable to stave off disaster or reap benefits. Thus, the people seize power, arise and overthrow it.]

On the other hand, the enlightened despot, Liang’s preferred modern ruler for China,74 acts like a father who schools his children’s desires, always with their best interests in mind. Unfortunately, modern China was awash in abusive parents.

The greatest victim of the power lust of the Congress of Vienna, in Liang’s opinion, was Italy, for Articles 93-104 of the Congress’s 1815 act sliced its territory into chunks for the near exclusive consumption of Austria. Borrowing one of Metternich’s infamous utterances (1814), which Mazzini would later use as a national rallying point, Liang has Metternich describe Italy as merely a “geographical expression,” whose legitimate claims to government exist solely in those political bodies with the strength to take possession of its richness:

這意大利只算箇地理上的名詞罷了。那裏還算得政治上的名詞。況且我們籍戰勝國的餘威。難道不要分占些便宜嗎。75
[Italy is nothing but a geographical expression. What is the point of considering it a political entity? With the power that we will gain being the victors, we can divide up the spoils.]

A scalding accusation from Metternich’s greatest critic in the play, the Carbonara, details the chief offenses of his savage tyranny:

你還把我意大利祖國當作乃翁傳下的遺產十一萬方裏. 把我意大利同胞認作拿錢買下的奴才三千萬多.76

[You still consider Italy, my land, like some 110,000 square miles of inheritable territory for you and your posterity, and the Italians, my countrymen, as 30 million some odd servants at the disposal of your lucre.]

According to Liang’s political theory, this was the worst kind of government, one that treated people like commodities instead of the heart and soul of a nation. What was needed was a reinstitution of classical ideas of enlightened kinship, which would place the ruler in the role of the nation’s nurturing father. The incomplete acts from the New Rome are sufficient to see clearly Liang’s hope for a modern China, as through the impassioned pleas of the heroes and villains of the Risorgimento and their Florentine narrator, he holds out the promise that a return to an enlightened, benevolent autocracy, combined with a new patriotic social bond, would lead to the rebirth of a nation.

Liang’s New Rome stands alone in this period of Chinese literary history as a work dedicated entirely to the narration of foreign icons and history. This uniqueness, however, is not only what constitutes its cultural value, for its aim is not be exotic. The
presentation of Italian exempla was a temporary estrangement designed to reflect and to meet the needs of local exigencies, and the obvious visual transformations of Dante and the Risorgimento heroes in the kunqu play, had it ever been performed, would have been only the outward manifestation of the deeper shifting in the play’s application of its Italian matter. Liang selected Italy, rather than other countries in which he also showed particular interest (e.g. America, Spain, Holland, Romania), because Italy’s history best reflected the conditions and hopes of a modern China. Furthermore, Liang discovered in Italian icons repositories for traditional and new Chinese commonplaces that would be commensurate with national redemption and prosperity in modernity. The New Rome was an essential part of Liang’s artistic infrastructure to promote the imagination of a Chinese national sentiment, culture, and state; enjoying the opera was to have been an educational experience by which Liang hoped to transform the feelings and relationships of his audience. Dante, Mazzini, and others provided the appropriate instructional voices for this task.

2 Kyle David Anderson, “Liang’s Yinbing Studio” (February 25, 2010), photograph.

3 These two unpublished acts are today available in A. Ying, A Collection of Late Qing Literature Wanqing wenxue congchao 晚清文学从钞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1962).


7 Tang, 22.


9 Prasenjit Duara’s term for that necessary stage of re-defining and re-naming the people in modern nation formation. See, Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), 33.

10 The Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana augments the OED’s characterization of pietas as simply a sense with such terms as feeling (sentimento), suffering (sofferenza), disposition (atteggiamento), and behavior (comportamento), grounding dutiful and patriotic care for others in matters of the heart. Grande Dizionario Della Lingua Italiana, v. XIII, s.vv. “Pietà,” “Pietas.”


15 Liang ranks the world’s countries into three categories: (1) those who dominate culturally, (2) those who menace militarily, and (3) those passive bodies that have neither the cultural nor military might to make a difference. Liang Qichao, “A Discussion,” 1-2.

16 Ibid., 9.

17 Ibid., 7.

19 Ibid., 42.

20 Ibid., 43.


22 Ibid., 37.

23 The nature of this struggle during the Republican and Communist periods sometimes bore a different type of political expediency: incorporating historical, ethnic others became part of stratagems to hold onto frontier lands and resources originally required during the Qing. See James Leibold, Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese (New York: Macmillan, 2007).


26 Ibid., 54.


29 I am still unsure what third defeat Liang is referring to in this passage. His phonemic rendering, feilafulanka 肥拉夫兰卡, seems to correspond more closely to a Chinese transliteration of Frankfurt than any Italian name or location.

30 Liang Qichao, The Theft of Ashen Dreams Jie hui meng 劫灰夢, Five Novels and Plays Xiaoshuo chuanti qu zhong 小說傳奇五種 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shu ju, 1936).

31 Zou Pengjun, Modern Chinese Theatre in a Time of Cultural Transition Wenhua zhuanxing zhong zhongguo jindai xiju 文化转型中中国近代戏剧 (Yi hai kou: Nan fang, 2001), 99-100.


34 Chen Yuexi, “The Daoist Immortal Magu with a Crane” (fourteenth century), Boston Museum of Fine Arts, ink, color, and gold on silk.
The official designation of Dante’s character type is the *fumo* 貢末, or second elder. This character always displayed a long, full beard representative of his age and wisdom.


Ibid., 79.

Ibid., 80.


Zarrow, “Modern Chinese Nationalism,” 18.


In “A Discussion of Enlightened Tyranny” (1902), Liang steers sharply away from any fantastical descriptions of a reality that history does not bear out: struggle *jinzheng* 競爭, not escape or non-action, is what determines history.


53 Liang Qichao, “Refuting Some Reports Concerning National Lands” Bo mou bao zhi tudi guo you lun 驳某报之土地国有论, A Collection of Writings from the Yinbing Studio Yinbing shi he ji 饮冰室合集, v. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), 139-143.


56 Ibid., 2, 3.

57 Ibid., 43.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., 41.


64 Ibid., 76.


69 Peter Zarrow, “The Reform Movement, the Monarchy, and Political Modernity,” Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China, eds. Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 45.


71 Liang Qichao, “A Discussion,” 23.

72 Ibid., 24.

73 Liang Qichao, “An Explanation,” 46.
Liang’s main purpose in “A Discussion of Enlightened Autocracy” was to prove why an enlightened constitutional monarchy was the appropriate form of government for China as opposed to the dangerously unpredictable and unstable republican system that others advocated.


Ibid., 80.
CHAPTER 3

Reductiones ad musicam:

New Poetry Rhythmics and the Petrarchan Sonnet

All art constantly aspires toward the condition of music.

—Walter Pater, The Renaissance

In February 1989, Qinghua scholar and poet Sun Dayu 孙大雨 (1905-97) recalled his first experiments with poetry in the periodical Xinmin wanbao (The New People’s Evening). Reminiscent of fellow poet Feng Zhi’s 冯至 (1905-93) earlier article, “我与十四行体的原因” Wo yu shisihangti de yuanyin (“Reasons for My Interest in the Sonnet”) (December 1988),¹ Sun entitled his account “我与诗” Wo yu shi (“Poetry and Me”). Upon matriculating at Qinghua University in 1922, Sun describes how he first became interested in English and Chinese poetry. At the time, his initial feeling toward New Poetry (新诗 xinshi)² was at best ambivalent: he considered it a bit too aloof and vague and found that its qualities of sound, tune, and rhythm presented nothing unique, providing only a rough approximation of the cadences of vernacular or 白话文 baihua prose.³ Enamored with poetry, Sun felt quite clear about the differences that should exist between the literary genres: “但如果要旋转, 要酣畅, 要舞蹈, 要跋扈, 要奔腾, 要飞扬, 跨着散文的细小而凡的步子不能济事” (“If you wish to swirl, make merry, dance, dominate, rush or soar, following in prose's tiny, bland footsteps is not much help”).⁴
After graduating from Qinghua in 1925, and while waiting for responses to his applications to study abroad in America, Sun Dayu traveled locally, seeing the sights and improving his poetry. That summer of 1925, while visiting a Buddhist monastery on the Zhejiang seaside, he reinvented an “entirely new poetic form” (个新诗所未曾而应当建立的格律制度). He reverently recalls his discovery:

结果被我找到, 可说建立了起来, 我写的了新诗里第一首有意识的格律, 并且是一首贝屈拉克体的商乃诗.

[The result was that the form was discovered, one could say established, by me. I wrote the first consciously structured poem of the New Poetry movement, a Petrarchan sonnet.]

Sun’s recollection places the occasion into a discernibly hallowed light. The circumstances surrounding the discovery build up its powerful, revelatory aura: Sun is cast into the role of a religious pilgrim who, nestled in the womb of a natural hermitage, receives a spontaneous epiphany that is the first, consciously metered poem of China’s New Poetry movement. The last detail of his story seems destined to share in the cumulative solemnity of the process of discovery, for the product of his meditation is nothing less than a Petrarchan sonnet entitled “爱” Ai (“Love”).

往常的天幕是顶无忧的华盖, 往常的大地永远任意地平张; 往常时摩天的山岭在我身旁
峙立，长河在奔腾，大海在澎湃；

往常时天上描着心灵的云彩，
风暴同惊雷快活得像要疯狂；
还有青田连白水，古木和平荒；
一片清明，一片无边沿的晴霭；

可是如今，日夜是一样地运转
星辰的旋转并未曾丝毫变换，
早晨带了希望来，落日的余辉

留下沉思，一切都照旧地欢欣：
为何这世界又平添一层灿烂？
因为我掌中握着生命的权威！

[The former veil of heaven is now my careless cover,
The former ground beneath me now stretches on forever;
The former ridges scraping heaven, now stalwart at my side
And the winding rivers gallop towards the surging sea;

The former clouds of heaven, once conveying the spirit’s thoughts,
Swirling winds and thunder have thrown into disarray;]
And the green fields, white waters, old woods and wild plains;
Form one line of splendor aside a boundless haze;

But today, morning and night spin a single round
The cycle of the zodiac has never varied,
The morning has brought a new hope, the afterglow of evening

Lingering reveries shine forth ancient joys:
Why will a new splendor be added to this earth?
Because in my palm I wield the power of life.]

Contrary to one’s expectation, however, the Petrarchan epiphany strikes only a
minor chord in Sun’s narrative. It appears to be mostly anecdotal, and Sun briskly moves
into matters that press more urgently upon his mind: to whom belong the true origins of
metered New Poetry? It so happens, Sun remarks, that decades after the event, scholars
still do not have their facts straight. Was it Wen Yiduo 闻一多 (1899-1946), the supposed
father of modern metered poetry and a fellow Qinghua Literary Society colleague, or he
himself who inaugurated the use of meter in the New Poetry movement? Sun provides his
own proof, to which his solemn tale of Petrarchan origins is a prelude: Wen Yiduo
published his 死水 Sishui (Dead Waters) on April 15, 1926, while his own poem
preempted the former by five days, appearing in 晨报 Chen bao (The Morning Edition).
Thus, he sets the record straight: “事实上还是我在前” (“Actually, it was I who was
first”).
Sun’s reverent narration of the Petrarchan sonnet’s pivotal advent into the New Poetry movement in China is thus employed as polemical evidence in a historiographic debate. The fact that his poem was an Italian sonnet seems to matter only insofar as it marks the point at which he entered into modern literary history in China. All potential latent, cultural, and poetic reasons for the sonnet’s adoption as the initiator of a revolutionary poetic movement are combined into this single motive: how it functions to answer a topical question in domestic poetic politics.

Sun’s silence in elaborating on the sonnet’s Italian significance marks not so much his ignorance (he is infamously loquacious when it comes to prosody and scansion) as his acceptance of the sonnet’s givenness as an influential Chinese poetic form. Writing decades after the sonnet’s adoption into Chinese letters, Sun saw little need to justify its remarkable role in modern poetic developments. This silence inherently coaxes our attention to consider the nativizing processes responsible for the sonnet’s submerged significance.

The present chapter identifies and analyzes the intellectual debates surrounding rhythm during the early New Poetry movement as being essential to the appropriation of the sonnet form, which also typifies the general way in which Italian matter was universalized and naturalized in China’s projects for modernization. My purpose here is to describe the musical rationales by which the sonnet was made to harmonize with Chinese letters, and in the process—to use expert Lu Dejun’s neologism—codified as a universal form reducible and conformable to music (合乐 heyue).10
Lu Dejun’s foundational study, 十四行体在中国 Shisi hang ti zai zhongguo (The Sonnet in China) (1995), masterfully outlines the history of the Chinese sonnet into which Sun inserted himself. According to Lu, the form’s existence in China can be divided up into four principal stages: (1) 输入 shuru (importation) (1920s), (2) 进化 jinhua (evolution) (1930-50), (3) 蛰伏 zhefu (dormancy) (1950-1980), and (4) 繁荣 fanrong (flourishing) (1980-). Over its almost one hundred-year existence in China, there have been hundreds of sonnet writers who have written thousands of poems. Those writing during the first two stages, on the level of both theory and practice, produced the most innovative and experimental works, with which this chapter is directly concerned. These poets include such well known figures as Hu Shi 胡适, Lu Zhiwei 陆志韦, Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, Xu Xu 徐许, Wen Yiduo 閆一多, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Mu Mutian 穆木天, Zhu Xiang 朱湘, Wang Duqing 王独清, Li Jinfu 李金发, Rao Mengkan 饶孟侃, Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋, Tang Shi 唐湜 etc. Lu describes how the form was at first practiced rather arbitrarily by study abroad students in the 1910s and 1920s. Only when poets began veering away from their obsession with free verse in the 1920s did they start to discover that the sonnet matched their maturing desire for structure and rhythm in a representational form of China’s combined new poetics and literary language. Lu describes the form’s impact on Chinese letters in the following way:

十四行体的各种体式在中国都有成功之作:

啊, 温柔的彼特拉克的桂冠,

密似的十四行, 打诗人手里,

我接过着火把, 高高地举起,
I hope to add to Lu’s study by shedding greater light on how and why that transplantation (移植 yizhi) occurred. Despite the wealth of information Lu provides, a crucial question remains unexamined: what were the rationales through which the Petrarchan sonnet was filtered to become what Guo Moruo in the 50s would declare was China’s own ethnic genre (现代中国的民族形式)?

In his introduction to the form, Lu seems to suggest a reason by describing the sonnet as being the most natural kind of poetry on structural, rhythmic grounds. He affirms that a poem containing approximately 12-14 syllables (or sounds 音 yin) per line, what a sonnet possesses, mirrors precisely the rhythmic ebb and flow of human breathing during a
vernacular reading (口语朗读 kouyu langdu). If that length is altered in any way, then the poem does not feel natural:

诗行长度最重要的限制因素就是人的吸引吐纳的节律, 所谓诗行太长，
指的就是同人呼吸吐纳节律的不一致.\textsuperscript{14}

[The most important limiting factor placed on a poetic sentence is precisely the rhythm of human respiration. When we say that a verse is too long, we mean that it varies from the rhythmic ebb and flow of breathing.]

This kind of organic, rhythmic affinity Lu claims science itself has proven (though we are left waiting for those proofs). This, however, gives rise to another obvious question, which Lu overlooks: if this is the natural way people breathe while reading (and contingently composing), why did the sonnet not appear in the Chinese language until the twentieth century, and then as a foreign import? It is of course absurd to assume that Chinese were not breathing naturally while reading or writing for thousands of years. Therefore, Lu’s appeal to natural breathing alone cannot be the only (or even primary) logic for the appearance of the sonnet in Chinese in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The notion that the sonnet conforms to the pattern of human breathing occludes a historical explanation of the rationales through which the form passed into China under the guise of naturalness. Lu’s rationalization here does not bring us any closer to knowing why or how the sonnet was made to seem natural and Chinese during its early phases of appropriation. To grasp the synthetic quality of the form’s acclaimed natural, Chinese structure requires that we recognize the progressive programs and discourses that facilitated its naturalization. Lu’s explicit reference to breathing done during “vernacular
readings,” inadvertently opens up this point. The vernacularization of the Chinese language from classical (文言 wenyan) to modern speech (白话 baihua) is the indisputable condition required to sustain the apparent naturalness of a Chinese sonnet. Only if modern Chinese is accepted as the new natural can the claim that the sonnet is natural and Chinese stand. Traditionally sparse grammars produced poems with lines ranging from 4-7 characters, but the modern baihua system, which was developing alongside the Chinese sonnet in the 1910s and 1920s, like its European linguistic counterparts, had become a great deal wordier. As a result, poets sought to replace their old poetic vehicles with new forms that could contain and transmit their modernized language and the new thoughts it permitted. Encapsulating this complicated discursive process into a question of rhythm proved to be an efficient way of implementing a whole host of transformative modernizing activities (e.g. rationalization, vernacularization, cultural borrowing, internationalized poesis, etc.) into a singular reduction, which served to reinforce, most importantly, the seeming naturalness of Chinese modernity. Writing and reading a sonnet in modern China, thereby, came to be seen as being as natural as breathing.

In the following pages, I explain the centrality of discourses of rhythm and musicality—reductiones ad musicam¹⁵—in the sonnet’s transposition into Chinese letters, a phenomenon not unlike the prominence of discourses of harmony and rhythmics¹⁶ in the globalizing poetics of the West (e.g. Ezra Pound). After an overview of secondary literature on music and modernity, which prepares us to analyze Chinese debates concerning metrics and rhythmics, I will examine the writings of some important participants in the evolution of modern Chinese poetics (e.g. Hu Shi, Guo Moruo, Wen Yiduo, Liang Shiqiu, etc.), which facilitated the sonnet’s appropriation as a native genre.
Musicality and Modernity

In the West, musicality proved central to projects to “make it new” by first making it “foreign.” Stylistic spice imported from afar served as a key ingredient in modernists’ attempts to renew their perceived stagnating cultures and arts. Decades before the arrival of the twentieth century, British classicist Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) accurately portrayed the modern condition in his essay “Heinrich Heine” (1863):

Modern times find themselves with an immense system of institutions, established facts, accredited dogmas, customs, rules, which have come to them from times not modern. In this system their life has to be carried forward, yet they have a sense that this system is not of their own creation, that it by no means corresponds exactly with the wants of their actual life, that for them, it is customary not rational. The awakening of this sense is the awakening of the modern spirit.17

Arnold’s use of the term “rational” targets the intellectual dimension of the awakening he invokes as part of the modern spirit. Chief to artists and theorists of the modern period was the imposition of a centripetal rationality that could personalize and modernize what was once customary.

In his chapter “Literary Institutions and Modernization,” Peter Bürger draws on the sociological tradition of Max Weber to lay bare modernization as a chief process of modernity,18 expounding on the work of weighing conducted by the intellect that, according to Arnold, constitutes the chief intellectual behavior of the “modern.” Rationalization, in Bürger’s view, is the weaving of reasons into a logical mesh that explains by way of its systematization of all views and realities. This making of the
modern moment resembles a revelatory, Freudian action that casts the new light of reason onto obliquely glimpsed realities and histories already darkly present. Like Wallace Stevens’ proverbial blackbird, the roving, systematizing consciousness of the modern intellect seeks to measure the edges of any number of realities—“The river is moving. / The blackbird must be flying.” The rational deliverance of old things to/by new eyes is the chief process and aspect of the modern.

In his study on the arts and early modernism, Christopher Butler underlines what he perceives as the most salient effect of modernist rationalization: the “subjective self-reliance” of artists rejecting the faith of proximate, past culture and arts. This view is correct in accounting for the schismatic and relativizing artistic works and intellectual discoveries of the early twentieth century, but it is slightly misleading in that it seems to omit notions of universals from modernizing processes. It is crucial to keep in mind that artists engaged in their own self-analyses are, in fact, still actively searching for those grander, rational principles that will bind together their fractured realities. Even in the most solipsistic and iconoclastic creations of modernity linger deep, spiritual yearnings and holistic poetics designed to fill in the fissures cracked by the loss of faith in traditional cultures and languages. Recourses to music were found to assist in modernist writers’ attempts to abandon old grammars and ways of writing and to elide, to juxtapose, and to collage their way to a new confidence in representing the modern world. Butler intimates this process in identifying a recurrence of ideas and terms that crop up across the disciplines of western modernist art:

In this period, concepts like’ intuition’ and ‘expression,’ or ‘subjectivity’ and ‘inner division,’ or ‘harmony’ and ‘rhythm,’ are parts of a changing
framework of ideas which inspired stylistic change in Modernist work in all the arts. Such developments arise as part of a conversation among artists (and the critics associated with them) which has a number of terms in common, and which modifies the conventions by which they address, conspire with, or provoke their audiences.22

Daniel Albright further highlights the notions of harmonics and rhythm in his concept of “vertical” chords across artistic media in modernity. Though many ages sought for their own pan-aesthetic correspondences influenced by music, he maintains that the modern period presents itself as unique among them “because there remains so much evidence of the germinative stages, and because there is so much self-conscious exploration of the ultimates of artistic possibility.”23 Modernity, more than any other historical period, “tested the limits of aesthetic construction,” coursing back and forth between Marsyian (imitative) and Apollonian (transcendent) extremes.24 This bipolarity was carried out often as the exploration or invasion of other artistic media. What suggested the possibility of these mutual forays into music, literature, and the visual arts was the underlying belief in a quintessential consonance of the arts,25 a consonance at its roots musical. Albright approximates this universalizing faith:

Perhaps there are chords in which one element is a musical note, another element is a work, and a third element is a picture—chords that compose themselves out of different layers of sensuous reality. Perhaps those artists involved in the collaboration understood the total effects, not in terms of the private effects of the separate media, but in terms of progressions, cadences, of these transmediating chords. Certain collaborations seem to possess
such an intimate integrity that all consciousness of the constituent arts vanishes.  

Although Albright does not speak of it, these same harmonic convergences sought between artistic media in modernity to produce innovations in a new rationalized world were precisely what invited cross-cultural borrowings and fusions. As part of the expansion of artistic horizons, “vertical” chords among disparate cultures and literatures were forged, underwritten by pan-aesthetic correspondences that justified them. Similarly, New Poetry intellectuals in China, in their adoption of the sonnet, sought to erase the consciousness of its foreignness precisely via the collapsing of poetry into discourses of a universal rhythmics and music.

However, as Albright also intimates, such rationalized consonances across cultures and genres inherently bear the sign of a deeper dissonance. Chinese intellectuals who theorized the sonnet into a native form would always show the trace of justifications required by intercultural and pan-aesthetic consonance. Therefore, the apparent harmony of the sonnet in the New Poetry movement was necessarily indicative of a deeper, original disjuncture constituted by divergence in origin, ethnicity and ownership.

In his influential “Notes on World Beat,” Steven Feld speaks to such a disjuncture in commenting on the appropriation of foreign rhythms in the American music industry. While directed at late twentieth-century practices, Feld’s analysis may also be applied to early modernity’s intercultural borrowings:

Musical appropriation sings a double line with one voice. It is a melody of admiration, even homage and respect, a fundamental source of connectedness, creativity, and innovation. This we locate in a discourse of
“roots,” of reproducing and expanding “the tradition.” Yet this voice is harmonized by a countermelody of power, even control and domination, a fundamental source of asymmetry in ownership and commodification of musical works. This we locate in a discourse of “rip-offs,” of reproducing “the hegemonic.” Appropriation means that the question “Whose music?” is submerged, supplanted, and subverted by the assertion “our/my music.”

Feld’s postcolonial critique arises out of the observation of western market practices (his case-study being Paul Simon’s *Graceland*) which tend to frame African and African-American materials, products, and ideas as the more mobile, leverageable concepts of labor, talent, or influence. While the intentions of his analysis are limited to a criticism of late-capitalist, western artistic appropriations, his last observation concerning the submersion of the all-important question, “Whose music?” in transcultural musical exchanges, is germane to the investigation of China’s musical rationalizations for appropriating the Petrarchan sonnet. In the case of Chinese poetry in the early twentieth century, going to its “roots” meant engaging in a universal discourse of rhythmics and musicality by which the foreignness of the Petrarchan sonnet could be expunged by the assertion that this is “our sonnet.”

