

FOLKLORIC ELEMENTS IN AVANT-GARDE FICTION: YU HUA'S "ONE KIND OF REALITY" AND "WORLD LIKE MIST"

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INTRODUCTION

The term *Xianfeng pai* 先锋派 (lit.: Avant-garde School) in the Chinese literary context has different implications from the avant-garde in Western Modernism. It refers to a group of Chinese writers who were engaged in fiction writing in the 1980s, and their works represent a completely new literary genre deviating from the socialist realist discourse of that time. In his study on Chinese avant-garde fiction, Zhang Xudong claims that "the so-called avant-garde writers seem to have redefined the field of literary innovation through writing about writing" (150). *Xianfeng pai* was not the first new literary school after 1978, when China's "open door policy" began, but it distinguished itself from the other schools, mainly the "Menglong Shi" 朦胧诗 (Misty Poetry) and "Xungen Pai" 寻根派 (Searching-for-Root Schools), with various pioneering attempts to innovate the literary form, language and narrative techniques of their works. They employed the forms of the Western modernist stories and novels, with the aim to subvert the discourse of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).¹ They also endeavored to demonstrate a "playful impulse" when practicing the narrative techniques borrowed from Western, Latin American, and Japanese modernist writers such as Dostoevsky, Kafka, Faulkner, Borges, Kawabata, and so on.²

However, to a great extent, the avant-garde writers constituted a Chinese literary modernity which is different from the West by continuously seeking sources and inspirations in traditional Chinese culture, especially through the appropriation of

folkloric elements. Folkloric elements in this paper refer more to the historical tales, folktales or folk customs which have cultural and aesthetic influences upon people's daily lives, mainly through an oral tradition, for instance, storytelling. By re-interpreting, transforming, or modernizing these elements when they use the narrative techniques imported from the Western writers, the Chinese avant-garde innovate certain features in their works which are different from both Western Modernism and traditional Chinese culture. Among these avant-garde writers, Yu Hua 余华 (1960-) is a representative case. In many of his early short stories, he adapts folktales which are rooted in a Chinese oral tradition and naturally exist among people who do not even read or write. In the labyrinth of his narration, Yu Hua's fiction has a deeper and more complicated connection to the old and the local culture.

74 Beginning with a background introduction to the avant-garde writers in the re-emergent wave of Modernism in 1980s China, the present paper analyzes two of Yu Hua's short stories, "Xianshi yizhong" 现实一种 ("One Kind of Reality") and "Shishi ruyan" 世事如烟 ("World like Mist"), and examines how folkloric elements play important roles in his early works. I will further argue that Yu Hua's endless preoccupation with narration is motivated by his efforts to exhaust the numerous possibilities of storytelling in traditional Chinese culture.³ More importantly, like other avant-garde artists, Yu Hua endeavors to construct a literary modernity in his stories which distinguishes new incidents from local folk tales. His writing thus indicates a huge tension between the old and the new, approaches the actual states of individual existence in contemporary China, and arouses a strong sense of defamiliarization in the reader. The narrative techniques he has adapted from modernist writers in other countries further help him reconstitute an old or local tale on the technical level as an avant-garde artist.

I. THE RE-EMERGENCE OF MODERNISM IN THE 1980S

The period from 1919 to the 1930s witnessed the first wave of Modernism in China when Chinese literature transitioned from the traditional to the modern. During the modern May Fourth Era (1919 - the 1930s), Chinese intellectuals established *baihua* 白话 (the vernacular language) as the literary language, introduced Western literature into China, and made various experiments in their own literary writings. Responding to the prevalence of Modernism in Western countries in the 1920s and 1930s, some Chinese modernist writers started the first prosperous stage of modernism in the history of modern Chinese literature. Nietzsche, Bergson, and Marx's philosophical works were translated into Chinese and widely read by intellectuals and writers. Freud's psychoanalysis was particularly embraced by New Sensationists (*xin ganjue pai* 新感觉派), whose works nourished the avant-garde writers of the 1980s.⁴