In an environment of universal rationalizing, the spiritual, emotional, and social values that had driven pre-Qin (-221BCE) to Ming-Qing (1368-1911) discussions of the connections between 仁 ren (moral uprightness) and 乐 yue (musical quality), and the debates surrounding the origins of music in the 宇 yu (universe), 理 li (reason), 礼 li (ritual), the 心 xin (heart), or 自然 ziran (nature), vanished in the face of the technical, linguistic approach of New Poetry reformers.²⁹ Music was reduced to the biology of its
players and the mechanics of their symbolic systems. Carl Seashore, a leading musicologist engaged in the science and psychology of music at the time in the West, described rhythm in life and the arts as a natural, biological, and artistic “instinctive craving” that is a necessary condition for intelligence.\textsuperscript{30} As such, it constituted a unique, naturally reinforced standard of efficiency. In this vein, the rhythmic theorization of poetry became a vital component of the autonomizing economy of translation in the Chinese modernist project of cultural progress (a symptom of general modernist developments away from semantic translations).\textsuperscript{31} For Chinese poets, discourses both of a technical and metaphorical nature concerning poetry’s musicality manufactured the possibility for the sonnet’s transposition from West to East, eventually solidifying its importance in the evolution of the New Poetry movement and ensuring its uniqueness as a local, artistic product. Chinese \textit{reductiones ad musicam} thus universalized the Petrarchan sonnet, largely stripping it of its Italian context and making it serve Chinese designs for modernization. To borrow from George Steiner’s description of Pound’s own rhythmic translations of Chinese poetry, the \textit{raison d’être} of the Petrarchan sonnet’s musical transposition into Chinese was ultimately to alter “the feel of the language and set the pattern of cadence for modern [Chinese] verse.”\textsuperscript{32} In this way, Chinese intellectuals tilted the slanted economy of cultural exchange their way, exerting control by nativizing an imported poetic form in the development of their own modernisms.
New Poetry, Rhythmics, and the Sonnet

Writing in the 1950s, the prolific author and renowned linguistic scholar Wang Li 王力 (1900-86) offered a fairly accurate summary of the sonnet form and its then recent history in China. His detailed survey of its use reveals that the stanzaic patterning of the Italian sonnet (意大利十四行 yidali shisihang) was the most popular of all the sonnet forms adopted by poets. While one, two, and three-section sonnets were not uncommon, most poets adhered to the visible divisions of the four-section structure, by which the first two quatrains and last two tercets were separated from one another (4+4+3+3). He adds, furthermore, that the English pentameter was the most commonly adopted meter, though the Italian dodecasyllabic verse was also often used. In addition to such quantifiable data, typical of his scholarly style, Wang provides some rare cultural insights into what he perceives the sonnet meant for Chinese literary history.

In section 63.1, Wang represents the flow of New Poetry as originating in anti-traditionalism, then moving to free verse (自由诗 ziyou shi), through Wen Yiduo’s corrective admonition to return to rhythm and form (格律 gelü), and finally ending with the adoption of western poetic forms, especially the sonnet. He describes how the sonnet entered into this current and grieves for the broader implications of its successful reception in China:

从此以后, 有些诗人更进一步而模仿西洋里最重要的而格律又最严的一种形式—商籁 (the sonnet). 这样汉语的欧化诗似乎走向一条由今而殷的道路, 虽然直到现代还有许多诗人在写自由诗. 34
[From there, a few poets went on to imitate the most important and metrically stringent poetic form—the sonnet. This Europeanized Chinese verse appeared to be moving from what was new in the direction of what was old, though many poets to this day continue to write in free verse.]

At the end of his historical review of New Poetry, Wang explains how some writers reached beyond pedestrian western poetic forms to grasp at the most classical and difficult of them all: the sonnet. The most interesting aspect of his evaluation of this trend is what he feels it implies on a larger cultural scale. Wang perceives the adoption of the sonnet as an Europeanization of Chinese letters, hence, the Europeanization of Chinese culture. He seems to ask, “Is the sonnet really a modern step forward for China?” In the conclusion to his lengthy article, Wang lays bare his anxieties about the idea of Chinese sonnets:

由此看来，商籁可认为西洋的“律诗.” 进二十年来, 中国一部分的诗人确有趋重格律的倾向, 而最方便的道路就是模仿西洋的格律. 纯粹模仿也不是个办法; 咱们应该吸收西洋诗律的优点, 结合汉语的特点, 建立咱们自己的新诗律.35

[From this we see how the sonnet may be considered the West’s “regulated verse.” For the past twenty years, a group of Chinese poets has insisted on forging ahead in the direction of poetic form, the easiest path being that of imitating western models. However, pure imitation is not a proper method; we must absorb the merits of western poetic forms and join them with the unique traits of Chinese, thereby establishing our own new poetic form.]
Wang’s comments on the sonnet conflate two of modernizing China’s greatest fears: seeming traditional and seeming belated. In his opinion, the diffusion of the sonnet in China had come to symbolize a hybrid specter that conjoined the haunting of an abandoned, classical past (“regulated verse”) with the threat of an oppressive foreign influence (“pure imitation” and subordination to western models). The sonnet posed a threat, as opposed to a boon, to the realization of a unique modern Chinese culture. Thus, Wang called for the creation of a new sonnet that was a consciously made Chinese product infused with favorable distillations of its western counterpart. New Poetry writers had to maintain a creative activism in their employment of the sonnet so that its Chineseness would be assured. The sonnet was desirable and useful to a China in cultural transition because of both its resemblance to classical forms and its sparkle as something foreign and new, but those characteristics were also its greatest perils.

Wang failed to recognize, in his chiefly bibliographical account of the sonnet in China, the discursive rationale by which Chinese intellectuals had already attempted to render the sonnet uniquely modern and Chinese. Even the very first attempt at using the form had been an overt exercise in giving China a voice in a modern world system. Hu Shi’s 胡适 (1891-1962) celebrated “A Sonnet” demonstrated how the form, long before its systematic adoption into Chinese letters, was used to escape the bonds of traditional Chinese verse and cultural belatedness by participating in global discussions of universal values.

On December 22, 1914, Hu offered the poem, “A Sonnet,” in English to the Cornell Cosmopolitan Club. Its unassuming presentation as an indefinite specimen of the genre (a c-d-c, d-c-d variant of the Petrarchan sonnet) is betrayed by its solemn content. He writes:
“Let here begin a Brotherhood of Man,
     Wherein the West shall freely meet the East,
     And man greet man as man—greatest as least.
To know and love each other is our plan.”

So spoke our Founders; so our work began:
     We made no place for pleasant dance and feast,
     But each man of us vowed to serve as priest
In Mankind’s holy war and lead the van.

What have we done in ten years passed away?
     Little, perhaps; no one grain salts the sea.
     But we have faith that come it will—that Day—

When these our dreams no longer dreams shall be,
     And every nation on the earth shall say:
     “ABOVE ALL NATIONS IS HUMANITY!”

The opening expression of universal brotherhood combines an earnest idealism with Hu’s experiences as an exchange student in America. Coming from a nation torn by East-West animosity, Hu lived a hope that had mostly been a nightmare for the vast majority of his countrymen. His studies abroad were vital labor in bridging the individual and cultural gaps and differences between East and West.

In the second quatrain of the sonnet, Hu juxtaposes two syntactically equivalent
acts: “So spoke our Founders; so our work began.” The Founders’ pronouncement and the workers’ acts are grammatically equated, but their semantic distinctiveness wedges them apart in two important aspects that speak to Hu’s personal experience: proximity and activity. The juxtaposition of the two clauses reveals a progression from past to present and from passivity to activity, rendering the pairing a contrastive conjunction: founders once spoke, but Hu and others now do the work. The past housed the words and imaginings of an East-West harmony, whereas the present marked the time for Hu to realize them in action. Hu’s sonnet was an appendage of his efforts to promote a “HUMANITY” above all nations, an active agent in his work to effect culture equality and peace. A year later, in the first entry of his journal (January 1, 1915), he would record another sonnet in English that reiterated this hope and commitment. Staged as a sort of slave uprising against the god of war and death, his sonnet “To Mars: Morituri te salutamus” promises the arrival of two new titans, Love and Law, who would right all wrongs, “and reign o’er mankind as one common fold.” Both poems exerted a concerted effort to enlist the sonnet in projects with universalizing trajectories. These initial idealistic attempts to employ the sonnet by a Chinese writer, though only tiny grains salting the sea, would, in the end, make waves that would wash over the entire New Poetry movement.

Six years after Hu Shi’s delivery of “A Sonnet” in the United States, Zheng Baiji 郑伯奇 (1895-1979) would publish the first Petrarchan sonnet in Chinese from another foreign city, Tokyo (1920). Where Hu had employed the form to participate in discussions of cosmopolitan views and values, Zheng used the sonnet to champion a spirit of Chinese nationalism and modernization. Zheng’s poem, though ostensibly written for a friend in Taiwan, in its final tercets blossoms into political allegory. Lines 9-11 portray traditional landmarks of Chinese geography as being taken
over by a wave of modern youthful vigor which the author calls upon his readers to join:

太平洋的怒潮已打破了黃海的死水

泰山最高峯上的積雪，已見消於旭日；

我們的前途漸來了！呀！創造，奮鬥，努力!"9

[The Pacific’s angry tide has blasted the dead waters of the Yellow Sea.

Old snow drifts atop Mount Tai have vanished in the morning sun;

Our future has gradually made its arrival! Ahhh! Create, fight, work!]

On a formal level, Zheng’s sonnet embodies the natural destruction and change depicted in his poem. The stale and stagnant monuments of old poetry are vaporized and purified by the force of his new poetic creation.

Hu and Zheng’s first attempts at composing sonnets appealed to universal brotherhood and the idols of youth and progress to communicate across cultures and to promote internal cultural renewal. However, their creations were not conscious, systematic attempts to incorporate the form into Chinese letters, but were vehicles for the expression of personal political messages. The naturalizing process of the sonnet necessarily entailed free and conscious rationalization. By invoking the sonnet within debates about musicality and rhythmics, the form was adapted to local exigencies and nativized. Furthermore, by the universalist nature of an appeal to rhythm, the New Poetry writers involved entered into a more advantageous political space, in which they were able to rationalize a universal logic and aesthetic right to appropriate the foreign form into modern Chinese letters.

A few years after his recitation of “A Sonnet,” Hu pioneered a vernacular
movement that took direct aim at classical Chinese language (文言文wenyanwen) and prosody and set the internal revision of Chinese poetry into motion. In his treatise on New Poetry, “谈新诗” Tan xinshi (1917), Hu established the standard for a whole generation of writers with a dual emphasis on the use of the vernacular and the rejection of classical poetics. He saw both measures as inseparable and essential to liberating the people's minds and habits from the oppression of traditional language and literary forms. Classical prosody, in his opinion, shackled the expressivity of poets and aborted any chance for the liberation of modern ideas and emotions. He writes:

我常说, 文学革命的运动, 不论古今中外, 大概都是从"文的形式"一方面下手, 大概都是先要求语言文字文体等方面的大解放. 欧洲三百年来各国国语的文学起来代替拉丁文学时, 是语言文字的大解放; 十八十九世纪英国华次活(Wordsworth)等人所提倡的文学改革, 是诗的语言文字的解放; 近几十年来西洋诗界的革命, 是语言文字和文体的解放. 这一次中国文学的革命运动, 也是先要求语言文字和文体的解放. 新文学的语言是白话的, 新文学的文体是自由的, 是不拘格律的. 初看起来, 这都是 "文的形式" 一方面的问题, 算不得重要. 却不知道形式和内容有密切的关系. 形式上的束缚, 使精神不能自由发展, 使良好的内容不能充分表现. 若想有一种新内容和新精神, 不能不先打破那些束缚精神的枷锁镣铐. 因此, 中国近年的新诗运动可算得是一种 "诗体的大解放." 因为有了这一层诗体的解放, 所以丰富的材料, 精密的观察, 高深的理想, 复杂的感情, 方才能跑到诗里去. 五七言八句的律诗决不能
I often say that literary revolutions, be they in the past or in the present, largely arise first from emendations to literary form, that is, the liberation of language and literary style. Three hundred years ago, the European nations’ vernacular traditions replaced the Latin classics. This was their liberation of language and literature. In 1819, France's Hugo, England's Wordsworth, and other poets called for poetic reform—a liberation of language and literature. In the past few decades, the Western poetic scene has had yet another poetic revolution. This has also been a liberation of language and literature. Now, at the time of our own literary revolution, we too require the liberation of language and literary form: the language of New Literature is baihua. New Literature’s form is free and unencumbered by traditional metrics. At first glance, perhaps these literary issues seem trivial, but that is only because the intimate relationship between form and content has not been realized. The bonds of traditional form block the spirit's development and prevent beauty from coming forth. If what is wished for is a new content and spirit, it is imperative that the spirit's enslaving shackles first be cast aside. For this reason, in recent years, the Chinese New Poetry movement can be called "The Great Liberation of Poetic Form." As a result of this liberation, lush content, acute insight, deep thought and complex, intricate emotions have all gravitated toward New Poetry. The old 5-7
character, 8-sentence regulated verse could never permit the growth of lush content. Furthermore, 28 character jueju could never produce acute insight. The set length, 5-7 character lines could never artfully form deep thoughts and intricate emotions.]

Accordingly, Hu Shi saw the possibility for spiritual maturation arising out of the restructuring of poetic forms. The 5-7 character fixed quatrain (绝句 jueju) and regulated verses (律诗 lüshi) refer to the classical shi forms used for centuries which had, in his opinion, exhausted (some have even claimed, statistically) the potential for new growth and expression. With heavy handed references to the experiences of the West, Hu Shi emphasized the need for continual artistic and linguistic evolution. For China, he believed, this required the adoption of new characters and grammars and the elimination of obsolete, prescriptive poetic meters. With intentional disregard for a potential replacement (after all, free verse had been crucial in the reinvention of the West), Hu was satisfied to promote solely the rejection of poetic meter as a gateway to lush, insightful, and emotionally complex artistic expression. His sense of anything goes outside of traditional forms is captured in a single phrase from the same document: “诗该怎样做，就怎样做” (“Whatever the poem needs to do, just do it”).

A contemporary leading figure during the same May Fourth era, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978), echoed and expanded upon Hu Shi’s sentiments in his theoretical works and early poetry. Two years after the publication of Hu’s treatise on New Poetry, Guo would creatively drape a musical overlay onto the former’s call for unfettered poetic play. In his first collection of poems,女神 Nüshen (Goddess) (1921), considered one of the
crowning achievements of New Poetry, Guo offers a host of experimental, free-verse pieces. The small, Hellenic-inspired drama that begins the collection, also named “Goddess,” is a thinly veiled, westernized allegory for the casting off of traditional literary chains. The piece is particularly interesting in the way it infuses Hu Shi’s dual-pronged approach to literary reformation with the descriptive facility of musical metaphors, which his generation would employ in its rationalization of the sonnet.

In “Goddess,” a sacred line of statuesque muses from a mountain shrine comes to life and proclaims the death of their old poses, music, and sources of inspiration. The rigged, mute pipes each goddess once held in her cold hands are blasted away by the advent of a new, more powerful music of nature threatening destructive change:

(女神之一)

在这优美的世界当中，

吹奏起无声的音乐雝融.

不知道月儿圆了多少回，

照着这生命底音波吹送.

(女神之二)

可是，我们今天的音调，

为什么总是不能和谐？

怕在这宇宙之中，

有什么浩劫要再！——

听呀！那喧嚷着的声音,
愈见高，愈见逼近！

那是海中的涛声？空中的风声？

可还是——罪恶底交鸣？

[...]

(女神之一)

我要去创造些新的光明，

不能再在这壁龛之中做神。42

[(Goddess one)]

Within this beautiful world,

our mouths blow silent tunes. Fusing.

I wonder how full the moon will be when it returns,

to waft upon us a wave of life-giving sound. Shining.

(Goddess two)

Yes, but why do our notes

now ring hollow?

I fear that within this world,

a calamity is about to occur—

Listen! The clamor from afar.

The louder it is, the closer it gets.

Is that the sound of the ocean roar? The rushing wind in space?

Perhaps—a shrill, evil omen?
(Goddess one)

I wish to create new rays of light,
I can no longer remain a goddess in a stone shrine.]

The musical goddesses in Guo’s poem awaken to the quandary of their own muteness. They are baffled by their hollow sounds, though almost immediately expectant of the arrival of new songs. In the place of their old melodies, the first goddess prays for a new tune from the moon. While conversing with her sisters, the second goddess hears a rumble approaching in the distance. The fact that the sound appears to be coming from the ocean (海) curiously hints at its western origins. Somewhat anxious and apprehensive about these natural sounds, Guo's goddesses nonetheless agree to participate in welcoming and recording a new earthly music. One of their chief tasks is the fashioning of new receptacles to contain these tunes. A third goddess calls for the creation of these new containers: “姊妹们，新造的葡萄酒浆不能盛在那旧了的皮囊” ("Sisters, new wine / cannot be contained in old husks"). Her admonition is to prepare new vessels for new music. The biblical nature of the reference (Matt. 9.17), which would not have been generally recognized by Guo’s readers, nonetheless imbues her statement with more than just common, metaphorical substance:

neque mittunt vinum novum in utres veteres alioquin rumpuntur utres et vinum effunditur et utres pereunt sed vinum novum in utres novos mittunt et ambo conservantur.45

[Neither do they put new wine into old bottles. Otherwise the bottles break,
and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish. But new wine they put into new bottles: and both are preserved.]

The reference adds a cultural imperative to the act of fashioning new poetic vessels for forthcoming melodies. With Dantesque-like flair, Guo’s third goddess seems to suggest the replacement of the *vetus* (eastern) with the *novum* (western). The fresh, messianic mead arriving in the East can be received only with the proper type of vessel. The symbolic nature of the pronouncement intimates that new songs and new structures in China occur under reference to the West.

While in some aspects a more visibly political allegory (a battle between kings occurs in the second half of the poem), “Goddess” remains a prognostication of an escape for Chinese literary form from its perceived ancient confines. In the poem, the key terms for “sound” (声 and 音) are ubiquitous and most directly convey the message that literary reform depends largely upon musical moderations, what the poem’s goddesses often refer to with the words 音乐 *yinyue* (music), 雍融 *yongrong* (blending), and 和谐 *hexie* (harmony). Guo Moruo, like Hu Shi, also believed that the emergent Chinese spirit actually produced sounds distinct from those of defunct imperial times. For him, the quality of that cadence resembled the randomness, power, immensity, and violence of the contemporary human spirit that produced it. Guo took Hu’s admonition to follow “the natural rhythms of expression” and the “natural harmony of words” to an extreme with the exclamation that he wished to burst his own vocal chords (我要把我的声带唱破). At the same time, his framing of “Goddess” in Hellenic and biblical terms reveals his sense that the new, Chinese sound would musically resemble and blend with letters from the West.
Despite Guo’s and others’ initial fervor of intimations that New Poetry would answer only to the virile tune of free verse, a complication arose in the 1920s when the popularity of the sonnet form turned the New Poets’ attention back onto the importance of poetic meter. In 1920, Li Sichun 李思純 (1893-1960) became one of the first intellectuals to initiate a revaluation of New Poetry’s direction. His call to pay greater heed to form risked ridicule from the artistic majority emboldened by poetry’s open forum. Nonetheless, he insisted that if New Poetry truly hoped to replace the ponderous legacy of classical poetry, it could not afford to reject meter any longer:

現在的新詩,狠有不滿足的地方, 懺疑他已代替舊詩的能力. 這是我望國內新文家的努力了. [...] 我認爲詩的形式是一箇重要問題. [...] 藝術的作用, 完全屬於形式的方面, 外象的方面. 而不屬於質的方面, 內容的方面. 48

[Today’s New Poetry possesses many incomplete features, for which I highly doubt it has already replaced the capabilities of old poetry. This is precisely what I wish our New Culture writers to pursue diligently. [...] I believe that poetic form is an issue of profound importance, for it shares a deep connection to poetic art. [...] Art’s function depends entirely upon the aspects of form and outward image, not those of essence and content.]

Adding his own to Li’s voice of reason, the New Moon49 poet Wen Yiduo diligently attempted to ground the pursuit of new letters in a more self-conscious, localized, and disciplined praxis. He believed that only a more sober marriage of East and West would engender the new cultural creation that intellectuals longed for. Only when writers ceased
to practice reckless utilitarianism in pursuit of western modernism (非功利的文学观) and returned to their origins could they more honestly face the West and hope to revive Chinese culture; they should “扎根中国而又面向世界的” (“root themselves in China and then face the world”). Wen’s frequently published articles and poems went a long way toward raising the consciousness of writers about the necessity of rhythm in the formation of a modern poetic idiom.

Wen began anchoring the aimlessness of New Poetry energies with two critical analyses of Guo Moruo’s famed collection of poetry cited earlier, Goddess (1921): (1) “女神之时代精神” Nushen zhi shidai jingshen (“The Zeitgeist of Goddess”) (June 6, 1923), and (2) 女神之地方色彩 Nushen zhi defang secai (“The Local Tone of Goddess”) (June 10, 1923). Wen began writing his commentary on Guo’s work during his free time as a student at the Chicago Institute of Arts in 1922. The first article, which appeared a few days before the second and was much less critical, aimed merely to address certain attributes of Guo’s collection that mirrored those of his period (it was scientific, energetic, tormented, western, liberated, etc.). In the second article, he unleashed his critique of Guo and the poetic rage that he encouraged.

In “The Local Tone of Goddess,” Wen discourages the quick, utilitarian trend of mimicking Western style and content. Instead, he implicitly encourages his readers to embark on a much more difficult task: to understand their own as well as other foreign cultures profoundly enough that they might attain to a complete newness of expression. This proposition requires a more sincere effort and dedication to the arts than were currently being practiced. He challenges writers to reevaluate their motives behind the pursuance of the “new” (新 xin). In his opinion, it is not enough to claim newness of
expression merely as a result of showcasing what is thought locally to be novel (e.g. doing what Baudelaire did, but in Chinese). This kind of newness is not aware of its own historicity, nor does it promote the development of art generally or locally, for something that is truly new or modern will not just be so as a local novelty, but will in a very real, existential sense be unique from all other creations. As Wen explains, in his evaluation of the New Poetry movement:

我总认为新诗迳直是‘新’的,不但新于中国固有的诗,而且新于西方固有的诗。言之,它不做纯粹的本地诗,但还要保存本地的色彩,它不要做纯粹的外洋诗,但又尽量地吸收外洋诗的长处;它要做中西艺术结合的ไอ้.

[Ultimately, I believe that New Poetry is truly new, both with respect to Chinese and to Western poetry. In other words, it is not a pure, native poetry, though it still preserves local color. At the same time, it is not purely foreign either, though it draws heavily upon the contributions of Western poetry. In this way, it seeks to engender through the coupling of Chinese and Western arts a handsome, new child.]

Essential to the creation of that new child, Wen insists, is a return to a local consciousness in the form of respect for time and place. Poetry is an outgrowth of life and life is contained by place and period. He continues:

在寻常的方言中 “时代精神”同 “地方色彩” 两个名词, 艺术家又常讲自创力 originality, 各作家有各作家底时代与地方, 各团体有各团体底时
代与地方，各不皆同；这样自创力自然有产生底可能了。我们的新诗人若时时不忘我们的“今时”同我们的“此地”，我们自会有了自创力，我们的作品既不同于今日以前的旧艺术，又不同于中国以外的洋艺术。52

[In modern parlance, the two terms “zeitgeist” and “local color” are often invoked. Artists frequently speak of creativity—“originality”; every poet has his or her time and place, every group has its time and place, and all are unique. For this reason, the very possibility exists for creative production. If our poets will not often forget their own “time” and their own “place,” we will naturally accrue our own powers of originality; our works, then, will naturally differ from those of the past as well as distinguish themselves from those abroad.]

At the time, Wen observes, the collective sound of Chinese poetry was indistinct. It needed, first, to refamiliarize itself with its own culture in order to become something new and Chinese. This was Wen’s main criticism of Guo’s poetry: it erred into the realm of seeming like another’s poetry, mistaking itself for a translation of Western poetry, because it failed to transmit its own Chineseness. Wen attributes one of the chief causes of Guo’s aesthetic failure in the Goddess to his inability to understand his own culture: “女神底作者，这样看来，定不是对于我国文化真能了解” (“From this, we can clearly see that the author of the Goddess had no real understanding of Chinese culture”).53 Finally, Wen suggested that two things be implemented to correct the direction of the New Poetry movement: (1) a restoration of faith in Chinese culture, and (2) the study and
comprehension of Chinese culture:

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[I believe that we must first recover our faith in traditional Chinese culture, because, both theoretically and realistically, it is impossible to create ex nihilo; we can only, and should only, construct this new house on old foundations. The second thing is that we must then seek to understand our own Eastern culture.]

The area in which Wen saw traditional Chinese culture contributing most to the formation of New Poetry was in a reassessment of its aversion to classical poetry and prosody. The indisputable rejection of all classical verse and meters, he believed, was an aesthetically unfounded notion. The effect of Hu Shi’s rallying call in 1916 to halt imitating the ancients (不摹仿古人 bu mofang guren) had gone far afield to the detriment of a proper understanding of prosody and aesthetics. Hu Shi had argued for this approach initially to free writers from old habits and to mobilize them to realize a new form of poetic expression that would merit the title of modern. In his famous essay “诗的格律” Shi de gelu (“On Poetic Form”) (1926), Wen provides a counterbalance to Hu’s progressivist summons by arguing for universal standards of form and rhythm in Chinese poetics that establish the possibility for a modern convergence of the old and the new, the local and the foreign. He insists that only by a reassessment of the fundamental, rhythmic nature of poetry could a truly new Chinese poetry be created.
“On Poetic Form” begins by drawing a simple analogy to the game of chess. In a manner typical of his sauntering prose, Wen mentions rather unremarkably that as chess cannot do without its rules, so poetry is not without its structure. He further illustrates his argument from analogy by asking readers to imagine what kind of game chess would be if the pieces were haphazardly scattered on the board. In effect, he concludes, it would entirely cease to be a game; there would be no possible moves for there would be no objective. In other words, “游戏的趣味是要在一种规定的格律之内出奇制胜” ("the scope and wonder of game arise from the foundation of rule"). Wen affirms that “作诗的趣味也是一样的” ("the allure of poetry is exactly the same"). The analogy is successful in that it is largely irrefutable.

From here, Wen capitalizes on his favorable position to suggest that any gamer worth his salt subsists off of that system of rule. In the realm of poetry, he remarks, any decent writer delights in the structure of his dance. What seem to be old, metrical shackles to the novice are delightful bells to the dexterous feet of a master. Translating Bliss Perry, he writes:

差不多没有诗人承认他们真正给格律缚束住了．他们乐意戴着脚镣跳舞，并且要戴别个诗人的脚镣．

[Almost no poet will admit that they are truly in bondage to form. In fact, they happily carry their shackles about dancing, all the while donning those of their peers as well.]

In this way, Wen also implies that those who complain about poetic meter or refuse to employ it are, in reality, hack poets:
As a result, I fear the more competent the writer, the more inclined he is to carry his shackles about so as to execute the most ecstatic and intricate dance steps. Only those who cannot dance curse shackles and obstructions. Only those who cannot pen poems feel that form is an unbearable restraint. For these, form becomes an obstacle. But where a true author is concerned, form naturally becomes an instrument through which to showcase their talent.

Instead of learning how to dance with their chains, these utilitarian mannerists make gestures to a renewed aesthetic of the natural, organic and emotional. But Wen draws an important distinction for his imagined opponents between the natural, which they allege they convey, and the artistic, within which they insist they labor.

By definition, Wen explains, the realms of Art and Nature are antithetical. One can’t appeal to one while working within the other:

诗国里的革命家喊道“皈返自然”! 其实我们要知道自然界的格律, 虽然有些像蛛丝马迹, 但是依然可以找得出来. 不过自然界 的格律不圆满的时候多, 所以必须艺术来补充它. 这样讲来, 绝对的写实主义便 是艺术的破产. “自然的终点便是艺术的起点”, 王尔德说得很对. 自然并不
尽是美的。自然中有美的时候，是自然类似艺术的时候。最好拿造型艺术来证明这一点。我们常常称赞美的山水，讲它可以入画。的确中国人认为美的山水，是以像不像中国的山水画为标准的。61

[Our revolutionary minded poets proclaim "Return to nature!" Actually, if we wish to know the laws of nature, we need only follow its traces to its discovery. Nonetheless, the natural world's form is most often incomplete, imperfect, thus the need for art to complete it. As a result, absolute fidelity to writing the world constitutes the bankruptcy of art. "The end of nature is the starting point of art," Oscar Wilde rightly noted. Nature is not always beautiful. In fact, when it is, that is precisely when it is closest to art. It would be best to take an example from the creative world to prove my point. We often praise the beauty of the landscape, speaking of how it can enter a painting. Chinese actually sense the beauty of a landscape based on its reflection of the standards of landscape painting.]

The slogan under which Wen’s so-called revolutionary poets compose is ultimately a hollow one reflecting their own self-deception. The pretense of art is the supplement of Nature and any statement to the contrary of necessity proposes itself as a rhetorical (or meta-rhetorical) supplement—Art, in other words. The Oscar Wilde citation in the passage marks the line dividing the realms of Nature and Art, as well as the beginning of Wen’s privileging of the artistic reality of human experience. Intuitively, he understands that humans, while being natural creatures, have minds that are entirely supplemental to Nature. Humankind is geared to make and see the beautiful, and beauty is an auxiliary to
what is natural. 62

In Wen’s opinion, vanguard writers who professed a wholly natural aesthetic were merely in denial or wittingly deceptive of their own logic for artifice. He affirms that when to the human mind something natural appears beautiful, it seems thus precisely because it conforms to a standard; it is not beautiful an sich but is so because it is part of an epiphenomenon: “自然并不尽是美的。自然中有美的时候，是自然类似艺术的时候” (“Nature is not always beautiful. In fact, when it is, that is precisely when it is closest to art”). 63 Proceeding again from general to specific terms, he then draws his argument into closer proximity to the issues of language and poetry:

这径直是讲自然在模仿艺术了. 自然界当然不是绝对没有美的. 自然界里面也可以发现美来, 不过那是偶然的事. 偶然在言语里发现一点自然的节奏, 便说言语就是诗, 便要打破诗的音节, 要它变得和言语一样——这真是诗的自杀政策了(注意我并不反对用土白作诗, 我并且相信土白是我们新诗的领域里, 一块非常肥沃的土壤, 理由等将来再仔细的讨论. 我们现在要注意的只是土白可以 “做” 诗; 这 “做” 字便说明了土白须要一番锻炼选择的工作 然后才能成诗. 64

[That being said, the natural world is in no way devoid of beauty. Within nature one can see the emergence of beauty, but it is only incidental. Incidentally, one may also find a bit of rhythm in natural speech. But then to claim that colloquial language is a poem in itself and to wish to abolish poetic feet so as to make poetry resemble spoken words is the death toll of
poetry. (You will have noticed that I do not argue against the use of common speech to make poems, which I, in fact, strongly believe is within the scope of New Poetry, and an extremely fertile field for it. But I shall explain that in greater detail later on. What concerns us now is whether an ant can make poetry or not; "make" implying that only after an act of strenuous effort and selection could it compose a proper poem).]

Wen admits that a bit of beauty may be picked up in the natural world or in natural speech, but these occurrences are random. In other words, Nature is not beautiful in and of itself. What is implied in his argument is that these coincidences are a function of human perception, the evidence of a supplemental standard of beauty that “randomly” stumbles upon reflections of itself that seem to come to be without external intervention. This standardization of perception renders the incidentally beautiful more inevitable than strikingly serendipitous; the mind is bound to discover what it engineered to find. In any case, Wen believes, these “natural” occurrences are hardly the grounds for scrapping poetic structures. Poetry by definition is the result of artifice, even when it discovers its own reflection in supposed natural phenomena, for, after all, such occurrences are themselves consequences of mind. Common expressions might seem poetic, but that recognition is entirely contingent upon prior standardization. In Wen’s estimation, the principle, universal aspect of poetry that differentiates it from all things natural and all other genres is its rhythmic structure.

Rhythm is the chief marker of artifice and the life-blood of poetry. For Wen, those practitioners of New Poetry who disdain form and rhythm focus too much on the primary material of poetry, ignoring the place of the literary arts to bring raw emotion and
personality into an appreciable form. He has harsh words for those sentimental, self-proclaimed "romantic" poets who gaze affectionately at themselves in their formless, literary mirrors:

又有一种打着浪漫主义的旗帜来向格律下攻击令的人. 对于这种人, 我只要告诉他们一件事实. 如果他们要像现在这样的讲什么 浪漫主义, 就等于承认他们没有创造文艺的诚意. 因为, 照他们的成绩看来, 他们压根儿就没有注重到文艺的本身, 他们的自身的人格是再美没有的, 只要把这个赤裸裸的和盘托出, 便是艺术的大成功了. 你没有听见他们天天唱道 “自我的表现”吗? 他们确乎只认识了文艺的原料, 没有认识那将原料变成文艺所必须的工具. 他们用了文字作表现的工具, 不过是偶然的事, 他们最称心的工作是把所谓 “自我” 披露出来, 是让世界知道 “我” 也是一个多才多艺, 善病工愁的少年; 并且在文艺的镜子里照见自己那倜傥的风姿, 还带着几滴多情的眼泪, 啊! 啊! 那是多么有趣的事! 多么浪漫! 不错, 他们所谓浪漫主义, 正浪漫在这点上, 和文艺的派别绝不发生关系. 这种人的目的既不在文艺, 当然要他们遵从诗的格律来做诗, 是绝对办不到的; 因为有了格律的范围, 他们的诗就根本写不出来了, 那岂不失了他们那 “风流自赏” 的本旨吗? 所以严格一点讲起来, 这一种伪浪漫派的作品, 当它作把戏看可以, 当它作西洋镜看也可以, 但是万不可当它作诗看.65

[There is yet another “romantic” banner that certain people use to strike
down poetic form. To these folks, I only have one thing to say. If they want to conform to contemporary ways of speaking of romanticism, then they will be frankly admitting that they completely lack creativity. For, with respect to their successes, their roots are not in the literary arts. Their private selves or integrity lacks beauty. They wish only to hold out a naked display of themselves and this is their grand artistic accomplishment. Have you not heard them chanting constantly “self-expression”? In reality, they really only comprehend the primary material of art, while not recognizing the tools required to mold that material into an art form. They use characters as a tool of expression, but this is only an occasional event. Their most cherished work is to publicize their inner selves and let the world know that their “I” is ranked among the artistic, talented and frustrated mass of young poets. Furthermore looking upon their surprisingly beautiful image within the mirror of art brings a few, sentimental tears to their eyes (ha, ha). Quite an interesting scene, really. How romantic! That’s right, their so-called romanticism is precisely this effusion, having absolutely nothing to do with the historical category. These writers aim not for literature. Obviously, if one wished them to follow the standards of meter to make verse, there is absolutely no way they would succeed, because from within a form, their poetry would never emerge. How would that not spoil the aims of their fluid narcissism? On a more serious note, these pseudo-romantic works should be looked at as trifles, or mini-western mirrors, but as poetry, they should not be regarded.]
Wen harshly handles those who speak badly of form, tossing them all into an unfortunate heap of hacks and megalomanicas. This categorization is no doubt a hyperbolic gesture, there being numerous exceptions (Guo Moruo, as Wen noted in his earlier articles, was, in fact, quite a good poet). In the second half of the citation, Wen draws on the stock image of the noble lady or dandy infatuated with her/his own mirror-image, weeping away like Narcissus. The image all at once invokes the interrelated issues of identity, desire, the gaze and experimental self-fashioning. In Wen’s description these poets gaze upon their raw, emotional selves in their verses only to be moved (for love or nostalgia?) by their own likeness. He finds the solipsistic melodrama of the image ridiculously amusing. Wen’s levity with regard to these poets’ attempts at self-fashioning, while demonstrating generally an insensitivity to the crises of personal and national identities, reveals an implicit confidence in his own new found solutions to the problems of Chinese modernism and New Poetry.

Temporarily curbing his ridicule, Wen assumes a more serious posture in order to define this type of effusive, imitative free-versing as nothing more than play, which, he insists, poetry is not. As contradictory as it may seem in light of his own experience, it now follows that poetry has taken on for Wen a very serious aura, one that demands the maintenance of strict standards of craftsmanship and composition. It is not meant to err into the egocentric labyrinths of play or cultural experimentation. Imitative literature, he makes quite clear, is not Chinese literature. For China, this means poetry must be Chinese poetry. The way in which he weds the concept of narcissism and emulation reveals his attitude towards the formulation of unique identity that he addresses in his earlier articles on *Goddess*. Identities are formed in reference to specific times and places, rooted in
complex social, geographical and historical systems. In summary, then, imitating the West is egoistic play in which poetry becomes a means to accentuate nothing more than the will which gives itself over to perpetual self-representations in a vicious cycle of estrangement and approximation. Poetry, as Confucian tradition would also dictate, must be more than effusion and self-reflection; it must be locally particular, permeated by currents greater than its own unrestrained emotion. Ultimately, the thing that corrals individual fervor and raw emotion into a proper poetic manifestation is rhythm/form: “格律就是节奏” (“form is, strictly speaking, rhythm”).

In the second section of his treatise “On Poetic Form,” Wen explains and demonstrates in greater detail what he means when he equates poetic form to rhythm, something New Poetry presently lacks. He begins his analysis by dividing rhythm into two aspects: (1) aural and (2) visual. The audible music of poetry is that aspect that generally best represents it. Using examples from his own and others’ work, Wen zeroes in on what he senses are two natural poetic feet in Chinese: the two and three-character word units. Building these feet up into higher structures, Wen also proposes the use of the quatrain, a popular macro-structure in use at the time, as an acceptable option in composing New Poetry. Overall, though, Wen’s scansion lacks the inspired, prescriptive force that one anticipates might balance out his pointed criticism of vanguard formlessness. In the end, what he mostly illustrates is a principle: the need to affix a regulated meter (which will vary on occasion according to content and diction) in order to produce harmonious writing. Below are his reflections on the musicality of verse structured by balanced syntax, verse length and poetic feet.
更彻底的讲来，句法整齐不但于音节没有妨碍，而且可以促成音节的调和。这话讲出来，又有人不肯承认了。我们就拿前面的证例分析一遍，看整齐的句法同调和的音节是不是一件事。

[More thoroughly speaking, orderly syntax not only poses no obstacle to sonorous quality put furthermore secures its harmony. In saying this, there will inevitably be those who will refuse to accept it. So, let’s take this example and analyze it for a moment to see if the balance of its syntax and the harmony of its syllables are in fact related.]

孩子们/惊望着/他的/脸色

[The children/fearfully watch/his/expression]

他也/惊望着/炭火的/红光

[He too/ fearfully watches/the coal's/warm glow]

这里每行都可以分成四个音尺，每行有两个“三字尺”（三个字构成的音尺之简称，以后仿此）和两个“二字尺”，音尺排列的次序是不规则的，但是每行必须还他两个“字尺”两个“字尺”的总数，这样写来，音节一定铿锵，同时字数也就整齐了，所以整齐的字句是调和的音节必然产生的现象，绝对的调和音节，字句必定整齐。67

[As one can see, each verse can be divided up into four feet, with each one containing two three-character feet (a shortened name for a three-character
structure that I will hereafter repeat) and two two-character feet. In this way, the meter proceeds with a definite clang, while the regulated number of characters balances it. Therefore, balanced characters and sentences are necessary prerequisites to the production of harmonious meter. A harmonious meter of absolute order will necessarily have a balance of characters and sentences.

Following this example, he draws on his own work, “Dead Waters” (1928), to emphasize his point:

这样讲来, 字数整齐的关系可大了, 因为从这一点表面上的形式, 可以证明诗的内在精神——节奏的存在与否. 如果读者还以为前面的证例不够, 可以用同样的方法分析我的 “死水.” 这首诗从第一行 […]

[In this way, the number of characters is very important, for from this surface structure is revealed a poem's inner spirit—the existence or nonexistence of its rhythm. If the reader believes the previous example is insufficient, they can apply the same measure to my "Dead Waters." From the poem's first line [...]]

这是/一沟/绝望的/死水

[This is/ a channel/ of hopeless/ dead waters.]
的试验。因为近来有许多朋友怀疑到“死水”这一类麻将牌式的格式，所以我今天就顺便把它说明一下。我希望读者注意新诗的音节，从前面所分析的看来，确乎已经有了一种具体的方式可寻。这种音节的方式发现以后，我断言新诗不久定要走进一个新的建设的时期了。无论如何，我们应该承认这在新诗的历史里是一个轩然大波。68

[and onward, every verse employs three two-character feet and one three-character foot, making the character count the same in every line. As a result, I feel that this was the first time I felt completely satisfied with my rhythm. Because others have recently called into doubt the Majiang tile character of the piece, I have felt compelled to explain it a bit. I hope the reader will pay closer attention to meter. From the earlier analysis in this piece, there are indeed already concrete methods to be sought out. After this meter is finally discovered, I avouch that New Poetry will quickly step into a new period of construction. Regardless, we must admit that this is a powerful moment in New Poetry's history.]

Relying on a pleasurable reaction to balanced rhythm contained in his own poem, Wen projects his personal standard and aesthetic conclusion into the hope of a general practice that if followed will usher in a unique phase in the New Poetry movement. All that is needed are the discovery and use of new poetic meters.

Attached to this universal description of audible rhythm, the second aspect of Wen’s conception of form refers more directly to issues of Chinese identity. While the notion of the pictorial or ideographic nature of Chinese characters has become somewhat
of a Western cliché over the centuries, Wen freely utilizes it as an essential characteristic of Chinese literary aesthetics that serves to differentiate Chinese rhythms from the rest. Since the beginning of the literary use of Chinese, the visual aspect of the character/word 作 has been a part of the appreciation of literary texts. Wen uniquely expands this linguistic fact into an architectural aesthetic in which he perceives the syntactic compounding of characters as being as discretely organized as audible feet, which in combination with the latter forms a distinctly Chinese rhythm:

[Naturally, the visual rhythm of poetry is somewhat secondary to the aural facet. However, because our language possesses an imagistic quality, when we Chinese appreciate belles lettres at least half of the effect is transmitted...]

当然视觉方面的问题比较次要的位置. 但是我们的文字是象形的, 我们中国人鉴赏文艺的时间, 至少有一半的印象是要靠眼睛来传达的. 原来文学本是占时间又占空间的一种艺术. 既然占了空间, 却又不能在视觉上引起一种具体的印象——这是欧洲文字的一个遗憾. 我们的文字有了引起这种印象的可能, 如果我们不去利用它, 真是可惜了. 所以新诗采用了西文诗分行写的办法, 的确是很有关系的一件事. 姑无论开端的人 是有意还是无心的, 我们都应该感谢他. 因为这一来, 我们才觉悟了诗的实力不独包括音乐的美 (音节) 绘画的美 (词藻) 并且还有建筑的美 (节的匀称和句的均齐). 这一来, 诗的实力上又添了一支生力军, 诗的声势更加扩大了. 所以如果有人要问新诗的特点是什么, 我们应该回答他: 增加了一种建筑美的可能性是新诗的 特点之一.69
visually. Originally literature occupied both realms of time and space. Though it occupied space, it did not necessarily evince a solid, visual effect—this is the pity of European poetry. On the other hand, our characters hold out the possibility of invoking this type of visual effect. Not utilizing it would be a shame. Therefore, the New Poetry trend of using Western ways of dividing lines is an extremely relevant issue. Tentatively speaking whether a novice writer intends to or not we should nonetheless thank him. That's because in his work we realize a poem's force includes not only musical junctures and sublimity of diction, but also contains an architectural aesthetic (units’ symmetry and phrases’ uniformity). For this reason, the strength of poetry increases and its sonority expands it even further. Consequently, if someone wishes to know what New Poetry is, we must respond: to increase the possibility of an architectural aesthetic is one of its key features.]

Despite his recognition that the visual aspect is secondary in importance to the aural rhythm of poetry, Wen nonetheless appears to place especial value upon it in his definition. As a modernist definition of rhythm designed to accommodate the contradictions of old and new, particular and general, local and foreign, Wen’s architectural aesthetic of rhythm is meant to infuse an appreciable aspect of Chineseness into a universalist definition exclusive to the needs of a modernizing China. It is an overt claim to the undeniable uniqueness of Chinese letters embedded in a universalizing definition of poetic musicality. The visual affect of Chinese characters is something that Western languages can’t reproduce. Consequently, this makes Chinese New Poetry culturally unique in a global,
poetic corpus. Wen amplifies this particularity by suggesting that visual, architectural aesthetics in fact enhance the aural aspects of rhythm, thereby further privileging aesthetically Chinese poetry in the face of potential western hegemonic models. In another sense, the constant, inherent visual nature of Chinese characters renders a priori any transpositions or translations of said foreign models into Chinese, uniquely Chinese and even comparably advantaged.

Nonetheless, Wen’s definition of rhythm/form proposes no radically new poetics. This, however counter-intuitively, marks the modernist nature of his theorization. Its breadth allows for the circumscription of the traditional and the progressive, the local and the foreign in a globalized cognitive system in which time and space converge into a topical, Chinese singularity. What renders his calculation identifiably historical and modern, is precisely its conscientious embrace of contradictory impulses, discourses and realities. What separates Wen’s definition of New Poetry from any other definition in time is the impetus to theorize rhythm at all so as to accommodate radical changes in local and foreign poetics for an emerging, modern Chinese poetics. Because Wen’s theorization of rhythm could, in fact, be applied to both classical and new, local and foreign poetry, it allows for the assimilation of what is other into a discretely defined system of rationalization. Within these denotative parameters something as alien to the Chinese shi 詩 as the sonnet could with little difficulty be translated into a native poetic form. It is precisely Wen’s expansive rationalization of the aspects of New Poetry rhythm that permits the possibility of the following transcultural equivalence:

你做诗模仿十四行体是可以的, 但是你得十二分的小心, 不要把它做得
If you are to imitate the sonnet, feel free, but beware that you not make a regulated Tang verse out of it! I really haven't the faintest idea why the regulated Tang verse can be thus cursed and humiliated! Why cannot the same characters used to write a poem [i.e. sonnet] be used to write a classical, regulated poem? Isn't a modern poem's aspects of sectional symmetry and phrasal uniformity a kind of classical, regulated verse?

In “On Poetic Form,” Wen articulates a poetics of rhythm that emphasizes local, Chinese uniqueness in terms of time, space and rhythm. He also theorizes modern Chinese poetics in such a way that it preserves the past while permitting the relevance of the present and future, and via its own universalized terms allows for the possibility of systematized assimilation of foreign models, such as the sonnet, into its own native form of metric expression.

A week before Wen’s “On New Poetry” was published, fellow New Moon poet Rao Mengkan 饶孟侃 (1902-67) published his own thoughts on New Poetry in the Chen bao fu kan (Morning Edition Supplement) (May 6, 1926), that adds clarity and force to Wen’s attempts to standardize world poetry via the universality of a rhythmic aesthetic. Where Wen chose to issue rhetorical taunts, however, Rao stated directly how a technical understanding of poetics based on the art and rhythm of the poetic foot renders obsolete entrenched prejudices with regard to what is old and new, native and foreign,
which threaten to entangle modern progress:

[Actually, strictly speaking, not only can new and old poetry not be distinguished from each other, but the distinctions between native and foreign poetry can also not be made with any certainty.]

In Rao’s analysis, this understanding serves as the premise upon which western poetic forms, including the sonnet, could be absorbed into the New Poetry movement. He explains:

[Therefore, if we speak exclusively of poetic feet, doing away with the issue of characters, we find that we can use foreign meters in New Poetry. Examples of this abound in the New Poetry movement: rhyming couplets,
the ballad, the sonnet, etc. Regarding the use of these foreign genres, one should only ask if they work well or not. The issue of local or foreign does not enter into the question. For example, the sonnet is not originally a British poetic form, but originates in Italy. However, because it functions well in British poetry, it is now considered one of their own poetic forms. From this we can see that not only does the debate between old and new have no foundation, but that there exists no firm standard with which to distinguish local from foreign.