However, Chinese Modernism quickly declined in the 1940s and almost completely disappeared after 1949, when the Communist Party established the new government. From 1949, Socialist Realism became the main literary discourse until the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s when the “open door policy” gradually changed the historical, political, and social milieu of the country. The consecutive appearance of the modernist schools such as “Misty Poetry,” “Searching-for Root” and the avant-garde weakened the dominant position of Socialist Realism in the literary field. The Chinese avant-garde writers such as Ma Yuan 马原, Can Xue 残雪, and Yu Hua, attracted the greatest attention of the readers and critics in this new era. For many, the avant-garde was “not only a literary alien, but also an epistemological enigma” (Zhang 151). And the avant-garde’s quick decline in the early 1990s strengthens the necessity to demystify this unique discourse constructed both by will and by chance (Zhang 156).

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II. THE AVANT-GARDE’S CONSTITUTION OF A CHINESE LITERARY MODERNITY

Generally speaking, the avant-garde functions as an intervention against the domination of Socialist Realism in the field of literature. From the very beginning, the avant-garde had a self-imposed attentiveness to enrich literature with a new genre allowing an expressivity of the individual experience in China. In an interview, Yu Hua, one of the avant-garde, elucidates why the avant-garde emerged in China when it had already disappeared elsewhere. Asked about his initial motivation to write avant-garde fiction, he explains, “I feel that I do not like our literature. Our journals and writers almost write in the same manner, therefore, I was seeking a fresher mode” (Wang). In this sense, the writers’ pursuit of new forms and narratives directly stimulated the movement.

Under such circumstances, it has been argued that Western Modernism provided the Chinese avant-garde with a possible model. However, to a great extent, the avant-garde writers constituted a Chinese literary modernity due to the following facts. First, Chinese Modernism was never on the same track as Western Modernism or Post-Modernism. In the 1980s, both Modernism and Post-Modernism simultaneously entered China and influenced the avant-garde. To simply apply the theories of Western Modernism to the Chinese avant-garde would sometimes be problematic because of the differences in chronology and the Chinese cultural background. Secondly, the Chinese tradition had always functioned as the sources of the avant-garde’s inspiration, which is easily ignored because the forms, language and narrative techniques preoccupying the avant-garde in their fiction derive from foreign sources. Thirdly, the Chinese Modernist writers in the first several decades of the twentieth century had already indigenized Western Modernism in certain ways and their

attempted experiments were not insignificant to the avant-garde in the 1980s. Lastly, the reformative Deng era allowed more choices and varieties in people's lives, which further motivated the avant-garde writers' conscious and unconscious constitution of a Chinese modernity that was in accordance with "the present age" which was more active than reflective (Kierkegaard).

To further elucidate the characteristics of the Avant-garde School, I will analyze two short stories by Yu Hua. I chose Yu Hua as a representative because he is one of the most successful writers of the Avant-garde School (although he is not the most productive one). He experimented with the form, content, and narrative techniques in his works and continues to write novels today.⁵ Also, like many other avant-garde writings, Yu Hua's early stories strongly demonstrate a distinctive tension resulting from the conflicts among the Chinese tradition, Western influences, and the writer's creative power. This tension was shared by most Chinese avant-garde artists in the 1980s and fundamentally urged them to construct a Chinese literary modernity.

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III. "ONE KIND OF REALITY" AND "WORLD LIKE MIST"

Yu Hua was born in *Zhejiang* 浙江 province in China in 1960. Almost all his school years belonged to the period of the Cultural Revolution. He became a dentist after graduating from high school; and five years later, in 1983, he began to write short stories. Yu Hua has published numerous short stories and three novels, two of which have been translated into English, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Japanese, and Korean. In 1998, his novel *Huozhe* 活着 (*To Live*) was awarded Italy's Premio Grinzane Cavour. In 2002, Yu Hua won the James Joyce Foundation Award. His novel *Xiongdi* 兄弟 (*Brothers*) was published in 2005 and received copious acclaim. However, compared to his early short story writings, Yu Hua's novels go in the new realist direction and he has lost some distinctive characteristics of being an avant-garde writer. Even so, throughout his early short stories and later novels, he resorts to folktales based on an oral tradition. In his writing, Yu Hua "construct(s) Chinese ethics, history, and culture as the object of his critique (Larson 191). Zhang Xudong's comment that Chinese avant-garde fiction has never "bothered to look for an opponent to challenge" is not applicable to Yu Hua's case. Instead, as Hu Heqing argues, Yu Hua was a grotesque fruit on the tree of the ancient Chinese culture, which is determined by the interior information, but not the influence from outside (51). Hence, Bonnie S. McDougall's quick suggestion "Chinese writing of the 1980s lacked creativity, and that as an inevitable consequence, their borrowing from Western literature, no matter of what kind it happened to be, resulted in an inferior product with a necessarily short shelf-life" seems to be questionable even if only in the case of Yu Hua (106).