Rao’s paradigmatic modernist rationalization clearly reveals the logical consequences of New Poetry discourses of musicality. The reduction of poetic expression to an atomic unit situated within a pleasurable, rhythmic syntax, dispels the accumulative force of larger historical and cultural polemics and the obstacles they pose to Chinese modernization. Under these conditions, and with the support of historical evidences (e.g. the experiences of Italy and England), the sonnet was eventually rationalized into its proper place as a Chinese genre.

Approximately eight years after Rao and Wen’s publications, another prominent leader of the New Moon poets applied directly the logic of the musical rationale to the writing of sonnets in Chinese. In his article, “谈十四行” *Tan shisihang* (“On the Sonnet”) (1934), Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋 (1903-1987) ties up the notions of sound, translation, universal history, and language in order to solidify the sonnet’s lasting significance in China. The casualness with which Liang treats his own thoughts on the topic must not be taken as lightly as he insists he delivers them: “近见颇有人试作十四行体，故略谈十四
行体之艺术如此” ("Lately, I have seen a great number of people trying their hand at the sonnet. So, I’ve decided to speak of its art") .

Despite the occasional nature of his comments, Liang reveals a great deal about his personal and generational interest in the sonnet form. The essay begins by laying emphasis on the historical process by which the sonnet would become such a universal form of expression. Liang’s rehearsal rightly begins at the sonnet’s Italian origins:

这个字源于意大利文之 sonetto, 原意为‘声音.’ 但丁皮特拉克均曾采用此种诗体, 而和以音乐. 有意而法, 由法而英, 此种诗体遂成为最流行的—种抒情诗体.

[This word originates from the Italian “sonetto,” meaning originally “sound.” Dante and Petrarch both adopted this form, accompanying it with music. From Italy to France and from France to England, this poetic form would become one of the most popular lyrical forms.]

Liang emphasizes the notion that the sonnet is an international genre while also tacitly uncovering the mechanism that allows it to travel globally: its musicality. The historical reality of the sonnet’s seeming ubiquity spurred on and sanctioned efforts by intellectuals to adopt and to modify the genre to local exigencies. Despite the differences between languages and poetics of Indo-European and Chinese origins, Liang Shiqiu and others saw adoption and alteration of the sonnet as an evolutionary inevitability. Sonnet scholar Lu Dejun explains:

中国诗人认为，十四行由意大利移植到英国时，既然可以有一些变化，

我们的语言与欧洲距离那么远， 也该可以有一些变化.
[Chinese poets believed that inasmuch as transference of the sonnet from Italy to England required some changes, because of the distance between Chinese and European languages, some changes would also be in order.]

Lu’s assessment of the situation echoes the motivations and justifications of Chinese writers at the time, who appealed to the musical nature of the sonnet as a way of accounting for developments in the New Poetry movement. Liang’s explanation exemplifies the ways in which New Poetry intellectuals employed the discourse of musicality to fashion an argument for the sonnet’s universality, and, hence, its inevitable sinification.

Key terms in the introduction to Liang’s essay underlie his logical, historical progression; 声音 shengyin (sound), 音乐 yinyue (music), and 抒情 shuqing (lyric) all call attention to the etymological and practiced sense of the musical that the sonnet form embodied for Chinese intellectuals. Furthermore, as an especially versatile type of music, the form then travels throughout Europe to become the most dispersed and popular of global poetic forms. In the logic of Liang’s rationalization, the sonnet’s etymological origins and early development are inextricably bound up with a perception of its being a particular type of sound, with a shared compatibility to contemporary, instrumentalized music. Liang’s attention to these correspondences reflects the attention his contemporaries paid to the issues of rhythm and form in New Poetry.

As the essay progresses, Liang addresses a concern that prolific historian Wang Li would express years later regarding the sonnet’s similarity to classical Chinese genres. He touches on some commonplaces of the sonnet’s similarities to classical, regulated verse to which we have already been introduced. First, the circular structure of the sonnet’s content
resembles that of the traditional, Chinese prose essay, possessing an introduction, development, complication and resolution (起-承-转-合). Second, its precise, balanced and rigid structure resembles the Tang’s regulated verse: “中国诗里，律诗最像十四行体” (“In Chinese poetry, regulated verse most closely resembles the sonnet”). Furthermore, Liang offers his own historical analysis of the sonnet’s function in European cultures by suggesting the potential for its participation in an entirely new linguistico-musical direction.

Despite their similarities, Liang affirms, the sonnet form is not as restrictive as classical, regulated verse. Quoting Wordsworth’s poem “Scorn not the Sonnet,” Liang draws on Wordsworth as emphatic support for his generation's use of the sonnet as a modern form:

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic! you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours; with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
With it Camoëns soothed an exile's grief;
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
His visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land
To struggle through dark ways; and, when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few!\textsuperscript{78}

Within “Scorn not the Sonnet,” Liang rediscoveres the metaphor for his own understanding of the sonnet’s musical faculties and their historical relevance. The poem metaphorizes the sonnet into a variety of instruments by which Wordsworth engages his readers in lively description while also justifying its ultimate usefulness at different times and places. The sonnet as 喇叭 laba (trumpet), 笛子 dizi (flute), and 琵琶 pipa (lute) served specific purposes to a number of canonical European poets in their various successes and trials. Furthermore, Liang discovers in Wordsworth’s sonnet an impassioned plea to maintain a musical form that ensured the development and renewable expressivity of the English language. While just as much could have been for the sonnet’s importance to the maturation of Italian letters and language at the beginning of the Renaissance, the example of England is ultimately a much more useful one: it provides stronger evidence for the translatability and universality of the form. Liang situates the sonnet in English history at the juncture between old and new modes of linguistic expression. By this comparison, he seeks to make a case for the sonnet’s potentially comparable impact on Chinese poetics in modernity. He writes:

这诗出自华次渥资之手, 所以格外有意义, 他是提倡白话的, 提倡歌谣的, 而他同时也拥护十四行诗. 中国的白话和古文相差太多, 英国的白话与文言相差没有这样的多. [...] 所以我们现在的新诗人不肯再做律诗尔肯模仿着做十四行诗，若说这是‘才解放的三寸金莲又穿西洋高跟鞋.’\textsuperscript{79}
This poem came from the hands of Wordsworth, so it contains a particular significance. He was promoting the vernacular, and promoting ballads while all the while promoting the sonnet. The differences between Chinese vernacular and its classical language are colossal while those of the English language are comparatively smaller. [...] Therefore, New Poetry writers are determined not to write regulated verse and insist on imitating the compositions of sonnets. Like the saying goes: “Only when the three-inch, gold lotus slippers are cast off can we slip on western high heels.”]

Liang’s basic understanding of the universal musicality of the sonnet enabled him to perceive its impact historically in England as being translatable to China without the implication of potential subordination to a western cultural hierarchy. This ability to take part in a universal history enabled by musical rationalization gives substance to later assertions, such as Guo Moruo’s declaration that China is rightful heir to the sonnet:

流传最普通,发展最成熟的诗歌形式,要算是文艺复兴时期从意大利发源的颂内休了! [...] 有人痛骂它是资产阶级的, 腐朽的, 没落的, 但是全世界的诗人照样做写, 中国诗人为什么就不可以写。80

[It is the most diffused, most developed poetic form—the very form that set off the Italian Renaissance. [...] Some criticize it as being too bourgeois, corrupt and backwards, but the world community of poets uses it, so why shouldn’t the Chinese?]

It is Liang and others’ faith in the sonnet’s translatability and utility as an instrument for linguistic reform and newness of expression, all functions of its musicality, that ensured the
form’s relevance to a modern China promoting its own linguistic and lyrical breakthroughs in modernity.

The poet Feng Zhi, whose article “Reasons for My Interest in the Sonnet” was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, offers us final evidence for how thoroughly the sonnet was naturalized for many Chinese writers. For him and others, the sonnet had eventually become an organic manifestation of the rhythms of Chinese life in modernity (something Wen Yiduo would certainly have been surprised to hear). Feng’s amazement at the naturalness of this process is testimony to the success of the musical rationale that had prepared the ground for his artistic experience:

From books I received wisdom, from reality I experienced life, until past experiences and things enjoyed before my eyes would often meld into one, conjoining within my mind. At first, the union was cloudy, but through the appropriate arrangement of words, it slowly came to take on a visible, tangible form. With the addition of some finishing touches, these forms one by one naturally turned into sonnets. This was something I never anticipated occurring. [From books I received wisdom, from reality I experienced life, until past experiences and things enjoyed before my eyes would often meld into one, conjoining within my mind. At first, the union was cloudy, but through the appropriate arrangement of words, it slowly came to take on a visible, tangible form. With the addition of some finishing touches, these forms one by one naturally turned into sonnets. This was something I never anticipated occurring.]
In the end, Chinese writers’ creation of modern poetry’s rhythmic foundations allowed for the universalization and subsequent nativization of the Petrarchan sonnet. Their historical and discursive amplifications of the poetic form, aimed at collapsing the temporal, geographical, spatial, cultural, and linguistic differences, and contradictions of a global reality, rested upon *reductiones ad musicam* whereby what was once Italian was universalized so that it could ultimately become Chinese and modern.

2 The Chinese New Poetry movement (1919-) was designed to explore new poetic forms that broke away from the old structures of classical Chinese poetry and more faithfully conveyed the language and spirit of modernity. Its most intense periods of activity occurred in the first few decades of the twentieth century before poetic energies were converted into tools of the Communist state. The development of and debates surrounding New Poetry continue in China to this day.


4 Ibid., 314.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Published some months later in *Poetic Sculpting Shi juan* 诗镌 (April 10, 1926), supplement to *The Morning Edition*.


10 Once Lu gets into his description of the different stages of the sonnet’s appropriation into Chinese letters, he begins to reveal (and practice) the ways in which the form was universalized into an appropriable musical essence. Repeating an etymology used by others before him, Lu describes how the term sonnet derived from a word that originally meant sound:

   十四行体成为严谨的律诗体, 是经过意大利诗人的努力形成的, 意大利文写作 sonetto, 意愿为声音, 表明这种诗体是一种合乐的歌诗. […] 这些都证明, 十四行体先天地具有鲜明的音乐性. (108)

   The sonnet became a rigorous form of regulated verse as it passed through the diligent efforts of Italian poets. In Italian it is called the sonetto, whose original meaning is sound, which demonstrates its close relationship to musical song. […] This verifies the innate musical quality that the sonnet form possesses.

Lu carries this belief of the sonnet’s inherent musicality into his renaming of the form’s different components. The four traditional groupings of the sonnet (4+4+3+3 or 4+4+4+2) are not simply referred to as sections in Lu’s description but are consciously named “musical passages:”

由于十四行原是一种合乐歌诗, 其诗行组织段落就其本来意义说, 体现一种音乐的分段组织, 因此, 我们就可以把十四行的段落成为音乐段落, 简称 “乐段.” (112)
Because it was originally a form conducive to musical song, the groupings of the sonnet’s verses, with respect to the form’s essential meaning, incarnates the division of musical passages. Hence, we can call the different sections of the sonnet musical sections, or periods for short.


11 Ibid., 176.

12 Lu includes in his helpful appendices the names of over one hundred and forty poets and their two thousand poems and theoretical writings on the sonnet composed between 1914 and 1993. Ibid., 408.

13 Ibid., 176.

14 Ibid., 93.

15 This concept of reduction employed to describe a process of translation in modernity is in fact a dialectical movement. On the face of it, what I suggest by *reductiones ad musicam* is fairly transparent: of all the ways in which the sonnet could have been described and theorized, the discourse of musicality was paramount. In other words, the sonnet was reduced to a single discourse by which it was conveyed into new, poetic territory. However, that very conveyance simultaneously maps out a cognitive and spatial trajectory that is anything but a reduction, for it facilitates the transposition of a poetic form from the Occident to the Orient, an expansivist maneuver par excellence. This kind of parabolic movement naturally inheres in cognition and translation generally, whereby initial reductions facilitate apprehension and subsequent expansions in target cultures. Why I have chosen to use the term, beyond its rhetorically familiar ring, is mostly to draw attention to a specific discourse, which would then later generate subsequent amplifications of the sonnet in Chinese. The idea of the reduction in this chapter, therefore, is principally a heuristic trope by which to bend a focus on the discourse of musicality and thereby understand its critical role in the dynamic exchanges between East and West in modernity.

16 Michael Golston’s *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science* (2008), describes the influential field of rhythmics (the interpretation of the rhythms of biological and mechanized processes) on the domains of culture and governance in early twentieth-century Europe. As evidence of this, Carl Seashore’s chapter on rhythm in his influential study *Psychology of Music* (1938) delivers 11 points that define what rhythm is and what it does. His conclusions situate rhythm at the center of all natural and human activities. He does remark, however, as Wen Yiduo also does, that any rhythm occurring in nature is better termed “periodicity,” inasmuch as it is neither created or perceived—there is no internal organization to its patterning (147). Thus, because music and poetry are intentionally created, they are essentially rhythmic in nature.


21 See Yao’s characterization of the compensatory nature of translation in modernity in the face of the “disappearance of any stable, religious or moral values by which to ground a viable society” (7).

22 Butler, 16.
Without a doubt, however, the most dramatic indication of the change that took place during the Modernist period in the dimensions of translation as a literary mode lies in the extent to which formal knowledge of the source language no longer constituted a requirement for its practice. Before the Modernists, translators in English simply proceeded under the assumption that full comprehension of the source language represented a necessary condition for translation. (11)

Thus, during the Modernist period, translation came into its own, serving as an expressly generative and literary mode of writing, rather than a principally linguistic operation limited in scope simply to reproducing the meaning of a foreign text. No longer governed by traditional conceptions of semantic fidelity and the constraints of linguistic knowledge, it functioned, and should be viewed, as a mode of literary production fundamentally compatible to, and, indeed, deeply constitutive of the other major Modernist forms of poetry and prose fiction. (13)


33 Wang Li, *Wang Li’s Complete Works Wang Li quan ji* 王力全集 (Jinan: Shandong jiao yu chu ban she, 1984), 256.

34 Ibid., 255.

35 Ibid., 297.

36 In this regard, modern scholar Wu Benxing draws attention to the autonomy exercised and created by the use of the sonnet in China:

It is true that the sonnet in the end was a traditional European poetic form; however, regarding its transplantation to China, it must be noted that it required a great deal of creativity in addition to common borrowing. By contrast, Chinese poets displayed a high degree of free will and self-consciousness in the process. Throughout ten years of intense work, Chinese poets not only
completed the integration of the sonnet form into Chinese letters but succeeded in creating a distinct Chinese version of the sonnet. (3)

Wu goes even further to remark how Chinese poets actually added to and supplemented the value of the sonnet by their literary creations:

Chinese poets expanded the expressive possibilities of the sonnet, adding another strain to the sonnet, exploring and transforming the sonnet’s meter, birthing into life the Chinese sonnet, the restructured sonnet and the free sonnet. (3)


37 Cited in Lu, 177.


41 Ibid., 138.


43 A commonly used equivalent for the modifier “western” is the Chinese word for “sea,” yang 洋, a synonym of hai 海.


45 Biblia sacra: iuxta Vulgatam versionem (Stuttgart : Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).


47 As time passed, Guo would convert to the idea that the mastery of the sonnet was an important development in the modernization of Chinese letters.

48 Li Sichun, “My Opinion on the Reformation of Poetic Form” Shiti gexin zhi xingshi ji wo de yijian 詩體革新之形式及我的意見, Young China Shao nian zhongguo 少年中國 2.6 (1920): 16-17.

49 Lawrence Wang-chi Wong’s recent chapter on the Crescent Moon School verifies historically the tenuousness of this designation, despite its usefulness to later generations. This group of poets, the majority of whom actively supported the infusion of form and rhythm in New Poetry, were less an organization than a loose group of acquaintances from Beijing and Shanghai associated with a small number of publications: The Poetry Supplement, The Crescent Moon Monthly and The Poetry Magazine. Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, “Lions and tigers in groups : The Crescent Moon School in modern Chinese literary history,” Literary Societies of Republican China, ed. Kirk E. Denton (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 279-312.

50 Sun Lulu, “The Child of Chinese and Western Arts: Comments on Wen Yiduo’s Poetry” Zhongxi yishu

At the time, Hu had systematically explained that every literary age in China had departed from the previous one and that each possessed their own distinctive style and form:

凡此诸时代，各因时势风会而变，各有其特长，吾辈以历史进化之眼光观之，决不可谓古人之文学皆胜于今人也。[...] 此可见文学因时进化，不能自止。唐人不当作商，周之诗，宋人不当作相如，子云之赋，——即令作之，亦必不工。逆天背时，违进化之迹，古不能工也。

All these periods changed according to their times and customs. All possessed their own unique points and strengths. My generation views the matter from a perspective of historical evolution: it cannot be called the domination of the present by ancient literature. […] From this we understand that literature evolves according to its age, it cannot be stopped. The Tang did not compose songs from the Shang or Zhou. Song writers did not write the *fu* of Xiang Ru or Zi Yun—if they had it wouldn’t have worked. To carry the ages against the currents of time violates the rule of progression. The simply old will not work.

In this way, Hu had crafted his argument to appeal to an evolutionary model of history that at the same time validated ethnic pride in traditional arts so as to convince both progressive and conservative writers to break out of an imagined, bygone, literary age. His appeal largely succeeded. What Wen would insist upon in his later critical work on New Poetry, however, was that this blind discrimination against traditional Chinese culture was misguided.


Ibid.

Ibid., 139.

Ibid., 140.

Ibid., 143.

Ibid., 144.

Ibid., 140-41.

Ibid., 141.


Ibid., 176.

Liang Shiqiu, “On the Sonnet” Tan shisihang 谈十四行, Collected Writings of Liang Shiqiu Liang Shiqiu wen ji 梁实秋文集 (Xiamen: Lujiang chu ban she, 2002), 474.

Ibid., 470.

Lu, 73-74.


Ibid., 471.


Ibid., 472.


Feng, 94.
CHAPTER 4

Chinese Decamerons: 
Sex and Revolutionary Fervor

Fig. 4 Xi Li’s “Day Six, Story Ten” ¹

夜深了，小张还没回来。外乡人按捺不住了，想人家的好事，他
轻轻地推开对方的门，来到人家的床前。

他鬼精，模仿着小张的声音说：

“咱打牌吧！”

“打就打。”

外乡人就上床和她打起牌来。

打完牌，女人睡过去了，外乡人提着衣服回了自己的房间。
一会儿, 小张回来了, 一边脱衣服, 一边对女人说:

“咱打牌吧?”

女人说: “不刚打了吗?”

小张先是一愣, 便明白了七八分, 气得一拍大腿儿骂道:

“妈个巴子的，还有偷牌的!”

李治山的故事已讲完, 大伙 “吃吃” 地笑起来.

张娟假惺惺地说: “故事棒极了, 今晚我们都讲了一通废话, 只有你这个故事故精彩, 提神儿。”2

[The night deepened. Xiaozhang had not yet returned.

The country boy couldn’t contain himself any longer. Thinking of his neighbor’s pleasures, he quietly pushed open the door opposite his and crept to the foot of his bed.

Cunningly disguising his voice to sound like Xiaozhang’s, he spoke:

“Let’s slap some tiles!”

“Alright…, slap away.”

The rural bumpkin hopped onto the bed and began slapping them down with Xiaozhang’s wife.

After the round ended, the woman turned over and fell back asleep.

The boy tugged at his clothes and snuck away to his apartment.
After a short while, Xiao Zhang returned home. He whispered to his wife removing his clothes: “Let’s slap some tiles.”

“Didn’t you just finish slapping?!?” she asked.

Xiao Zhang stood there befuddled. After a moment, he came to his senses, understanding what had just occurred. He punched his leg and cursed: “That son of a bitch! He stole my tiles!”

When Li Zhishan’s story ended, the group was sputtering with grunts and snickers. Zhang Juanjia slowly composed herself: “That story was incredible! All we’ve heard tonight has been garbage until this tale. It’s saved the day!”

Jiao Naifang’s imaginative 东方十日谈 Dongfang shiritan (An Asian Decameron) (2000), is the culmination of almost seventy years of exposure to Boccaccio’s collection in the Chinese language. All the details of Jiao’s version, down to the visual plates and mock proemio, closely mimic, satirize, and modernize the structure of the Italian original and its numerous iterations in Chinese through the Republican and Communist periods. Jiao’s jolly brigata, a group of ten Beijing graduate students, seeks respite from city life and a temporary escape from the confines of study and Communist work units. Allured by the exoticism of the nation’s frontier regions, the group sets out for the deserts of the western province of Xinjiang, where they conduct ten nights of story-telling followed by a voyage to the mountains of Tibet. A portion of the Tenth Tale from Day Six, cited above, reflects the tenor of their exchanges while enjoying the freedoms of the open desert (Fig. 4). Beyond the propriety and pressures of city life, graduate school, and government oversight, they freely indulge themselves in entertaining tales of violence,
trickery, and lust. The emphasis on sexually-motivated themes in their tales marks a clear evolutionary leap in the nature of Chinese receptions and interpretations of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Jiao’s privileging of 自由 *ziyou* (freedom) and sexual playfulness, in contrast to the traditional emphases of responsibility to one’s country and people, demonstrates an acute departure from previous ways of understanding and experiencing the *Decameron*.³ The present chapter offers the first analytical history of the *Decameron* in China from 1929-1980, which starkly offsets Jiao’s recent, liberated contribution, documenting the fluctuating history of sexuality’s momentous arrival and subsequent submergences in early Chinese receptions of the *Decameron*.

The interpretation of the *Decameron* in China during the Republican and Communist eras provides important points of reference from which to gauge the evolving attitudes of Chinese intellectuals toward human sexuality and their understanding of it as a reforming mechanism in modernity. Informed by Wendy Larson’s recently developed notion of Chinese sexual subjectivity and the “revolutionary spirit,”⁴ I will examine the various framing apparatuses of Chinese editions of the *Decameron*, which stage a recurring tussle between individual sexuality and collective, nationalist fervor, two perennially combative impulses of modernity. The three editions of the *Decameron* by Huang Shi and Hu Zanyun (1930), and Fang Ping and Wang Keyi (1958, 1980) constitute dynamic, transcultural sites upon which modernist discourses of translation, individuality, nationalism, Marxism and sexuality converge. In these translators’ prefaces, Boccaccio’s emphases on individual compassion, pain, disclosure, and passionate love, more familiar perhaps to western readers of the original *proemio*, are absorbed into larger, socializing schemes of a modernizing China. Boccaccio writes:
Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti: e come che a ciascuna persona stea bene, a coloro è massimamente richiesto li quali già hanno di conforto avuto mestiere e hannol trovato in alcuni; fra’ quali, se alcuno mai n’ebbe bisogno o gli fu caro o già ne ricevette piacere, io sono uno di quegli. […] E chi negherà questo, quantunque egli si sia, non molto più alle vaghe donne che agli uomini convenirsi donare? Esse dentro a’ dilicati petti, temendo e vergognando, tengono l’amorose fiamme nascose, le quali quanto più di forza abbian che le palesi coloro il sanno che l’hanno provate.⁵

[‘Tis humane to have compassion on the afflicted; and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort and have found it in others: among whom, if any had ever need thereof or found it precious or delectable, I may be numbered; […] And though my support or comfort, so to say, may be of little avail to the needy, nevertheless it seems to me meet to offer it most readily where the need is most apparent, because it will there be most serviceable and also most kindly received. Who will deny, that it should be given, for all that it may be worth, to gentle ladies much rather than to men? Within their soft bosoms, betwixt fear and shame, they harbour secret fires of love, and how much of strength concealment adds to those fires, they know who have proved it.]⁶
Despite Boccaccio’s frankness with regards to his purpose for including *remedia amoris*, Chinese intellectuals would extend the scope of his framing heuristic to encompass the broader, more compelling social issues facing a Chinese civilization in transition out of its perceived feudal bondage. This revisionist aim provoked new methods in exposing and treating the *amorose fiamme nascose* at the heart of Boccaccio’s original project.