1. “ONE KIND OF REALITY”

“Xianshi yizhong” (“One Kind of Reality”) was first published in 1988 and is regarded as one of the best works Yu Hua has ever written. It is a piece of fiction about family revenge based on a real event that happened in a northern area of *Zhejiang* province in South China (Yu, “One Kind of Reality” 159).⁶ The first act of violence occurs when *Pipi*, a three-year-old child, drops the baby whom he is holding on the ground because he feels it is too heavy. The baby is killed. The baby’s father, *Pipi*’s uncle, *Shanfeng*, kills *Pipi* for revenge, but later he himself is maliciously killed by *Pipi*’s father, *Shanggang*. At the end of the story, *Shanggang*’s body is being dissected by doctors after he is executed by the government (Yu, “One Kind of Reality” 159). At first glance, the readers might be greatly distressed by the violence in the story, but they might be more unsettled by Yu Hua’s narration, in which the author neglects emotional elements and replaces them with cruel calmness and indifference. However, neither the disclosure of the violence nor the distinctive narrative strategies are the real intentions of the author. The literary critic Chen Sihe once remarked, “Every short story Yu Hua wrote in 1986 and 1987 can be read as an allegory” (301). The story reveals a strong anti-traditional and anti-heroic attitude in the author’s modern “reflection (or subversion) of the traditional ethical meaning of revenge” which has existed in the Chinese society for thousands of years (Hu 49). And it is necessary to read this story together with the other modernist writers’ interpretations of this theme in their works.

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Some critics have pointed out the theme of revenge in “One Kind of Reality” but few have noted its thematic connections to the revenge story of the King *Yue*, *Goujian* 越王勾践, in the *Spring and Autumn Period* (770 BC - 476 BC),⁷ Yu Qu Yuan’s 俞曲园 *Qixia wuyi* 七侠五义 (*Seven Knight Errants and Five Righteous Persons*), Lu Xun’s 鲁迅 “*Zhujian*” 铸剑 (“Forging the Swords”), and Jin Yong’s 金庸 martial arts fiction. These tales were originally from legendary or folkloric stories popular among people in the area of *Zhejiang* and represent a “conventional logic” of being *xiayi* 侠义 (chivalrous and righteous) that come from a collective past. However, in “One Kind of Reality,” as Larson has put it, “[a]t every turn the conventional logic through which one generally understands social interactions and relationships is overturned” (187). The story becomes a strong irony of the positive images of the avenging heroes “being inebriated on the bloody sacrifice” (Hu 50), which resulted from their successful and violent revenge for certain reasons. To a large extent, “One Kind of Reality” implies the author’s rational reflection on the spiritual ravage done by the violence of the Cultural Revolution, as well as on Chinese history. It cannot be interpreted separately from the traditional Chinese cultural context. On the contrary, the story has its deeper roots in Chinese people’s experience of human existence in the past, especially during the chaotic period of Cultural Revolution, and in the meanwhile, penetrates human behavior in a reformative age of China. Hence, Hu Heqing reads “One Kind of Reality” as a resistance “to the profound spiritual mode of the [Chinese] classical

texts” (51). Larson has elucidated it as an exposure of “an underlying violence that becomes a substitute for conventional logic in explaining human behavior,” and furthermore, allegorically, of certain codes that control “the human individual at the global level” (189; 191). Essentially, in this story, Yu Hua reveals to the reader his modern views on this old theme by deconstructing its tradition and reconstructs the reality of a new moment in the current age. The modernity Yu Hua has sensed and endeavored to transmit to the reader cannot be fully understood outside of this specific Chinese cultural context, both traditional and modern.