Over the course of a few decades, Boccaccio and his *Decameron* were made into revolutionary agents enlisted in the greater service of a people’s liberation. Boccaccio’s explicit appeals to the comfort and diversion of wounded hearts, by means of unveiling the mechanisms of amorous relations, became transformed in Chinese into a more collective, revelatory metonym: the exposure of a corrupt feudal system in favor of a new society designed to provide the masses with greater freedom to pursue their rightful, material desires. In this way, the Chinese translators of the *Decameron* construct their own mediating frames around the already complex multi-tiered text that Boccaccio had set in place centuries before. These local contextualizations in China enlarge the heuristic structure of the *Decameron’s* ever broadening interpretive units (novella→novelle→rubrica→rubriche→brigata→Florence→Italy)\(^7\) in order to incorporate experiences in the Far East.

**Sexistence and Modern China**

The present section offers an introduction to the enmeshed discourses of individualism, collectivism and sexuality in China during the first decades of the twentieth century, in order to orient our analyses of Chinese decamerons being published at the same time. A review of Wendy Larson and Liu Jianmei’s studies on love, sex and
nationalism provides a heuristic frame with which to interpret key scholarly articles written in the 1920s and 30s by the leading Chinese psychologists and Freudian critics Zhou Jianren and Gao Juefu, whose work reveals the degree to which sexuality was made answerable to the needs of the collective over those of the individual during sexology’s incipiency in China. This knowledge of a broad scientific, intellectual resistance to individual sexuality and the contingent privileging of sexuality as a communal and nationalist concern assists us in understanding the why and how of the *Decameron*’s numerous Chinese appropriations.

In the introduction to her monograph *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China* (2009), Wendy Larson reveals the hypothetical error that would lead to her innovative argument concerning the marginalization of sexualized notions of individuality in modern China. Initially, she admits, her thoughts on Freud’s influence on Chinese intellectualism and the arts were largely predictable, reflecting the western prejudice of assuming Freud’s universality. However, her miscalculation transforms into the innovative thesis of her study. This move is achieved by the association of her once jaundiced view with the dominant trends in Chinese scholarship, to exaggerate the historical borrowings of western theoretical frameworks and methodologies used to interpret Chinese history and culture. This exaggeration of the universality of western theories continuously spawns misconceptions. In order to correct the overestimation of Freudian thought in modernity, Larson analyzes the historical contexts and texts in which Freud came to be integrated into Chinese thought. This inquiry helps to unveil the contingent nature of Freudian psychology and sexology, reducing them back to the level of the historical, a modification anticipated by
Arnold I. Davidson’s 2004 study, *The Emergence of Sexuality*, in which he explains the historical process by which a western existence was discursively transformed into a *sexistence*:

>[It is] not because we became preoccupied with our true sexuality that a science of sexuality arose in the nineteenth century; it is rather the emergence of a science of sexuality that made it possible, even inevitable, for us to become preoccupied with our true sexuality. Thus our existence became a *sexistence*, saturated with the promises and threats of sexuality; the biggest change of the nineteenth century in terms of sexual discourse is a changing of the ‘rules’ in which sexual identity became separated from anatomical structure, becoming ‘a matter of impulses, tastes, appetites, satisfactions, and psychic traits.’

The localized, temporalized traits of Larson’s artistic objects of study reinforce Davidson’s conclusions about the historical contingency of potential *sexistence(s)* in China. Modern Chinese creative and theoretical texts and films possess their own unique and imaginative logic. Far from being the primal impulse and marker of modernity, Larson argues, sexual desire is only one of the important discourses of identity formation in the revolutionary periods of the twentieth century (by no means its “linchpin”).

Liu Jianmei’s earlier work on romance and revolution (2003), while diverging from Larson’s in its universal premise that Chinese writers are thoroughly sexed and hence conflicted, nonetheless provides historical force to the argument that sexuality was not the primary marker of the Chinese modern identity. In fact, China’s history continues to bear out the predominance of revolutionary sentiment over individual passion. Liu
explains how in the late 1920s, a series of local and international political developments helped to engender a new narrative formula that brought together amorous relationships with acts inspired on behalf of the modernizing state. Although such a literary project appeared to be destined for a happy marriage with bright political prospects, Liu Jianmei finds in the diffusion of this theme of “revolution plus love” (革命加戀愛 geming jia lian'ai) strong evidence for the “contingency and contestedness of modern Chinese literary history.”¹¹ She argues that the widespread texts exploring the creation of new social and sexual selves, within a society in turmoil, functioned as imaginative spaces in which intellectuals experimented with interactions between revolutionary fervor and individual sexuality. Liu insists that these explorations by Chinese modernists of the connections between revolutionary and personal passions were in no way singular in their depiction of an official version of modern Chinese history—or even an unofficial one—but were instead multiple and highly contradictory. The façade that held revolution and love suspended in the same plane was at best tenuous. Writers struggling with the social meanings of their progressive private desires, as well as the implications for individuality of collective symbolism and revolutionary activity, were constantly troubled about how to harmonize personal and public desires:

Beneath the harmonious relationship between personal love and revolutionary passion in the late 1920s and the early 1930s lies a split personality, or more specifically, a split modern consciousness characteristic of the writers who frantically pursued this fashion. Driven by the utopian dream of a strong China, those leftist writers came to embrace revolution and love enthusiastically both in fiction and in real life
but found themselves confronted with dilemmas between the ideal and reality, self and nation, progress and tradition, revolutionary masculinity and sentimental femininity. In other words, they were fascinated with this formulaic writing because it provided a perfect site to linger on the dilemmas and contradictions that epitomized their tormented experiences. Although they appear romantic and passionate, they are also schizophrenic—an archetypal modern mental state resulting from their bitter struggle for personal happiness and national idealism.  

Such important May Fourth writers as Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Qu Qiubai, Jiang Guangci, and Ding Ling experienced violently these dilemmas for themselves. Their personal lives and literary works were riddled with the contradictions of modern values in which the development of the individual and the socialist collective were relentlessly in tension. Liu remarks:

As a result, their literary practices of revolution plus love were crammed with paradoxes: they violently attacked the passive sentimentality and individualism that prevailed in the May Fourth literature, but their writing could not escape the petit bourgeois mentality; they seriously criticized capitalist materialism, but the sale of their work was largely based on a consumer culture; their bold description of sex connected sexual emancipation with revolutionary and antifeudal acts but at the same time contained the elements of bourgeois decadence.  

These conflicts were threatening enough to provoke the political establishment under Mao to censor the individual’s expression of private feeling and sentiment. Under these
restrictive conditions “heterosexual love became unspeakable, unhealthy and inappropriate.” Consequently, the exploration of individuality and sexuality was banned as a modern possibility. As a popular hymn reminded billions of Chinese for decades (1943-), only nationalistic ideals would be allowed to shape modernity in China: “没有共产党就没有新中国 / 没有共产党就没有新中国” (“Without the Party, there is no New China/ Without the Party, there is no New China”).

While Liu perceives lurking behind this modern history the deep machinations of the libido, a utopian dream, and its erotic and cultural sublimations, as explained by Freud and Marcuse, Larson argues for less universalist and more historical explanations for the marginalization of sexuality, grounded in translation and the development of science and curricula locally, claiming that the historical contexts and ongoing intellectual discussions during the importation of Freudian thought were responsible for the leavening of sexuality’s importance in Chinese modernity.

The earliest introduction of psychology into China occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, through translations by Christian missionaries devoted to the service of a more scientifically oriented, moral education in the East. Instruction in psychology was given initially in the context of civics, grafting the more radical implications of modern western subjectivity back into the root of traditional, Confucian sensibilities:

Confucian cultural bias toward constructing and imagining the subject as fundamentally social, eventually constrained the development of the alienated, isolated sense of trauma rooted in frustrated sexual desires that was implicit in Freud’s work.
A review of the intellectual avenues through which Freudian thought came to be accepted in China provides evidence for the socialization of his theories in ways that would inhibit the establishment of a *sexistence* comparable to the West’s, and favor in its place a revolutionary existence.

With the exception of some important introductory texts published in the late nineteenth century, the majority of formative psychological materials came out of the New Culture movements of the 1920s and 30s. The overwhelming majority of these articulated Freudian dream analysis and sexology within the confines of traditional beliefs and social structures. Qian Zhixiu’s brief synopsis of the psychoanalytic method in Europe in “梦之研究” *Meng zhi yanjiu* (“Research on Dreams”) (1914) exemplifies this tendency to redact and to nativize psychoanalysis. Later, the widely acclaimed visits by European intellectuals John Dewey (1859-1952) and Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), who lectured in China from 1919-1921, stimulated an outpouring of interest in psychology and theories of the unconscious. Following their lectures, Chinese intellectuals began to adopt, adapt, and debate more fervently the import and merits of Freudian thought.

A flurry of seminal articles emerged on Freudian psychology between the years 1922-1924, often appearing in the 心理 Xin li (*Journal of Chinese Psychology*) and *The Education Review*. Yu Tianxia’s article “分析心理學” *Fenxi xinlixue* (“Psychoanalysis”) (January 1922) introduced to China the Freudian idea that sexuality could explain abnormal psychologies and pathologies. At the same time, however, Yu ignored the larger, radical implications of sexualizing human experience (e.g. the counterintuitive coincidences of healthy and perverse sexuality and civilized and
neurotic behaviors) by promoting “the possibility of turning sexual desire toward socially useful tasks, which would benefit both the individual and society,” a line other Chinese psychologists would often repeat:

此外如群眾心理, 暴民心理, 革命心理, 罷工, 排外, 絕交, (斷絕國交) 戰爭, 嫖妓, 凡為社會之變態現象, 皆在此科研究範圍之內。

[Furthermore, all of the following fall within the scope of this scientific research: psychology of the masses, mob psychology, revolutionary psychology, strikes, xenophobia, isolationism (severing diplomatic ties), wars, prostitution, and all other abnormal, social phenomena.]

Thus, Yu latched onto the constructive possibilities that sexology and psychoanalysis as modern sciences offered to Chinese society, while passing over the essential deconstruction between normalcy and perversion that Freud’s theories performed. Yu and other contemporary proponents of western psychology, to my knowledge, never expressly agreed with Freud that sexual perversions are the primitive and universal dispositions of humanity.

The three famous Zhou brothers were likewise caught up in the activity of disseminating and evaluating Freudian thought and human sexuality. Zhou Jianren and Zhou Zuoren’s articles in the Educational Review (1922-26) advocated that for the benefit of the individual and society, sex should become more openly discussed. Zhou Jianren’s 1922 article on the theory and application of sex education demonstrates the typical way in which Freudianism was domesticated into practical applications for the maintenance of stable, harmonious relationships in Chinese society.
If we understand the true reason for the production of existing life forms in this world, we can then establish the foundations upon which people better treat themselves and others, and clearly understand their mutual relationships.]

Curiously enough, in “性教育的几条原理” Xing jiaoyu de ji tiao yuanli (“Some Principles of Sex Education”) (1924), Zhou states almost verbatim the dictum of a sexualized existence:

[Our ability to experience beauty is in no way attributable to the fact that beauty exists independently in things outside of us, but rather because the feeling of beauty surges from within us. This spirit that can sense beauty is rooted in the function of sexuality. Not only this, but modern
psychologists tell us that that since humankind is bisexual everything it
does is based upon a principle of sexuality. Psychology speaks of what it
calls sublimation. Through this function, the basic sexual instinct is
sublimated into every form of art and thence expressed. [...] In light of
this, a creature’s normal life, that is its selfish search for personal survival,
also causes human life to become richer and benefits its behaviors. The
sacrifice of self, etc., all originates from these foundations of sexuality.]

In early modern China, Zhou’s proposal of the sexual grounds for all social phenomena
was certainly a revolutionary claim. However, and despite his academic boldness, Zhou
too avoids the radical implications of what he states by rendering it a fact of life that is to
be controlled, sublimated, and reapplied to the workings of a functioning society. Thus,
what begins with a gesture confirming a sexistence ultimately turns into a treatise on how
to dissuade children from masturbating and from becoming too curious about sex (e.g.
pestering adults with questions, etc.). His claims becomes a revelation of sex as a means
to contain it. Zhou’s reference to the highly valued sublimated form of “personal
sacrifice” further emphasizes the subordination of individual instincts and desires to the
interests of the collective.

Those intellectuals who had a more profound grasp of Freud’s theories were less
conciliatory, opting for direct criticism of individual sexuality. China’s most prominent
psychologist at the time, Gao Juefu, also the best read in Freudian theory, produced a
number of articles in the late 1920s and 30s that thoroughly investigated Freudian
psychology. Gao was the first to offer a systematic critique of Freud, steering a course
between the blind rejection and the fashionable embrace of his theories amongst
intellectuals. His 1934 article in The Journal of Education, “弗洛伊特及其精神分析的批判” Fuluoyite ji qi jingshen fenxi de pipan (“A Critique of Freud and His Psychoanalysis”), reviews Freud’s principal contributions and suggests, sometimes sarcastically, the weaknesses of them. Gao’s thoughtful critique provides a consistent logic for the greater Chinese rejection of a unilateral sexistence.

His quarrel with Freud begins in a comparison of the former’s differences with Jung on the issue of the unconscious. In a word, Freud’s unconscious is exhaustively sexed:

[According to his thought, there is no one that does not harbor selfish desires. These urges either become the prohibitions of society’s moral system or the deep shameful secrets of the individual. As a result of the function of suppression, they are then sublimated into the outer world of consciousness. Nonetheless, these sublimated desires are by no means dissolved into formlessness, but persist, shooting up within other areas of human life. [...] So, then, where is the evidence for this unconscious?]

As intimated by his final question, Gao is most concerned with the lack of evidence to support Freud’s theory. His initial disapproval stems mainly from the anxiety of a lack of proper scientific rigor on Freud’s part. Furthermore, as Gao elaborates on his misgivings,
he points to the fact that the very veracity of Freud’s theory of the sexed unconscious stands precisely upon an intented lack of evidence. He is highly skeptical of the fact that a theory of the unconscious necessarily relies upon an absence of knowledge; it is what someone does not know that proves what the therapist or scientist claims. Gao distrusts this type of intellectual laxity: the theory can neither be proven nor disproven. If a patient agrees with the analysis, that is proof of its veracity. If she disagrees, that is even further proof of the existence of her sexed unconscious: “你雖否定他的分析的結果, 卻也無害於他的學說的成立” (“If you denounce the results of the analysis, this in no way injuries the truthfulness of his [Freud’s] theory”).31

Gao’s exasperation with the impenetrability of the theory grows as he demonstrates how words and dreams in Freud’s psychoanalysis can signify at once their literal meanings and their antonyms, whichever happens to fit best the theoretical model of a sexed unconscious at the time.32 After quoting extensively from Freud’s interpretations of material objects as standing in for male and female sexual organs, Gao finally lets his scholarly demeanor slip to vent his exasperation:

所以由弗洛伊特看來, 我們簡直生活於性的象徵的包圍之下。著作家拿筆做文章, 女工拿針線縫衣服, 農夫以鋤犂耕田, 醫生在病人的手臂上打注射針—這些動作都僅為性交的象徵。還有路邊的電柱, 龍井山的龍井, 及一切的一切, 都僅為男生殖器或女生殖器象徵。這還成什麼話呢?33

[Therefore, from Freud’s viewpoint, we are all simply living in a world surrounded by sexual symbols. An author grabbing a pen to write an
article, a female worker picking up a needle to sew clothes, a farmer
taking a plow and hoe to work the earth, a doctor inserting a needle into
the arm of a patient—these are all merely sexual symbols. The roadside
lamppost, the Longjing mountain’s Dragon well—in short, everything, is
reduced to symbols of the male and female members. What kind of talk is
this!]

Gao’s professional frustration with Freud’s lack of scientific rigor finally culminates in
an exclamation that reveals a culturally specific motivation for his criticism: he, as well
as many others for whom he spoke, simply did not believe in so thoroughly sexed an
existence. This notion of pan-sexuality (汎性論 pan xing lun) was faulty on the grounds
that it provided no good reason with which to claim special authority for the sexual
interpretations of dreams, psychoses, and reality. However, the theory was equally
suspect to Gao and the Chinese simply because it was so presumptuously narrow in its
interpretation of human psychology. Gao did not entertain the belief in the necessary
sexistence that made Freud’s theories tenable in the first place.

At the end of his article, Gao offers an alternative, more reasonable notion that the
origins of life and all its unconscious, psychological activities are not singularly sexed,
but manifold:

我們原不敢否認性的重要, 原不敢否認夢和神經病只有於基力變態的
發洩, 但是我們也承認夢和神經病實皆為多方面的, 有時為性慾的滿足,
有時為性慾滿足的反面, 有時為野心, 驚懼, 悔恨的表示, 或其他. 34
[We do not dare to deny the importance of sexuality, nor the fact that dreams and psychoses are solely based on the hemorrhaging of an abnormal libido. That being said, we also accept the fact that dreams and psychoses have many different facets: some arise out of the satisfaction of sexual wishes, some from their lack of satisfaction, some originate in ambition, terror, while others are manifestations of regret, etc.]

Gao thus affirms the plurality of a psychological existence which resists the radical gravitation of Freud’s pan-sexualism, placing it back into play within a mix of sundry other emotional motivations. His opinion made explicit the reasons for the prevailing rejection of a sexistence in China.

Because of such intellectual resistance and social pressure, despite the highly sexual nature of the work of many Chinese authors (e.g. the Creationists and New Perceptionists), the sexualization of the individual modern subject would never fully take hold in China:

From Lu Xun’s lustful, poetic Confucians to Yu Dafu’s references to national weakness, from the failure of Ding Ling’s Sophia to embody and project the delights of sexual liberation to Shi Zhecun’s superficial psychological probing, from Guo Moruo’s transformation of psychological theory into national metaphor to a general awkwardness about expressing sexual desire—even before the political demands of Marxism branded psychoanalysis as idealist and bourgeois, Chinese writers working in the 1920s and 1930s were unwilling to completely
accept the fully sexualized, fully psychologized person as the only way to be modern.\textsuperscript{35}

Instead, another motivation, the revolutionary spirit, would seek to dominate that psychic space so prominently occupied by sexuality in the West. The appearance of the \textit{Decameron} in China during the first decades of the twentieth century renders it an important crux to observe the tensions and fluctuations between individual sexuality and collective, nationalistic sentiment.

\textbf{Translators’ Prefaces; Re-framing the \textit{Decameron} for China}

The first Chinese translations of the \textit{Decameron} appeared in periodicals in the form of isolated, individual tales. Luo Ailan, the first to have translated these tales into Chinese, published two in separate installments of the \textit{文學周報 Wenxue zhoubao (Literature Monthly)} (1928).\textsuperscript{36} A translation of one tale by another writer, Yue Zhi, appeared shortly thereafter in \textit{大衆文藝 Dazhong wenyi (Popular Literature)} (1929).\textsuperscript{37} As sites of first contact with Boccaccio’s work for Chinese readers, Luo and Yue’s selections and translations formed lasting impressions of the \textit{Decameron} and furnished cultural contexts for interpreting its significance in a Chinese venue. Of the one hundred tales these translators could select from, three were chosen which dealt directly with the issues of young maidens’ sexual activity and the taboo against deviant, extramarital intercourse.

Luo’s translations of Day Nine, Tale Two and Day Seven, Tale Six demonstrate a combination of feminine ingenuity and sexual freedom, informed by a May Fourth agenda to promote the figure of the modern or New Woman as being emancipated from
the oppressive bonds of her feudal, feminine role. By contrast, Yue’s recounting of the infamous tale of Spinelloccio Tanena and Zeppa di Mino (Day Eight, Tale Eight) situates that story more faithfully in the category of delight (cosa piú dilettevole) for which Fiammetta initially purposed it in her introduction. This category of pure entertainment likewise had its analogue in China, in the form of classical and vernacular bawdry tales. However, because of his tales’ treatment of social ills directly related to China’s quest for modernization, it is Luo’s tacit framing that would eventually endure throughout the late Republican and early Communist periods (while Yue’s approach would fade to the background, like most other popular fiction in China’s history).

Luo’s translations describe, respectively, the sexual exploits and quick scheming of a young lusty 尼姑 nigu (nun), Isabetta, and a wanton newlywed, Isabella, interested in trying out new flavors of men (口味 kouwei). In both instances, these young women defy their assigned social roles as faithful brides (one to Christ, the other to an aged merchant) in order to satisfy their appetites with young men outside the established bonds of marriage. Furthermore, despite the punishments that await them for their transgressions, these sexually emancipated women appear to enjoy an extra dose of intellectual prowess by which they also avoid judgment. In the end, their intelligence, seemingly emboldened by their adulterous acts, converts a prohibited sexual outlet into an activity sanctioned by the law’s inability to condemn it. Messer Lambertuccio’s trial of Isabella is turned back upon him to the point where he is entirely purged of suspicion about his young wife’s affairs and actually protects the life of her lover. Furthermore, Isabetta’s pointing out of the sins of her judge, the abbess, frees her from punishment and guarantees her the indefinite satisfaction of her lusts (as well as those of her sisters):
ciascuna si desse buon tempo quando potesse.

誰遇了良機, 即可以盡量享受。)

[all might give themselves a good time, as they had opportunity.]

Coincidentally, only months before Luo Ailan’s translations appeared in the *Literature Monthly*, the May Fourth female writer Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-86) had stoked the flames of a native feminist movement with the release of her controversial fictional memoirs, 莎菲女士的日記 *Shafei nushi de riji (Miss Sophie’s Diary)* (1928). While no direct influence between Ding’s work and Luo’s translations can be adduced in a comparison of the texts, they both reflect a similar tendency of the May Fourth period: the desire for women’s liberation from her feudal past.

Ding’s diary immediately offended traditional sensibilities with its overt criticism of the Confucian patriarchal order and its candid revelations of sexual desire. The journal’s protagonist, a sickly maiden, shares her iconoclastic thoughts, ardent desires, and melancholic feelings toward her suffocating life. The dark clouds of her reality are dispelled only when she feels the occasional, spontaneous desire well up from within her. Only primal passions appear to invigorate her world:

我抬起头去, 呀, 我看见那两个鲜红的, 嫩腻的, 深深凹进的嘴角了. 我
能告诉人吗, 我是用一种小儿要糖果的心情在望着那惹人的两个小东
西. 但我知道在这个社会里面是不准许任我去取得我所要的来满足我
的冲动, 我的欲望, 无论这于人并没有损害的事. (一月一日)
[I looked up and saw the corners of his soft, red, and deeply inset mouth. Could I tell anyone how I looked at those two delightful lips like a child longing for sweets? But I know that in this society I’ll never be allowed to take what I want to satisfy my impulses and my desires, even though it would do nobody else any harm. (January 1st)]

In fact, at one point in the diary, it is precisely the virtue of these carnal passions that succeed in nursing her back to health, a miracle she, of course, keeps to herself:

毓芳云霖看不出我的兴奋, 只说我病快好了. 我也正不愿他们知道, 说我病好, 我就装着高兴. (一月十日)

[Yufang and Yunlin didn’t notice how excited I was getting. They just said that I’d soon be better. I didn’t want them to understand, so when they said I was getting better I pretended to be pleased. (January 10th)]

Ding Ling’s troping of sexuality as a serum for personal and social ills is something she absorbed from her readings in western literature. In her introduction to the English translation of Ding Ling’s works, Tani E. Barlow describes Ding’s use of imported Western feminism as a “fulcrum” by which she sought to dislodge the ritualized Confucian bonds between the sexes. This was largely carried out within a reiteration of the Enlightenment idea of a sexed, binary reality, wherein culture is pitted against nature, and the natural, feminine, and sexual are privileged over the cultural, masculine and ritual. Ding Ling’s work served to solidify further the metaphorical positions of the debate between the traditional and the modern, the suppressed and the sexually free. Numerous writers, intellectuals, and cultural revolutionaries afterward continued in the use of these
same imagined terms, theorizing the sexual and the feminine as natural and therefore a
modern means with which to liberate Chinese society from an ignominious past. They
championed “not kinship but personal identity, not procreative fertility but sexual
expression, not appropriate behavior but natural behavior.”\textsuperscript{45} Luo’s selections from
Boccaccio achieve precisely this effect. The tales of Isabetta and Isabella magnify Miss
Sophie’s own attempted escape from the bonds of kinship and Confucian propriety as
they express themselves both sexually and intelligently.

Because of the appropriateness of his selections to May Fourth efforts at women’s
liberation, it is curious that in translating the tales of Isabetta and Isabella, Luo
systematically cancels out any trace of the stories’ original frames. The absence of Elisa
and Fiammetta’s introductions and glosses on the tales raises a question as to the
translator’s view of them: did he feel that Boccaccio’s framing was inadequate to his
purpose to fit the tales into modern Chinese discourses of female liberation?

The frame to Isabetta’s tale emphasizes on the favor of Fortune in unraveling the
power of the abbess and endowing the young nun with a quick retort at the opportune
moment:

Carissime donne, saviamente si seppe madonna Francesca, come detto è,
liberar dalla noia sua; ma una giovane monaca, aiutandola la fortuna, sé da
un soprastante pericolo, leggiadramente parlando diliberò. E come voi
sapete, assai sono li quali, essendo stoltissimi, maestri degli altri si fanno e
gastigatori, li quali, sí come voi potrete com prendere per la mia novella,
la fortuna alcuna volta e meritamente vitupera: e ciò addivenne alla
badessa sotto la cui obbedienza era la monaca della quale debbo dire.
Dearest ladies, 'twas cleverly done of Madonna Francesca, to disem-barrass herself in the way we have heard: but I have to tell of a young nun, who by a happy retort, and the favour of Fortune, delivered herself from imminent peril. And as you know that there are not a few most foolish folk, who, notwithstanding their folly, take upon themselves the governance and correction of others; so you may learn from my story that Fortune at times justly puts them to shame; which befell the abbess, who was the superior of the nun of whom I am about to speak.]

The significance given to Fortune might provide an explanation for why Luo omitted this section. The spotlighting of Fortune might have diminished the attention designed to focus upon the active undertakings of women in their sexual and social emancipations. An analysis of Fiammetta’s gloss on the tale of Isabella, however, would seem to dispel any singular, ideological motive on the part of the translator for excising both frames:

Molti sono li quali, semplicemente parlando, dicono che Amore trae altrui del senno e quasi chi ama fa divenire smemorato.
Sciocca opinione mi pare: e assai le già dette cose l'hanno mostrato, e io ancora intendo di dimostrarlo.

[Not a few there are that in their simplicity aver that Love deranges the mind, insomuch that whoso loves becomes as it were witless: the folly of which opinion, albeit I doubt it not, and deem it
abundantly proven by what has been already said, I purpose once again to demonstrate.]

Fiametta’s interpretation, unlike Elisa’s, would seem to accord quite comfortably with Chinese modernist notions of femininity and sexuality. The life breathed into Miss Sophie by her passions, for example, anticipates the wisdom and cunning infused into Isabetta and Isabella by their active, sexual lives. In their cases, love does not derange but rather quickens the mind. Thus, Luo’s excision of the frames would appear not to be solely a choice motivated by difference of opinion or purpose. In fact, his motive might possibly have been the opposite of anxieties of difference with Boccaccio. Instead of an act demonstrative of an interpretive disagreement, the omissions of the frame may actually indicate Luo’s sense of the tales’ transparency, which he anticipated his learned Chinese audience would have no trouble glossing correctly. In his mind, the absence of any real context for the tales or their original author posed no obstacle to their reception. In fact, quite to the contrary, their excision most likely promised a more fluid reception, as Yue Zhi’s afterword to her translation seems also to confirm. For Yue, it is precisely within an historical ignorance of the Decameron that a universal appreciation for it arises for her and her readers:

[Regarding his life and times, I know very little. […] There are two reasons why I translate this tale: (1) so that readers can see the author’s
boldness in the work, and (2) so that they can come to understand its timelessness.

The Chinese word for “timelessness” (超越時間性 chaoyue shijian xing) means literally to transcend time or epochs. The notion, though not necessarily the term, is an ancient one, rooted in lyrical and cyclical notions of cosmogony and reality in China that renders all hermeneutics a quest to sympathize with and to reincarnate the sentiments and thoughts of previous authors and generations. While the term might have referred more to questions of bawdy plot and narrative stylistics for Yue, for Luo and the audience for whom he intended his tales the implied transcendence would more likely resemble an ideological chord believed to resonate with modern readers across the board.

The issues of women’s liberation and feminine sexuality invoked by Luo’s selections would continue to be featured in prefaces of future, complete editions of the Decameron, although, as the political turmoil in China deepened in the late 1920s and the clamor for solidarity and nationalist identity increased, the former would cede their prominence to the rise of a revolutionary spirit. Huang and Hu were the first to publish the Decameron in its entirety and to provide a proper preface to it. One of the major emphases of their introduction follows Luo Ailan’s precedent of valorizing the stories for their contribution to women’s liberation. Huang gives critical flesh to Luo’s tacit framing of the tales in his suggestive selection, recognizing that there are many who suspect Boccaccio for misogyny by the way he ostensibly toys with female sexuality and negatively portrays female characters (玩視女性 wanshi nuxing). He advises his readers to read between the lines of the text, though, to recognize what and whom Boccaccio is truly criticizing:
蒲伽丘之所以好拿婦女們—尤其是貴族婦女的行爲來作題材，言外之意，實在是攻擊僧侶們的禁慾主義，以及揭露禁慾主義所生惡果。^{51}

[Boccaccio’s habit of taking up the topic of female sexuality—especially that of aristocratic women—is actually an attack on the [false] asceticism of monks, and the exposure of the evil fruits of asceticism.]

The apparent immorality practiced by many of the tales’ ladies, Huang sees as a symptom of the hypocrisy of religious morality and a complete failure of asceticism and abstinence. Thus, Boccaccio’s intentions are proven to be benevolent with regards to women who, in his stories often free themselves from the oppression of religiously backed morality and its dubious practice by the Church’s duplicitous servants. What are superficially seen as immoral acts within the tales are actually Boccaccio’s narrative way of liberating women from social and sexual oppression:

蒲伽丘“十日談”中這一類故事，不啻是對於這種悖理思想的嚴重抗議。受禁慾主義和“禮教”的毒害著，尤以婦女為最甚，故蒲伽丘此書，表面上似乎是侮辱女性，實質上是間接援救婦女出於禁慾主義和“禮教”的壓迫，對於婦女解放運動，有莫大的貢獻。^{52}

[These stories within Boccaccio’s Decameron are not just the rigorous rejection of this kind of irrational, unnatural system of thought: because there are many who have been infected by the poisons of asceticism and “propriety,” especially women, while it appears that Boccaccio is ridiculing women, he is, in fact, simply succoring them from the...
repressions of asceticism and “propriety,” and therefore making a great
correction to the women’s liberation movement.]

While Huang and Hu avoid directly advocating the employment of similar methods in
China’s struggle to break away from feudal oppression in modernity, they make
correlations between the times that suggest they at least do not refuse a comparable
remedy. To begin with, the term 禮教 lijiao is selected to signify social morality and
Confucian propriety. This translation harbors within it a sense of decorum rooted in
Confucian ethics, something intellectuals in the 1930s were eager to jettison. Secondly,
Huang draws a parallel between the behavior of the corrupt Italian monks with the so-
called, contemporary disciples of holiness in China: “中世紀的僧侶欲以禁欲主義維持
兩性道德，正如我們貴國的‘聖人之徒’想拿‘禮教’來維持‘風化’，一般無異”
(“Medieval monks’ desire to use asceticism to maintain a moral double-standard
perfectly accords with our noble nation’s so-called ‘disciples of the sages’ use of
‘propriety’ to maintain the cultural status quo”).53 The editors’ focus on corruption and
the backwardness of certain systems of thought in medieval Italy and modern China
comes to eclipse in a way the force of their argument for Boccaccio’s aid to the plight of
women. Boccaccio’s release of women from social oppression by means of sexual
liberation becomes only one manifestation of the greater aims of modernization: to resist
the past and to revolt against its hypocritical agents. This point is further born out by the
remainder of Huang and Hu’s preface, which focuses almost exclusively on the
revolutionary character of the Decameron and its author. This discursive shift from the
composite theme of individuality, sexuality and liberation to revolutionary concerns for
collective solidarity and progress reflects a dominant cultural trend in the 1930s to make modern art political.

In addition to validating and extending the themes introduced by Luo’s translations in 1928, Huang ushered in the discussion of the revolutionary spirit of Boccaccio and his text that would hold a central place in Fang Ping’s later editions (1958, 1980). His introduction characterizes the *Decameron* as a vital tool in the liberation of Europe from the Dark Ages of political oppression and intellectual bondage. This interpretation of the text’s historical role in Italy suggested a similar function for it in contemporary China where intellectuals, politicians and generals were all struggling to modernize the nation and to abandon their feudal, Confucian pasts.

Huang refers to the time preceding the European Renaissance as the Dark Ages (黑暗时代 *hei an shidai*), a period marred by superstition and a paucity of reason and critical thought: “鬼氣沉沉的大氣之下, 人性受盡種種非理的壓制和桎梏, 幾乎喘不過氣來” (“Under the heavy veil of superstition, human nature was beset by every type of irrational restriction and bond, leaving no room to breathe”). As he saw it, the Renaissance punctured that dark veil and added the necessary sensitivities to the human condition that would nourish a stunted, feudal existence to health. As a central text in the establishment of the humanist tradition and a chief stimulator of the Renaissance, the *Decameron*, through its humorous and skillful execution, brought the world to a finer, more detailed understanding of the realities of the human condition. To Huang and Hu’s understanding, Boccaccio perceived what no other had discerned before him. A man ahead of his times, a seer, and hero (大智, 大勇 *da zhi, da yong*), Boccaccio saw through the irrational fogs of his epoch to conceptualize the hidden heart of human nature:
一百個故事裏，用幽默巧妙的筆調，把‘人性’的各方面，表現得透闊玲瓏，描寫得淋漓盡致。我們從此不但認識著人類的各個形象，並且透視了深潛隱密的諸般人性。57

[Through the use of a comical, masterful style, his one hundred tales exhibit every facet of human nature, demonstrating astuteness and genius in his thoroughly detailed descriptions. From these we are not only brought to the knowledge of man’s various images, but are privileged to peer into the deep, hidden recesses of the spirit of the common man.]

This unique perception of the latent human spirit is enabled by the protracted imagery of light and revelation in the editors’ understanding of Boccaccio and his new age. Huang and Hu lay special emphasis on the revealed nature of the human experience brought about by the illumination of Renaissance and humanist thought. This revelatory metaphor upon which the notion of a Dark Ages primarily functions lends itself to the proliferation of analogies of light and discovery, which in turn reinforce the editors’ conception of Boccaccio’s pivotal role in the evolution of human history. The repetition of the Chinese character 透 tou (to penetrate) employs this imagery. Moreover, it is through the prophetic-like vision of Boccaccio and the Renaissance that the deeply recessed, hidden nature (深潛隱密 shen qian yin mi) of mankind is revealed.

By isolating and lionizing the contributions of Boccaccio’s text in this manner, Huang and Hu provide themselves with an important tool with which to validate their and other modern Chinese intellectuals’ efforts to see through to the modern spirit of man so as to nurture it en masse in China. The translators briefly, but explicitly, link the
authorities of Boccaccio and another May Fourth intellectual, Zhou Zuoren, as professing similar statements to examine more closely the human element in life:

記得周作人先生說過，我們讀書之外，還要‘讀人’，大家如果有心‘讀人’，那麼，本書便是絕好的讀本。58

[We remember what Zhou Zuoren said that besides ‘reading books’ we must ‘read people.’ If we all have the desire to read people, then the present book is an optimal manual.]

The synthetic coincidence of the two writers’ viewpoints confirms the reading of the *Decameron* as an important text in the reevaluation of human nature in China as a means to modernist reformation, a hermeneutic practice dating back to pre-Qin, classical civilization. Historically, new social, cultural and political orders in China often hinged upon reconceptions or privileged perceptions of human nature.59

In this way, Huang and Hu place Boccaccio into a revered lineage of intellectual readers of men who stood as paragons and protectors of civil society (and in the case of Mencius, champions of the people or 民 min). While being an ancient tradition, this was, nonetheless, precisely how May Fourth intellectuals understood their roll as progressive artists and intellectuals. The interpretable sites of their peers, however, transcended simple physiognomy, settling often upon more modernized locales informed by the discourses of western science and medicine. Medical diagnosis was a favored mode of evaluating and treating individual and social ills. A spokesman for his generation, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) establishes in his 呼喊 *Na han (Call to Arms)* just such a genealogical point of origin for modern diagnosis of the spirits of men:
我已经到了东京了，因为从那一回以后，我便觉得医学并非一件紧要事，凡是愚弱的国民，即使体格如何健全，如何茁壮，也只能做毫无意义的示众的材料和看客，病死多少是不必以为不幸的。所以我们的第一要著，是在改变他们的精神，而善于改变精神的是，我那时以为当然要推文艺。60

[Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because after this film I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, can only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles; and it doesn't really matter how many of them die 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 determined to promote a literary movement.]

It is ironic that Lu Xun’s decision to abandon medicine is communicated as a sort of psychological appraisal that would eventually lead him to evaluate Chinese society medically in such fictions as 狂人日記 Kuangren riji (A Diary of a Madman). Boccaccio, while contributing little in the way of physiological or psychological diagnoses, was nonetheless nominally added to this illustrious list of reformers hailing back to antiquity, the most modern of whom embraced a more realistic and scientific mode in their assessments. Boccaccio’s new insights into human nature produced intricate, realistic portraits of men and women that transgressed taboos (‘他不’的人性 tabu de renxing)61
and revealed human attributes and liberated human passions previously ignored and repressed.

In tandem with an agenda to exalt the significance of the *Decameron*, Huang and Hu further amplify Boccaccio’s importance by equating his accomplishments with those of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther. The editors pair the value of Boccaccio’s artistic worth to the social and religious significance of Martin Luther’s efforts to reform the Church. While such an equivalence might be hard to conceptualize in the West, where the spheres of religion and art have moved drastically apart in the past centuries, it was not as farfetched a claim to have made in early twentieth China, where scholar-officials, like medieval clerics, had only too recently ceased to straddle the political, intellectual, artistic and religious realms. For Huang, the significance of these two figures was approximately equal: the abolition of an epoch of oppression and darkness (*暗無天日* *an wu tian ri*)62 perpetrated by the Church’s agents. Likewise, the movements of which they were apart, the Renaissance and the Reformation, Huang took together as being the same movement in aim and spirit: to bring about the highest state of happiness and glory to the soul of man. They differed in their focus on the material and the spiritual, but these, being the two chief facets of human existence, naturally melded into a singular purpose: “文藝復興與宗教改革, 實質上也只是一種運動” (“The Renaissance and the Reformation, are in fact one and the same movement”).63

This understanding of the singular root for human emancipation across the centuries in Europe led Huang and Hu to make the following statements equalizing the work of Boccaccio with that of Luther:
[If Martin Luther had been born in southern Europe and carried with him a literary temperament, I believe he would have produced the Decameron. Also, if Boccaccio had been born in northern Europe and possessed a natural endowment for religion, I think that he would have promoted religious reform.]

The editors would even go so far as to conflate their documents into the same, single treatise on human nature:

[Boccaccio’s Decameron used a humorous style to ridicule monks and aristocrats. Martin Luther’s 95 theses used a more serious approach to proclaim the corruption of the Pope. Both works achieved their effects as unprecedented masterpieces that would endure through the ages. Although their forms were different, they were in fact the same work—just two different approaches.]

The kind of perspicacity that (it was thought) Boccaccio exhibited in his emancipation of humanity from the Dark Ages, Huang and Hu illustrate in a rehearsal of
the Second Tale of the First Day, the famous account of Abraham the Jew visiting Rome. As Mencius and Confucius had once seen through the pretenses of pretenders to virtue, Huang and Hu isolate in this tale Boccaccio’s creation of a character that likewise sees through the hypocrisy of political and religious corruption. In fact, as is ironically the case with Abraham the Jew, that revelation of the duplicity of the protectors of the Church is a stimulus to conversion to a truth that transcends the tragedy of the hypocrites’ behavior. This truth bears witness to a belief and an order of the faithful apart from but supplemental to a corrupt, obsolescent system of power. This process by which the perception of corruption gives rise to a greater truth and understanding of man and the cosmos was a pattern that would again appear in Fang Ping and Wang Keyi’s editions during the Communist period. Huang and Hu’s exploration of Boccaccio’s role in practicing a vital hermeneutics of humankind tied up in the histories of conceptual, social and cultural revolution in Europe finally culminates in their admonition to use the text as a tool to promote modernist enlightenment in China. Reading the Decameron will lead the Chinese to awaken to their circumstances and, like Abraham the Jew, to identify the corruption of an old order, by which understanding a purer one may be established:

中國史, 可以說是鬼氣十足的歷史, 自從所謂 “開化” 以來, “薩滿教” (Shamanism) 變相的 “禮教,” 便籠罩著全民族的整個生活, 把人性壓制得擡不起頭。現在中國還有無數鬼的黨羽, 扮作種種形相—愛國者, 革命黨, 教育家, 藝術家, “聖人之徒,”“以風化為己任”的 “偉道先生,” 遺老遺少, 紳士學者等等, 利用社會固有的權威, 壓制人性, 搾取平民。我們學得箇伽丘這本 “十日談” 在近日的中國, 還很用得着, […] 讓讀者
讀過許多“打鬼運動” 的莊言正論，救國救民的大道理之後，讀一兩篇來醒一醒腦兒，怕不是無益之舉吧。66

[Chinese history is one thoroughly permeated by a spirit of superstition. Since its inception, shamanism, disguised as “propriety,” has completely overshadowed the lives of the people, constraining their natures to the point where they dare not lift up their heads. Currently, there still exist numberless “ghost” henchmen disguised in every kind of form, masquerading as patriots, revolutionaries, educators, artists, “disciples of holiness,” “Great Truth” men who make culture there “personal responsibility,” both young and old, gentlemen and academics, etc. They manipulate society’s inherent authority to restrain human nature and to oppress the common people. Boccaccio’s Decameron is still of great use to us today in China, providing readers with opportunities to encounter its variety of rough and polished theories for dismantling superstition and to contemplate philosophies that might save the nation and the people. All of this after one or two readings will awaken their minds. I dare say this poses no disadvantage.]

Huang and Hu’s praise of Boccaccio, the perceived value of his Decameron and its contributions to trends in individual sexuality and revolutionary sentiment, in the eyes of subsequent translators and publishers, in fact, posed a decided advantage to the readers of a Communist China.
On an unnumbered page facing a regal etching of Boccaccio by Van Dalen, Chinese readers opening Fang Ping and Wang Keyi’s 1958 translation of the *Decameron* first encountered a short introductory paragraph alerting them to the contents of the collection:

内容提要:

本书是世界古典文学名著; 通过一百个生动有趣的故事,作者描绘了文艺复兴时期意大利人民生活的全貌, 表现了对于人类的爱和信心, 有力讽刺了反动教会势力的卑鄙无耻。⁶⁷

[Content summary:

The present volume is a masterpiece of classical, world literature; through one hundred riveting stories, the author describes the true aspects of the lives of the people from Renaissance Italy, demonstrating his love and faith in mankind while ridiculing the unabashed corruption of the Church’s power.]

The preface is notably sparing in its details about the original author and his work. Notwithstanding its brevity, though, the encapsulation sufficiently hints at the stance that the Chinese translators would take in incorporating it into the so-called annals of world literature. In the absence of all other contextualizing details, the social import of the text in the early years of the Communist era is made clear. Echoing Huang and Hu’s descriptions of Boccaccio’s revolutionary nature, Fang and Wang laud the Italian poet as a kind of champion of humankind (人类 renlei).
Thus, from the very beginning of Fang and Wang’s translation, the *Decameron* is cast with a political patina that accentuates Huang and Hu’s efforts to valorize Boccaccio’s realistic insights into the nature of mankind. Their statement imbues the collection with the potential to shift power relations and to promote a universal understanding of brotherhood and mutual confidence in a manner that parallels dominant Communist notions of collectivity of the time. The comical, sexual, and carnivalesque tales and narrative strategies employed by Boccaccio are in turn masked under the general characterization “exciting stories” and the promise of their capacity to promote a universal spirit of fraternity. As a consequence, Fang Ping and Wang Keyi’s 1958 translation, presents readers with its own unique, framing narrative in which the *Decameron* is sanctioned as a volume of and for the people as a collective, striking a dissonant chord to the type of personal succor and delight for which Boccaccio had originally intended it. The rich addition of a provocative visual apparatus to Fang and Wang’s translation presents an especially interesting case in the interpretation of the text’s intended significance to a broad Communist readership. Such bourgeoisie notions as individuality and sexuality, that are otherwise eschewed in the introduction, are openly exhibited in the artistic apparatuses of the translation only to be continuously tamed of their inherent power to destabilize a collectivized reading of the text.

While the foreword is ostensibly sparing in substance, the pages that follow it richly compensate with visual detail. Eighteen different reproductions of etchings, ink drawings, and paintings from various Italian, Russian, and English editions of the *Decameron* immediately greet readers as they thumb through to the Table of Contents (artists include: Van Dalen, Im Propylaen, Louis Chalon, Tito Lessi, Steele Savage, Mac
Harshberger and Rockwell Kent). Immediately striking are the stimulating nature of the depictions. The plates are filled with violent and erotic scenes of naked men being flogged, lusty women being serenaded, lovers groping longingly under trees, and young voyeurs spying on bathing maidens. Overall, the reproductions are wholly provocative when they are not openly explicit. Fang and Wang’s selections of art, however, demonstrate some discrimination and restraint. The more orientalizing and verisimilar eroticized illustrations by Louis Chalon, available to the editors in J. M. Rigg’s 1953 English translation, have notably been removed from the repertoire (Fig. 5, 6):

![Fig. 5 Louis Chalon’s “Title Page”](image1)

![Fig. 6 Chalon’s “Day Two, Tale Six”](image2)

The last ink drawing in the series of plates selected by Fang and Wang is an illustration from the story of the painters Bruno and Buffalmacco (Day Eight, Story Nine) wherein are depicted two lovers embracing over a tomb, the lady caressing her partner’s neck, her legs spread open toward the viewer. The visual suggestiveness of
representations such as this one injects an apparent paradox into the aims of the translators to frame the collection as an instrument for collective liberation and fraternity, rather than an exploration into the commerce of individual vendetta and sexuality. Apart from any speculative, marketing motive to entice readers and to sell books, the pictures serve an important rhetorical function, inasmuch as they assist in reproducing tension that already inheres in the individual novelle and their multiple framing devices. They contrast notions of the sexualized individuals of the tales with the collective morality and fraternity afforded by their glosses. Similar to the embedded fantasy told within the tale of Bruno and Buffalmacco, what is presented before the eyes of the reader may be trusted and pursued, but only at one’s own peril. In other words, the framers of the tales have a personal investment in maintaining a contrast between the truth and fantasy that they weave for their audiences. Fang Ping and Wang Keyi, likewise, capitalize on this contrast of stimulation and expectation on the part of readers caused by the visual images in order to accentuate later a more truthful rendition of the material realities that undergird the fiction of the novellas’ depictions. Consequently, the display of erotic pictures and tales representative of individualized sexuality and behavior are necessary to their exposure as fictions in the revelatory light of a forthcoming, ideological interpretation of the volume: the translation’s main preface.

The maiden’s wanton posture from the eighth-day illustration gestures to the facing page, the introduction entitled 卜伽丘和他的‘十日谈’ Bujiaqiu he ta de ‘Shi ri tan’ (“Boccaccio and His Decameron”), which serves as the most commanding, textual interpretive frame of the collection. The introduction is Fang Ping’s translation of an original preface written by the Russian author A. Shteyn (亞什提恩) (1955). At first
glance, the borrowed nature of this frame may seem to convey little about the Chinese translators’ understanding and interpretation of the Decameron. However, the intentional selection, and, as we shall see later in the later 1980 edition, the elaboration upon Shteyn’s preface, while not always a direct communication of their own thoughts at the time, nonetheless speaks a great deal about the translators’ attitudes. After all, Fang and Wang were not translating from the Russian when they produced their 1958 Chinese edition, but from three other English translations: (1) John Payne (1931), (2) J. M. Rigg (1953), and (3) Richard Aldington (1930). This suggests that Shteyn’s preface was purposefully sought out as an alternative accessus that more appropriately coincided with the translator’s understanding of the Decameron’s significance as intimated in their initial epigraph. Russian glosses on European classics abounded at the time and were preferred on general ideological grounds. The People’s Press out of Beijing (人民出版社 Renmin chuban she), for instance, made Russian interpretations of the European renaissance and Italian writers widely available in Chinese. Shteyn’s preface in Fang’s translation extends the notion of democratic Boccaccio (意大利文艺复兴最民主的初期短篇小说家) broadcast in such pamphlets as 文艺复兴 Wenyi fuxing (The Renaissance) (1955).

Almost as if the visual reproductions where no factor at all to the understanding of the collection, the introduction picks up where the preludial synopsis left off, reinscribing the Decameron within a history of social class struggles. Shteyn sets the historical scene of the tales by representing an Italy actively fleeing from its feudal past. Wielding the tools of mercantile and capitalistic ingenuity, Italy succeeded in establishing a new economic and social system from which all other European nations benefited and borrowed. The fact that it would come to constitute the birthplace of capitalism does not
seem to damper the heroic changes it introduced to the world. Shteyn tempers any potential praise for the work’s capitalist overtones by a calculated strategy of citation in which advancements linked back into quotations of Marx and Engels, whereby emphasis is constantly redirected from the type of society Italy introduced to the world to the revolutionary spirit its free city-states exerted in order to wrest their independence from the oppression of medieval asceticism, feudalism, and the grips of the Church: “他们把尘世的现实的目的，光明而乐观的世界观与对人的热爱跟盲目宗教信仰作了对比” (“They took the aims of a realistic, material world, one luminous and positive, and contrasted the love for mankind with those blind tenets of religion”). Thus, in spite of its capitalist trajectory, the Italian Renaissance was an important revolutionary stage in the historical process of broadening the privileges of mankind. Furthermore, Shteyn finds Giovanni Boccaccio to be the most revolutionary of all other cultural figures of his era: “但是特别鲜明地表现了意大利文化的民族特征的是十日谈的作者乔凡尼卜伽丘” (“But the brightest representative of the particular, ethnicity of Italian culture is the author of the Decameron, Giovanni Boccaccio”). While in some ways caught in the tangles of its capitalist milieu, the Decameron ultimately absolves its author of guilt in being the first literary site to describe the tempestuous, contradictory nature of capitalism.

One of the greatest historical proofs for Boccaccio’s revolutionary spirit arises out of a cogent biographical moment rehearsed in the preface. In the struggles between merchants and aristocrats played out on the streets of Florence in 1342, Boccaccio is named as a chief supporter of the people, a preserver of republican freedoms, and a strict antagonist of feudalism: “卜伽丘马上显露出他自己是共和政体的拥护者, 封建传制制
度的敌人” (“Boccaccio quickly revealed that he was a preserver and proponent of republican government, in other words, an enemy of the self-perpetuating feudal system”). He detested the blind arrogance of the aristocracy so much, Shteyn remarks, that he adopted the status of a common citizen (人民身份 renmin shenfen) in order to perform government service. The author later points out, however, that Boccaccio was no champion of the ignorant masses and workers. Regardless of his snub to the lowest stratus of society, Boccaccio is ultimately cast as having promoted a democratic ideal in the Decameron that redeemed his political positions in reality: “在他的优秀的艺术作品中, 首先是在十日谈里面, 卜伽丘是能够克服他在征政治上局限性, 表现出更广泛的全民的愿望的” (“Within his artistic pieces of literary genius, first and foremost the Decameron, Boccaccio was able to overcome the local limits of his own political prejudice, exhibiting a more expansive interest in the people”). With this democratic piece of writing, Boccaccio gave medieval asceticism its final blow (致命的打击 zhiming de daji).

The greatest critical theme Shteyn finds permeating the text is Boccaccio’s vituperation of widespread corruption in the Church. Boccaccio often executes this theme with caustic and crude humor. In a number of stories he showcases men of the cloth caught in the midst of sating their appetites for power and sex. Shteyn is keen to point out, though, that despite the centrality of sexual deviance in these tales, Boccaccio is not intent upon condemning lasciviousness per se. Shteyn points out that the carnal appetites are never something Boccaccio directly condemns, whether lay or the clergy. However, what comes under fire is their hypocrisy: “僧侣们的罪过不是因为他们享受尘世的幸福, 而在于他们是伪君子, 假善人, 他们的言行不一致” (“The monks err not
in enjoying the pleasures of this world, but in being hypocrites, charlatans and in betraying their words with their actions”).\textsuperscript{80} Sexuality, in fact, is something that Shteyn finds organic to Boccaccio’s revolutionary spirit, at least the nature of its ubiquity. The openness with which Boccaccio treats human sexuality at once celebrates the common urges and the common people they animate, valorizes women and their experiences and overturns the oppression of an unnatural, medieval asceticism.\textsuperscript{81} Sexuality is, therefore, the biological expression of a natural, social equality in both its origins and its constant performance. Thus, it becomes part of the greater strategies of democratization by which all people are given access and entitlement to the enjoyments of material life. Sexuality is an equalizer that accompanies the motley crew of protagonists from all levels of society parading through the stories of the \textit{Decameron}. Consequently, the unveiling of sexuality likewise sheds light upon the lower levels of society most often neglected. In this way, Fang and Wang use Shteyn’s frame to insert the social and material significance of the erotic images leading up to the introduction. Far from signifying the individualistic commodification and exchange of sexual pleasures, the tales of Boccaccio represent the means by which human beings are equalized and their societies democratized.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, it initially seems strange that Fang and Wang would allow a translation of a Russian author to state entirely a Chinese position. The awkwardness of this decision is most acutely felt in the last portion of the introduction, where the reception and translation of Boccaccio in Germany and Russia is rehearsed. The more overt the references to Russian translations and the importance of the collection in Russian, the more exponentially glaring becomes the absence of a
Chinese response to the *Decameron*. How is that absence, then, to be accounted for? For the translators, it was not merely a question of reconveying Shteyn’s introduction for convenience sake. The introduction offered something in the way of an ideological framing that other (English) readings did not. The decision to translate the introduction wholesale from the Russian demonstrates a recourse to authority, but one that was intentionally selective. It is a notable move away from the western European, capitalist ground from which the *Decameron* sprouted, flourished and circulated. Riggs’ (1950) introduction, for instance, is entirely ignored. The biographical hearsay (e.g. affairs with princess Maria [Fiammetta]) and historical debates (e.g. the nature of Boccaccio’s secretive repentance in 1361) surrounding Boccaccio’s life that wholly occupy Riggs’ introduction prove too historically ponderous and ideologically weak for the Chinese translators’ purposes. Without the force of a more compelling principle, Riggs’ declaration that the work exudes a “profound, many-sided and intimate knowledge of human nature” (xviii) is ultimately unconvincing. Fang and Wang’s blurb at the beginning of their 1958 edition is evidence, however brief, of the power of socialist principles to substantiate claims for the *Decameron*’s canonicity. Twenty-two years later (a span that included the Great Leap Forward [1958-61] and the Culture Revolution [1966-76]), the translators would finally craft their own detailed frame around the collection.

Fang Ping and Wang Keyi’s updated 1980 edition contains important changes that establish a more explicit and locally meaningful position on the *Decameron*. In both the exhibition of art and the provision of introductory knowledge and interpretation, the translators have heightened the degrees of effects, interpretations and tensions presented
in the 1958 edition. Evidence of their more thorough involvement in the framing of the text is first detected by the absence of the 1958 epigraph. Replaced by a modern-style title page with publication information, the former explanation to the reader has been delayed and replaced by Fang’s own introduction. Before Fang offers his expansions of Shteyn’s introduction, however, startling changes to the visual apparatus of the text are first detected.

In addition to the facsimile of a plate from the earliest printed edition of the *Decameron* with etchings (1492), already present in the 1958 edition, the editors have added a reproduction from the same edition (most likely lifted from Rigg’s introduction). This etching adds a visual dimension to the collection that the first edition did not: the activities of the *brigata* (Fig. 7).

![Fig. 7 “The Brigata”](image)
In this reproduction, the party is seen acting in its two principal modes: (1) dance and promenade; and (2) storytelling in the garden. The plate is divided down the middle showing the party huddled behind a lute player, some hand-in-hand in postures preparatory to dance. The right side of the plate contrasts the dynamism of the group’s members in the adjacent representation as they now find themselves seated around a fountain in their *locus amoenus* with one of their colleagues crowned ruler, sitting atop a pedestal. The reproduction is significant in that it visually emphasizes the centrality of the collection’s original frame. Drawing greater attention to the contextualized nature of the tales provides readers with the visual stimulus that will help them weigh the numerous reproductions that follow as relating back to a frame. Furthermore, the inclusion of the plate presages the interpretive framing work in which Fang will shortly engage through his own introduction to the collection. Referencing the *brigata* ahead of the erotic depictions of the tales foreshadows the relationship that Fang will ultimately have to the text as a whole.

Within the remaining visual reproductions, six new ink drawings appear, while the number of artists depicted has been significantly reduced. The 1980 edition contains only the work of two artists: Steele Savage (1931) and Mac Harshberger (1948). While many of the original images are retained in the new version, additions and replacements are many, and all, curiously, tend to the increase of eroticism. An example of this is found in the Savage illustration from the First Day, Fourth Story in which a friar is seen cupping the exposed breast of a woman who lingers under a wooden canopy entangled with grape vines (Fig. 8). His free hand is outstretched, poised to pluck fruit from a low-hanging bunch of plump grapes.
Another image of Savage’s, startling in its ambiguous mix of eroticism and violence (*eros* and *thanatos*), depicts a scene from Day Two, Story Eight (Fig. 9). Against a black sky a wide-eyed lord stands erect over a woman who gropes her bosom. She cranes her neck back to gaze at the starry sky as she fingers her bare chest. However, her supple, erotic posture is violently contrasted by the statuesque position of the lord who stands over her. Shifting his weight backward onto his right hip, bizarrely disengaged, his hands gesture up and away from his and the woman’s body, as if issuing a reprisal or discourse. The stark contrast in their behavior transcends the boundaries of the odd to suggest a scene of looming threat and violence. These and other new selections all contribute to the heightened sense of the tales’ sexuality in the apparatus of the 1980 translation. In this way, Fang also increases the sense of contrast originally present in the 1958 edition between the stories’ content and Shteyn’s introduction by...
which the heuristic significance of the latter was cast into greater relief. Fang’s introduction, poised to replace the Russian author’s, would likewise become more explicit in its function as a Chinese, interpretive frame for the text. Another element accentuating the significance of Fang’s Chinese frame is the fact that the bawdry art depicted is done exclusively by the hands of foreigners from capitalist nations. This is a casual coincidence that is made more ideologically important in Fang’s subsequent interpretations of sexuality and capitalist culture which we will shortly visit.

Lurking questions about the reasons why Fang waited for twenty-two years before writing his own introduction are partially dispelled by a comment he makes there. While it is likely that over the passage of time he had finally formed his own informed opinion of the text and learned the craft of framing, Fang provides a convincing practical reason for having delayed to venture his own opinion until August 1980: the Decameron was no longer on the list of prohibited books monitored by the Gang of Four during the Cultural Revolution. Under the hope of a new era of open thought and inquiry following a decade of disaster, Fang was inspired to break old taboos (in the spirit of Huang’s articulation) and to promote a new line of Boccaccio scholarship in China:

现在, 思想开始解放, 禁区正在打破—只有在大好形势的今天, 我们才有可能以无产阶级继承前人所创造的一切文化成果的气度, 对于十日谈这部古典名著进行探讨, 在深入研究的基础上, 给予一个科学的总结。83

[Now, thought has begun to be liberated. The prohibited territories of mind are being broken. Only in the favorable position of the present can
we finally speak tolerantly of all cultural production created by the 
forebears of us proletarian inheritors and investigate this classic chef 
d’oeuvre, the *Decameron*, and thereby provide a scientific summary of it 
based upon a foundation of responsible scholarship.]

Though the moratorium on free thinking and inquiry in the early eighties under Deng Xiaoping was short lived, Fang happily seized the opportunity when it seemed most profitable. What oddly stands out in the introduction, though, is that nothing is found in it to suggest the transgression of any established party-line. In other words, there is no apparent evidence of the liberation of thought that Fang claims he performs. The intransitive aspect of the passive construction English verb compels us to ask implicitly “to be liberated from what?,” a question that helps us to better understand Fang’s statement before simply discarding it as a thinly veiled attempt to pass his “communist” frame off as the product of free thought. Apart from any other historical or editorial explanations for his earlier silence, Fang’s delay confirms what history tells about these decades of touch-and-go in China: as an intellectual, it was often best not to speak at all. The hat of a reactionary could be hung on any word. Thus, we need not immediately doubt Fang’s sincerity in believing he was liberated, at least from a certain superstratum of fear, for in 1980, he was finally permitted to research and to speak out on western works again, despite the absence of the heterodoxical opinions that we feel must necessarily inhere in the term “liberated.”

The dominant theme throughout Fang’s introduction is the notion of Boccaccio as a revolutionary comrade. This is a palpable elevation of the rhetoric and an extensive elaboration of the ideological reasoning first suggested in Huang’s introduction and later
published in the Chinese translation of the Shteyn’s Russian introduction (1958). As Wendy Larson has cogently argued in her own case studies, this stance reflects the Chinese stress on revolutionary spirit as a crucial feature of modern Chinese subjectivity over and against the matrix of sexualized individuality.

With little variance, Fang casts Boccaccio in the role of political writer who defies corrupt authorities and systems and champions the causes of the masses:

[For Boccaccio, this was the decisive impasse with the enemy wherein he would yield his pen like a sword. All throughout his works and by every artistic means he opened up a violent attack upon the Church’s ascetic pontifications.]

In this way, Fang perceives Boccaccio’s mission as being primarily a social one wherein his artistic abilities serve as mere secondary attributes. Boccaccio is elevated to a kind of people’s hero by the way in which he applies common abilities and weaves common stories into the evolutionary force of an epoch:

[For Boccaccio, this was the decisive impasse with the enemy wherein he would yield his pen like a sword. All throughout his works and by every artistic means he opened up a violent attack upon the Church’s ascetic pontifications.]
Boccaccio’s was a responsibility to challenge, to rally, to ravage and to strike. He explored the artistic possibilities of how to use common artistic forms to shoulder the destiny of an epoch.]

The martial language that Fang employs, augments Boccaccio’s heroic mission as a revolutionary writer. Furthermore, his use of the term 呐喊 nahan (to rally) unmistakably recalls one of the most important literary figures of the modern period in China, Lu Xun who had made that verb a centerpiece of his early, revolutionary fiction. Fang thus forges a native, literary link between Boccaccio’s mission and Lu Xun’s own arduous burden to awaken his countrymen and “to save the children.”

Fang points out three general aspects of Boccaccio’s work and character that help characterize him as a modern, revolutionary soul engaged on behalf of society at large. These are: (1) resistance to corrupt feudal authority through biting satire; (2) the liberation of women through discourses of love and marital reformation; and (3) the extension of existential and material privileges to the masses tied up in such concepts as 人道 rendao (humaneness), 人文 renwen (humanism), and 人性 renxing (humanity).

While he makes passing reference to the comicality of the collection, also a manifestation of Boccaccio’s humanity, the overall impression of Boccaccio’s portrait is that of a dedicated revolutionary: “强调的是它的富于战斗性的一面, 因此容易想象为这是一部怒目金刚式的作品” (“What is emphasized is the book’s conformity to a warrior spirit, making it rather easy to imagine it approaching the status of a fierce, stalwart work”).

An attentive reader of Boccaccio’s works, Fang extracts his own evidences from within the text for the kind of revolutionary Boccaccio was in his day. In particular, day four’s apology attracts Fang’s attention as proof of real opposition by the ascetic,
medieval reactionaries whom Boccaccio was constrained to fight off: “作者甚至不得不中断了他的叙述过程,在故事中间插进了一段表白” (“The author was forced to cut short his narration and insert an explanation”).

Amplifying the force of Shteyn’s earlier comments on the egalitarian display of characters and life on the cusp of the Renaissance, Fang employs the common epithet “human comedy” to describe the Decameron, understanding that to mean a colorful and honest, literary depiction of a panoply of people in a realist mode. He interprets this narrative style as conveying a greater appreciation for human life and destiny, an authorial gesture of clemency to expand the freedoms of the people it describes:

十分可贵的是作家的人道主义精神，总是关心人的命运——
人们怎样摆脱封建教会的精神枷锁而掌握自己的命运。88

[What we can most appreciate is the author’s humane spirit, one always concerned with the people’s destiny—how are people to free themselves from the spiritual shackles of the feudal Church and seize their own destiny.]

Fang tethers this beneficent spirit of Boccaccio to a statement made by Marx that the religious fantasies of men are dispelled only by the demands to realize their material blessings in reality.89 As one concerned with the pragmatics of a material, carnal existence, Boccaccio displayed a unique and abiding interest in humankind in his times:

卜伽丘笔下的那些充满着对人生的热爱, 一心追求尘世欢乐的故事, 就是抛弃了天国的幻梦, 宣扬幸福在人间。90
[The love of mankind that fills Boccaccio’s quill and seeks out life’s pleasures in his stories, jettisons the empty fantasies of a heaven to come, proclaiming the blessedness of life among men.]

On the other hand, the hypocrisy of the aristocracy and the Church in the Middle Ages was a function of their sanctioning of an ascetic lifestyle, one that impoverished the materials existences of the masses.

Fang takes Shteyn one step further in interpreting Boccaccio’s criticism of religious hypocrisy as not being a simple consequence of the author’s opinions on moral life. In Fang’s opinion, Boccaccio’s indignation stems from his understanding of the ideological hypocrisy at work which suppresses the realization of desires and fulfillment of the destinies of the majority of the people. He finds an example of this in the fourth tale of the third day in which a husband mesmerized by a preacher’s sermon chases away the night worshipping while the same preacher elsewhere stays up all night venerating the body of his wife. This deceptive exchange of spiritual fantasies for material pleasures on the part of the preacher exemplifies the greater ideological strategies at work in feudal society, something Fang interprets Boccaccio as blaming. The Church’s dismal descriptions of reality and its promises of forthcoming spiritual blessings are precisely what allow the aristocracy and religious clerics to enjoy the lion’s share of life’s material blessings:

受欺骗的广大民众甘心把人世看作苦海,过着牛马的生活,少数封建特权阶级就更可以为所欲为,过着荒淫无耻的生活。所以, “禁欲” 的背后就是 “纵欲,” 作者非常懂得这个道理。他看透了天主教会玩弄的是什么卑鄙的伎俩。91
[With the vast majority of people duped into willingly accepting that life is a sea of troubles and accepting to live like dogs, that thin, privileged level of feudal society could more easily realize their own desires, pursuing sundry pleasures without shame. Our author fully understood how behind the curbing of desires lurked a pursuance of them. He saw through this strategy of Catholicism and identified it for what it was: a cheap trick.]

The issue of sexuality comes up obliquely in Fang’s more involved discussion of the issue of love and marriage as part of the more modern aspect of Boccaccio’s thinking. Boccaccio was forward thinking in his understanding of the necessity to link the rites of marriage with conjugal love, something that was hardly common practice at the time. However, because Boccaccio’s understanding of love and humanism was founded within the confines of a capitalist system of commerce and ideas, Fang laments that love, if it can be called that, was helplessly entangled in principles of 享乐主义 xiangle zhuyi (hedonism) and 个性解放 gexing jiefang (individual liberation). For this reason, Fang suspects that Boccaccio’s stories purposefully present a capitalist society in which crimes perpetrated by men of the cloth are now enacted by others in positions of material ascendancy. It is the intentional unveiling of the replacement of the Church with the corruption of a new capitalist class of merchants:

个性解放几乎同时意味着性的解放；对天主教会不公开的纵欲的批判，似乎只是为了代之以资产阶级公开的纵欲。如果说，那些富于批判的锋芒，揭露天主教会腐败行为的故事，使人看到了腐朽的封建社会不可避免的没落命运；那么十日谈里另外一些不很高明的故事 (例如
第八天故事第八), 仿佛预示着资本主义国家里必然会出现的那种淫乱污秽的社会风气. 93

[The liberation of the individual at the same time almost signifies sexual liberation; the criticism of the Catholic Church’s latent pursuance of desire appears to be designed only to replace it with a capitalist class’s pleasure seeking. If we accept that those sharp judgments disclose the corrupt behavior of the Catholic Church, allowing people to see the unavoidably fallen nature of a rotten feudal society, then, in another way, the less highbrow stories of the Decameron also seem to foretell the necessary appearance of sexually decadent and corrupt social conditions in capitalist nations.]

Fang’s interpretation is astute. Moreover, in a sense he reifies the same unveiling of perverse capitalist sexuality that he attributes to Boccaccio, in his arrangement of the prefatory materials to the Decameron. The precise selection of explicit erotic images representing the collection’s tales, and fashioned exclusively by western hands, comes to function as Fang’s own double exposure of a sexuality which democratizes and undoes the power of an oppressive history even as it suggests the corrupt excesses of a new capitalist order dedicated to hedonism and inequality. Thus, with Fang’s expansion of framing mechanisms, the strategy of discovery is likewise broadened. Where Boccaccio once explained the empathy motivating his revealing tales, at its origins and destinations oriented toward the individual, Fang now uncovers individual sexuality as the antipode of a care for class, society and historical evolution.
It is from this interpretation and framing of the Decameron that Fang succeeds in lauding Boccaccio as a revolutionary spirit. Despite, his limits and excesses, Boccaccio is honored for assisting in the exposure and abolition of a feudal system that too had plagued China for millennia. For this reason, capitalist monetary, social and sexual corruptions aside, Boccaccio is ultimately hailed as a revolutionary brother-in-arms:

这样一位旗帜鲜明的战士是值得我们尊敬的。当我们正努力要把二千多年来根深蒂固的封建势力从自己的国土上铲除掉时，我们有理由纪念卜伽丘，这位文艺复兴时期的伟人，把他看作曾经走在我们前面的一位战友。\(^{94}\)

[This brilliant, banner waving soldier deserves to be honored. While we are still diligently engaged in our own country in uprooting two thousand years of deeply enrooted feudalist forces, we truly have reason to remember Boccaccio, that great figure of Renaissance civilization, and view him as an ally who came before us.]

As a result, the sexualized visual apparatuses of the translations and the bawdy nature of the individual novelle are ultimately made to serve the aims of a revolutionary agenda. Sexual liberation is countenanced according to ideological need as either an important factor in the liberation of the masses from feudalism or as the corrupt sign of individualistic perversion in a capitalist society. In both circumstances, it is openly exhibited as a force of communist modernity harnessed by the exigencies of a superior revolutionary spirit. In this way, Chinese decamerons constitute an important barometer in modern Chinese culture, tracking cultural fluctuations in pressures between
individualism and sexuality and collectivism and nationalistic fervor. As Jiao Naifang’s 2000 publication confirms, that barometer continues to record extreme shifts in cultural attitudes towards individual sexuality and nationalistic fervor as China continues its deliberations on modernity.


3 Monica Piccioni, Italian sinologist and one of the only scholars who has published on the reception of Boccaccio in China, provides important timelines and synopses preparatory to this chapter’s literary and cultural analyses. Monica Piccioni, “Boccaccio e la Cina,” Mondo Cinese 89 (May/August 1995); “Il Decameron: un bestseller in Cina,” La letteratura italiana in Cina, ed. Alessandra Brezzi (Rome: Tillesmedia, 2008), 239-49.


5 All citations in the original Italian are from V. Branca’s two volume edition: Decamerone, 2 vols, ed. Vittore Branca (Torino: Einaudi, 1992).


7 Marcello Turchi draws attention to the widening scope of Boccaccio’s work that extends beyond Florence to take in different regions and customs of Italy, especially the South. Marcello Turchi, “Immagini di umanità nelle prospettive meridionali del Decamerone,” Nuovi quaderni del meridione 7 (1969): 259-88.


9 Larson, 11.

10 Ibid., 5.


12 Ibid., 18.

13 Ibid., 21.

14 The infamous Talks at Yan’an explicitly proscribe the whims of personal sentiment as motivation for the creation of art. Art must be socially and politically conscious— responsible to the collective, not the individual.
15 Liu, 23.

16 Cao Huoxing, “Without the Party, There is no New China” Meiyou gongchan dang jiu meiyou xin zhongguo 没有共产党就没有新中国, Songs of the Revolution to be Sung by All Geming gequ dajia chang 革命歌曲大家唱 (Beijing: Yinyue chuban she, 1965), 124.


18 Larson, 34.

19 Including Wang Guowei’s translation of Ruric Nevel Roark’s Psychology in Education (1895), in which emotion, imitation, judgment, sense, and desire were grounded in the context of teaching, training, and personal development.


22 A notion raised in Freud’s Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905).

23 Larson, 46.

24 Yu, 83.

25 The usefulness of Freudian theory to describe reality and to suggest proper avenues for social evolution is a given. The manifest impulses of the primary libidinal force of human nature (eros, thanatos and nirvana) all tend toward states of harmony that are realized both individually and socially. However, even in Freudian inquiries as utopian as Herbert Marcuse’s proposal of eroticized civilization in contrast to historically repressive and dominating ones (1955), social harmony is always theorized by way of primal, individual perversions and the threats of sexual reversions.

26 Social harmony 和 being one of the foundational principles and values of Chinese civilization.


30 Ibid., 7.

31 Ibid., 7.

32 Ibid., 8-9.

33 Ibid., 9.
34 Ibid., 14.

35 Larson, 73.


37 Yue Zhi, “Two Neighbors” Er linren 二邻人, Popular Literature Dazhong wenyi 大众文艺 1.4 (1929): 606-12.

38 Wang Ning’s study of Chinese feminism invites comparatists to recognize the important historical and cultural differences that exist between western feminisms and their Chinese counterparts. Feminism made visible by the May Fourth movement, would never acquire that aspect of individualism inherent in the West. Despite the lip service paid to women’s social and sexual liberation, progress has always been heavily marked in China by strong social and revolutionary significance. Wang Ning, “Feminist Theory and Contemporary Chinese Female Literature,” Feminism/Feminity in Chinese Literature, ed. Chen Penghsiang and Whitney Crothers Dilley (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 203.


41 Ding Ling, The Collected Works of Ding Ling Ding Ling zuopin ji 丁玲作品集 (Chengdu: Xizang renmin chuban she, 2000).

42 Ding Ling, Miss Sophie’s Diary and Other Stories (Beijing: Panda Books, 1985), 22.

43 Ding Ling, The Collected, 28.


46 Yue, 612.


48 In a response to accusations that he was a dangerous bourgeois writer, Lu Xun wrote an essay, “Literature in Revolutionary Times” Geming shidai de wenxue 革命时代的文学 (1927), that defines the stages through which revolutionary literature must pass. His apology reveals the extent to which literature had become synonymous with social revolution in China at the time. His articulation of the second stage is somewhat reflective of the period toward which China was supposedly heading:

(二) 到了大革命的时代，文学没有了，没有声音了，因为大家受革命潮流的鼓荡，大家由呼喊而转入行动，大家忙着革命，没有闲空谈文学了。还有一层，是那时民生凋敝，无论国面吃尚且来不及，那里有心思谈文学呢? [...] 穷苦的时候必定没有文学作品的，我在北京时，穷，就到处借钱，不写一个字，到薪俸发放时，才坐下来做文章。
With the arrival of the revolution, literature essentially disappears without a sound. All have been swept up by the wave of revolutionary fervor, marshaled to enter into its forces. Everyone is busy with the work of revolution and has no time to discuss literature. There’s also another stratus of society, those who are critically impoverished and wholly preoccupied with the search for bread. How would they have the time to ponder literary issues? […] While destitute, there are certainly no literary works being produced. When I was in Beijing and poor for a time, I was occupied with borrowing money from wherever I could get it. I didn’t write one character. It wasn’t until a salary started coming in that I had the luxury to sit down and write an essay.


49 There exist two major bibliographies for the publication of Italian texts in Chinese, both of which can be located in Beijing: (1) Bi Shutang, *Hanyi yiguo shuji ji guanyu yiguo zhi hanji mulu—Catalogo di opere in cinese tradotte dall’italiano o riguardanti l’Italia* (Beijing: Zhongyi Wenhua Xiehui [Centro Culturale Italiano], 1942); (2) *Bibliografia delle opere Italiane tradotte in Cinese 1911-1992 = Yidali zuo pin Han yi shu mu (1911-1992)* (Peking: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1992).

50 Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron Shi ri tan* 十日谈, trans. Huang Shi and Hu Zanyun (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1932), viii.

51 Ibid., viii.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., iv.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., v.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.

59 The activity of reading people had always enjoyed an extensive, native tradition, leading all the way back to the philosophers Mencius and Confucius. In the philosophical articulations of these two Confucian sages, the art of reading men was often associated with reformative and revolutionary thinking aimed at the reordering of society. Originally, Confucius had drawn attention to men’s words and physiognomy as indicators of their inner characters in a push to ground virtue in moral character in opposition to ones’ birth and social status: “Confucius said: Refined speech and becoming appearances rarely hide a benevolent character!” 子曰: 巧言令色，鮮矣仁! (“Xue’er” 学而 in Cheng Shude, *The Analects: A Critical Edition Lunyu jishi 论语集释, 4 vols. [Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006]). This claim demonstrates a faith that the benevolent ruler and gentleman junzi 君子 carries interpretable signs about them. A century later, in his elaboration of basic Confucian principles, Mencius fixated on a specific bodily site whereat men could be read:

孟子曰: “存乎人者，莫良於眸子. 眸子不能掩其惡. 胸中正，則眸子瞭焉; 胸中不正，則眸子眊焉. 聽其言也，觀其眸子，人焉廋哉?” (“Li lou shang” 离娄上, 1.15, *Mencius 孟子*)
Mencius said: Of all things existing in man, there is none better than his pupil. A pupil cannot hide one’s wickedness. If there is righteousness in the breast, the pupil will be clear. If, however, unrighteousness resides in the breast, the pupil will be blurry. Listen to man’s words, and watch his pupils. How can he possibly conceal anything?


61 Huang and Hu, vi.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., vii.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., ix.


72 Fang and Wang, II.

73 Ibid., III.

74 Ibid., IV.

75 Ibid., XXX.

76 Ibid., V.

77 Ibid., IV.

78 Ibid., VI.

79 Ibid., XV.

80 Ibid., XX.
81 Ibid., XX-XXII.


83 Ibid., 1.

84 Ibid., 3.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid., 23.

87 Ibid., 3.

88 Ibid., 4.

89 Ibid., 6.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., 16.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., 26.

94 Ibid., 27.
CONCLUSION

After the political and military challenges of the nineteenth century, China sought national redemption through the appropriation of foreign modes of modernization. In the realm of literary art, for much of the twentieth century, “translation, adaptation, appropriation, and other interlingual practices related to the West” came to constitute the foundations of the modern Chinese intellectual tradition. In these cultural exchanges, Italian Renaissance concepts, forms, and authors came to serve specific, meaningful roles in China’s creation of its own modernisms. Up until the present, though the extensive and fraught histories of English, French, German, and Russian literary influences on China have been told and retold, apart from general bibliographic work Italian borrowings in China’s processes of cultural renewal have lain largely unquestioned or undiscovered. This project has attempted to redress this situation by demonstrating the profound influence that Italian cultural borrowings have had on Chinese modernity.

By considering the dynamics of contact between Italian culture and China, this dissertation has not only filled a critical, historical gap but has also drawn attention to the complexity of a crucial translated space in which Chinese intellectuals most often processed Italian literature through other cultural intermediaries. This gap has been treated less as an absence than as a crucial site of overabundance, one that has already been overly-written a number of times by other, more politically imposing western traditions, whose glosses historically raised Italian literature to the universal level of what was representatively modern and western, and therefore, of use to Chinese readers. These primary appraisals of the value of *Italianitas* to modernity provided the
paradigmatic scheme upon which Chinese intellectuals attempted to erect their own conceptions of China’s evolving modern society and arts. The logic of Italian culture’s universality, combined with China’s own calculated historical and conceptual connections justified the Italian borrowings and their eventual nativization as Chinese cultural products.

The role that Italian culture played in narratives of modern Chinese developments is *prima facie* significant in that Chinese intellectuals historically felt impelled to transplant elements of Italian culture into Chinese contexts. However, the circumstances that made concepts of Italian Renaissance particular to China’s modernization also caused these appropriations to be passed over in historiography and literary criticism. Italian culture, unlike that of so many other marauding European powers in Asia, was not, strictly speaking, forced upon the semi-colonized Chinese: the influence of Italian culture did not directly grow out of colonial and postcolonial conditions, for Italy was not a significant player in carving up the ports and economies of the mainland. While a Goethe or a Shakespeare was often delivered directly across the embattled trenches of intercultural communication, Chinese intellectuals more freely and actively sought out ideas of Italian Renaissance and its literature. Contact with Italian literature, thus, offered unique opportunities for intellectuals to imagine modernity and to practice new forms of cultural and individual distinctiveness. Riding a crest of centuries of European and Japanese glosses, mediations and translations, Italian culture and literature arrived in China with a singular accretion of value that resembled something like China’s own powerful and expansive ancient tradition. Furthermore, through these linguistic and cultural mediations, Chinese intellectuals came to grasp the importance of Italian history
and its canonical figures and texts as the deep and distant bedrock of western modernity. In this way, Italy came to constitute a hallowed place in early modern Chinese occidentalisms (romanticizations of the West and modernity). Inasmuch as Italy was the origin of world renaissances, western humanism, and the modern age, Chinese intellectuals chose to come to terms with it so as to re-contemplate their own notions of origin and future in a modern global system.

Focusing on China’s involvement with Marco Polo, the Italian Renaissance, Dante, Boccaccio, and the Petrarchan sonnet, this study has investigated dynamic interactions between and historical significance of citation, translation, literary writing and movements, scholarly production and print culture across the twentieth century (from the late Qing through the ongoing Reform era). The overall methodological approach to this project has been inspired by what Xiaomei Chen has called a *post-postcolonial* outlook and what Lydia Liu has termed *translingual practice*. I have sought to maintain a critical approach that moves through and past the limited, prescriptive discourses of orientalism and occidentalism in order to arrive at a more generous analysis in which my objects of study, however “othered” or “misinterpreted,” are explained in terms of their complex political and historical worth in specific contexts. Applying this approach to a cultural analysis of Italian borrowings has allowed my case studies to contribute to a greater understanding of modern Chinese literary history, as well as to draw greater attention to the active role that Chinese intellectuals played in a global cognitive system.

On a final note, some important issues remain to be explored in order to round out the cultural history I am attempting to write here. These include: (1) a more detailed analysis of the competing national and international cultural milieus with which Chinese
intellectuals identified, and (2) a fuller assessment of the influence of Japanese and other foreign intermediaries on Chinese intellectuals’ Italian borrowings. What Hao Chang once put forth as a key—but then insoluble—query about the history of Liang Qichao’s thought also applies to the future of this project: “Did the Japanese translation of Western literature which Liang had read involve such a degree of interpretation that Liang’s understanding of the original Western ideal had been affected?” When such questions have been answered, we will be better able to achieve a thorough evaluation of the incentives driving the appropriations of the Italian Renaissance, its literature and figures, and their comprehensive value to a modernizing China.


APPENDIX

Personal Communication with Jiao Naifang,
author of *An Asian Decameron* (2001)

This appendix includes Jiao Naifang's comments on his collection of short stories, *An Asian Decameron*, as expressed to me via an email communication on May 10, 2010. They are included here, with his permission, as further evidence of the Decameron’s continuing relevance in contemporary Chinese letters. Jiao’s stories and his literary goals reflect the sustained importance that Boccaccio’s text holds in the ongoing debates surrounding individuality and sexuality in China.

(1) 你已说过你认为十日谈类似于蒲松龄的小说. 你觉得你的短篇跟着些什么人的作品哪里有差别？你们的目标不同吗？风格呢？故事里头的题目等?

我的故乡在山东淄博, 是聊斋文化的发祥地, 我从小喜欢听故事, 也喜欢把听来的故事讲给小朋友听, 特别是做家务活—推磨 (就是推着石磨转圈圈, 用石磨把玉米磨成浆, 摊煎饼. 时间长了人就晕了) 姐姐, 弟弟他们经常替我推磨, 条件是让我坐在一旁给他们讲故事. 我就大脑中储存的那些故事, 就添枝加叶地讲给他们听, 于是, 因为讲故事, 我就免除了推磨这项单调的家务活.

80年代中期, 我看到了薄伽丘的《十日谈》, 书中的故事读起来轻松有趣, 深入浅出, 故事小说化, 小说故事化.
可以这么说，除了薄伽丘的《十日谈》给我以框架上的影响之外，我的《东方十日谈》在许多方面还受到了卡夫卡，海明威，蒲松龄三位作家的影响。语言上具有海明威电报式的语言特色；在许多故事的叙事风格上借鉴了卡夫卡的荒诞，内容上的荒诞是作品的另一显著特点，故事是荒诞的，结局更是荒诞的；而在选材上又受到了蒲松龄作品的影响。描写平民性，市井百态，在小故事，小情节中蕴含事物的发展规律。

(2) 你可以多详述你念大学时对于十日谈有什么印象吗？

1993年的秋天，我从《淄博声屏报社》考入鲁迅文学院与北师大研究院联合举办的第二届（在职人员）作家研究生班，专业是文艺学硕士研究生，开始系统学习专业课程，业余时间开始较多地阅读外国文学，特别是欧美文学，对我印象最深的，影响最大的还是薄伽丘的《十日谈》。

在《十日谈》的一百个故事里，薄伽丘先生用现实主义手法刻画了王公贵族，骑士僧侣，市井平民，三教九流等大量人物，这些不同阶层，不同职业的人物角色，具有鲜明的性格特征。

我觉得《十日谈》的文学体例很是新颖，容易拉近作者与读者的距离，你可以把它当做一部小说集，故事集去读，也可以把它当做一部长篇小说去读；既可以从头开始读，
第一天，第一个故事开始读，也可以从第三天第三个故事开始读。不管从什么地方开始读，都不会出现阅读障碍。

我在一周内一连将这本名著读了两遍，仔细品味。晚饭后散步的时候，这个问题也时时在脑海中闪现，薄伽丘是怎样采用故事会的形式，别出心裁地以框架结构把这些故事有机地组成一个严谨、和谐的叙述系统的呢？

这部作品把大瘟疫时期作为一个引子，引出10名男女青年，点明了自然祸害导致的社会秩序、人际关系的堕落，使整部作品有了时代底色。并将这个底色为一个个故事做背景，大框架中套小框架，故事中套故事，鲜明地表达了作者的情感和观念。

《十日谈》的语言以文学古典名著为典范，又吸收了民间口语的特点，语言精炼，流畅，又俏皮，生动，描写事件和人物微妙尽致，灵动多姿。

从哲学的角度讲，人生是一个不断寻找的过程，寻找适合自己的事业，寻找朋友，寻找美学，寻找爱情；习武者寻找适合自己的拳师；运动员寻找最适合自己的教练；爱好文学的人寻找自己崇拜的作家，喜欢哲学的人寻找与自己心灵对应的哲学家；在日常生活中，人们逛商场，其实在寻找一双适合自己的鞋子，或者一件得体的衣服……

我找到自己在文学创作上，与自己创作风格上相近的偶像—薄伽丘和他的《十日
谈》，经过一段时间的酝酿和多次创作冲动，我于 1994 年的春天开始创作《东方十日谈》，1995 年春天完稿。

(3) 你可以在一边说明为什么你在八十年代的时候决定开始写这些短篇以及为什么等到 2000 才发表吗？

我是八十年代初开始写作的，从八四年开始断断续续地在报刊上发表短篇小说，其中有的小说成为了《东方十日谈》里的故事。

1995 年春天，《东方十日谈》刚完稿，便与几家出版社联系出版，编辑对此稿很感兴趣，认为这本书具有独特的艺术价值，和市场潜力，认为，该书的出版会在社会上引起较大的反响，但在最后通过选题的时候，出版社却犹豫了，理由是由于书中涉及到有关人性的东西，出版后会引发争议，于是书稿搁浅了，一晃就是 5 年，直到 2001 年初，该书才由哈尔滨出版社出版发行，并在社会上引起反响，成为当年的畅销书。

(4) 我们已经谈到让读者有心灵启示是你个人写文学的目标之一。看你东方十日谈的人，你愿意他们有了什么样的顿悟的感受？

我认为文学是用语言描述人性情感情律的一门艺术哲学，读者在阅读中产生审美情绪，逐渐融入作者营造的意境中，走进主人公的内心世界，洞察主人公所处的社会环境，意识形态，礼仪，风俗人情等，继而升华自己对社会的观察能力，以及判断力。
我所追求的目标是，让《东方十日谈》的读者能够快乐地阅读，读了之后能够开心，在笑声中得到心灵上的启示，人类社会是个大舞台，需要形形色色的角色，同自然界一样，物态的多样性是永远的真理。

(1) Kyle Anderson (KA): You mentioned once that for you Boccaccio’s Decameron felt a lot like Pu Songling’s Liao Zhai ghost stories. Where do you see your short stories differing from Boccaccio’s and Pu Songling’s? Do you feel your literary goals to be similar? Your styles? The topics of your tales, etc.?

Jiao: I was born in Zibo, Shandong province, the place of origin of Chinese Liao Zhai culture. From a tender age I loved to listen to stories and to pass them on to my friends, especially when I was working at the grindstone. My sister and brother would often take my place at the grindstone to mash corn for Johnny cakes to hear me tell stories. My big head was full of stories that I would wildly embellish for them. It was this knack for telling stories that got me out of a life of monotonous household chores.

In the 80s, I first read for the first time Giovanni Boccaccio’s Decameron. Its stories were fast, fun, and loose, but were probing in an approachable way—stories novelized; a novel storified.

I must say that besides the structural influence that Boccaccio’s Decameron offered to my Asian Decameron, I also found inspiration in Kafka, Hemingway, and Pu Songling.
On the level of language, my work attains to a Hemingway-like telegraphic style. In terms of my novel’s tone, a great many stories borrow from the fantastic Kafkaesque. The stories’ wild content is one of their defining features. The stories are bizarre but their conclusions are even more fantastical. As far as choosing my materials, Pu Songling was an inspiration. Describing the lives of people and the colorful attitudes of the city folk were the pattern for the development of my short stories and plots.

(2) KA: Could you elaborate a bit more on your first impressions of Boccaccio during your college years?

Jiao: In the fall of 1993, I left the Zibo Radio and Television Media Unit and tested into the second round of the Lu Xun Literary School and Beijing Normal University’s jointly sponsored writing program. As a Master’s student of literature, I embarked on my first systematic investigation of literature. When schoolwork didn’t occupy me, I turned often to reading foreign literature, especially European and American literature. The work that naturally most impressed me was Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.

Within the *Decameron*’s hundred stories, Boccaccio uses a realist mode to paint princes and dukes, the aristocracy, knights and monks, city and country folk. This wide spread of characters from all different walks of life, social statuses, and industries is described in such vivid and distinct ways.
I felt that the *Decameron*’s approach and layout was wholly new. Boccaccio’s style minimized the distance between author and reader. You could take it as a collection of short novels or short stories. You could also take it as a lengthy novel and read it, beginning at the first day, first story. Or, just as well, you could pick it up and start from the third day, third story. Wherever you decided to start, the novel presented no obstacle to your reading pleasure.

For one week, I read it nonstop. I finished it twice, savoring it with every page. During my customary after dinner strolls, a question would continually flash into my mind: how was it that Boccaccio so deftly wielded the short story form? Was it his original approach to the frame that makes these stories harmonize so organically into a narrative system?

The *Decameron* takes the bubonic plague as its prelude to introduce a group of ten young women and men and to point to the scourge that nature brought upon the social order and human relations. This setup endows the novel with a profoundly local backdrop. This local color provides the background to every one of the *Decameron*’s stories. It frames, within the greater frame, stories within the larger story; all express the emotions and ideas of their author.

The *Decameron* draws on the linguistic models of classical literary masterpieces while also fully absorbing the voice of the people to create a language that is rarefied, smooth,
witty, and moving. Its narrations of events and people are subtle and penetrating, fresh and supple.

From the perspective of philosophy, life is a process of endless searching. It is a quest to find the perfect occupation, friend, aesthetic, and love; the young fighter hunting for the perfect trainer; the athlete for his coach; the book lover for an author to worship; the thinker, the philosopher who speaks most directly to him. In the circumstances of everyday life rambling through streets and markets, this translates into a search for that perfect pair of shoes or outfit….

I found my creative idol and stylistic model in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. After a period of impulsive maturation, I began writing the *Asian Decameron* in 1994. I finished the manuscript in 1995.

(3) **KA**: Could you describe again why the novel’s publication was held back until 2001?

**Jiao**: I actually began the work in the eighties, publishing on and off a number of short stories in literary journals, stories that would later make their way into the *Asian Decameron*.

In the spring of 1995, the manuscript reached completion and a number of presses were contacted for publishing. The editors showed great interest in it, believing it possessed a great deal of artistic merit. They estimated it had good market potential and the ability to
cause some social buzz. However, after a period of deliberation, the publisher stalled: the book’s treatment of human sexuality threatened to stir up too much controversy. So it was held back, until after five years (the beginning of 2001) Harbin publishers agreed to release and distribute it. And it did cause quite a reaction, becoming one of the year’s best sellers.

(4) KA: We’ve already spoken briefly about how one of your chief literary aims is to enlighten your readers. What kind of insight do you hope your readers gain from reading the *Asian Decameron*?

**Jiao:** I believe that literature’s employment of language to describe human emotion is a philosophical gateway. Readers reading experience a range of emotions that slowly melds them into the creative landscape of the author. They gain public entrance into a private space to see more clearly the social reality, ideology, etiquette and customs that reside in the mind of the author. From this experience, readers learn to distill their own capacity to observe and to judge society.

The goal that I pursue in the *Asian Decameron* is to make my readers happy. To titillate hearts and to trigger the spiritual enlightenment that comes with laughing. Human society is a grand stage where people of every hue and color perform, the same as the natural world itself. In the end this is our greatest eternal truth: the multiplicity of being.


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Zarrow, Peter G. “Liang Qichao and the Notion of Civil Society in Republican China.” *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship,*


Zou Pengjun. *Modern Chinese Theatre in a Time of Cultural Transition Wenhua*

*zhuaxing zhong zhongguo jindai xiju* 文化转型中中国近代戏剧. *Yi hai kou:*

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July 2010

Education

• Ph.D. (2010), Comparative Literature, The Pennsylvania State University
• National Taiwan University ICLP (Summer 2006, 2007-08), Taipei
• M.A. (2005), Comparative Literature, Brigham Young University
• B.A. Honors, Cum laude (2003), Comparative Literature, BYU

Academic Honors and Awards

• Fulbright-Hays—Beijing and Rome (2009-10), US Department of Education
• Institute for Arts and Humanities Dissertation Grant (2009), Penn State
• U.S. Fulbright Grant—Taipei, Taiwan (2007-2008), US State Department
• Waddell Biggart and Fischer Graduate Fellowships (2006), Penn State
• Edward Erle Sparks Fellowship (2005-2006), Penn State
• The Dante Society of America’s “Dante Award” (2003)

Professional Activities

Teaching and Guest Lectures

• 卜迦丘和中国 (“Boccaccio and China”) (20 April 2010)
  Beijing Normal University (Chinese)
• Intro. to Chinese Literature, Film and Culture (Summer 2009), Penn State
• “La ruta de la seda” (“The Silk Road”) (17 April 2009), Penn State (Spanish)
• Intro. to Asian Literatures (Fall 2008), Penn State
• Chinese 001, 002 (2006-07), Penn State
• Italian 002 (2005-2006), Penn State and BYU

Publications

• “Chinese Decamerons: Making Sex Revolutionary?”
  currently under review by positions.
• Rev. of The Chan Interpretations of Wang Wei’s Poetry: A Critical Review, by
• Rev. of Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing: A Route to Hermeneutics and
  631-34.

Conferences

• ACLA 2009 (American Comparative Literature Association), “International
  Modernisms: Musicality and Qu Yuan”
• AAIS 2007 (American Association of Italian Studies), “Ugolino and the
  Narrative Economy of Lagrime”
• ACLA 2006
  “Lapides vivi: Wang Wei and Dante’s Living Stone”

Languages

Advanced

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