In “One Kind of Reality,” Yu Hua consciously achieves these goals with several rhetorical and narrative strategies. The first (and also the most important) strategy is to give no reason for exacting vengeance in a story with a theme of revenge. The series of violence results from nothing more than a three-year-old boy’s dramatic negligence of the baby in his arms. The lack of a justified reason for *Shanfeng*’s ruthless revenge on the boy, his nephew *Pipi*, thereafter makes the story deviate from a conventional mode and leads the reader to a deeper level of questioning and examining of the characters’ logic in the story (Chen 302). Consequently, all the traditional values of ethics that can be used to make judgments on decisions have become suspect, and there emerges a “crisis of the meaning-constructing systems” (Larson 190).

The development of the story further sheds light on the crisis of the fundamental ethical system: the Confucian five kinships on which both the traditional and modern Chinese society is based.⁸ Yu Hua explores three kinds of relationships in “One Kind of Reality”: elder and younger brothers, husband and wife, and mother and son. All of these relationships in the story seem abnormal in a society that has a tradition of Confucian teaching of filial piety. The absurdity of human relationships, especially between the elder and younger brothers (from being brothers to being enemies), becomes another kind of reality; the traditional ethical system no longer functions, but a new and modern system has not been established.

The instinctive and cruel reactions of the two brothers *Shangfang* and *Shangang* remind us of Nietzsche’s illumination of “the actual tools of culture” which represent “a counter-argument against ‘culture.’”

They are not much better than uncaged beasts of prey toward the outside world, where that which is foreign, the foreign world, begins. There they enjoy freedom from all social constraint; in the wilderness they recover the losses incurred through the tension that comes from a long enclosure and fencing-in within the peace of the community; they step *back* into the innocence of the beast-of-prey conscience, as jubilant monsters. (Nietzsche 22-23)

These insightful descriptions are applicable to the two brothers in Yu Hua’s story. The difference is that the “culture” from which *Shanfeng* and *Shangang* break out has its own background, and the original driving force of their violence is ironic because it is obvious the three-year-old *Pipi* does not intentionally “murder” the baby. It is these two aspects which open up space for the allegorical reading of the story as discussed above.

However, Yu Hua's exploration of modernity on the ethical, cultural, and historical levels is less recognized by the critics than his innovations on the level of form, mainly, his narrative techniques. Many critics think Yu Hua's indulging himself in the narrative weakens his creative power and his inquiry into more significant meanings. My argument is that Yu Hua's endless enthrallment with narration stimulates his various experiments with infinite possibilities of storytelling, which, again, is not irrelevant to the larger tradition of Chinese culture, especially in the Chinese storytelling of local tales and folklore. The writing of "One Kind of Reality" was originally inspired by a report of an incident widely spread among the local people who had told and retold all sorts of revenge stories over thousands of years. Yu Hua sensitively and successfully observes the modern elements in the new incident lacking in the older stories. Together with his detached and defamiliarized narration, the story evokes a completely new reading experience and reflective thinking in the reader. Though the narrative techniques he has learned from the non-Chinese modernist writers help him refresh a local tale on the technical level as an avant-garde story, Yu Hua's writing reveals the characters' actual existences in both the Confucian ethics and the socialist ideology through demonstrating their instinctive but stunning responses to a sudden event in their family. His new insights make "One Kind of Reality" one of the best works of the Chinese avant-garde in the 1980s.

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In his later works in the 1990s, Yu Hua gradually turns to a new realism and produces his most influential novels. However, his appropriations of folktales, local incidents, and common people's experience, as well as his fascination with storytelling, continue. For example, his famous novel *Huozhe* begins with a young man collecting folk songs and his encounter with the old character *Fugui* in a small village. Similarly, *Xu Sanguan maixue ji* 许三观卖血记 (*Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*) is set in a small southern town in which Yu Hua's efforts to deconstruct the tradition, question the modern ethical system, and to "create a critical, Chinese, and yet modern stance" of the society continue (Larson 193).

2. "WORLD LIKE MIST"

Compared to "One Kind of Reality," "Shishi ruyan" ("World like Mist") has more elements of traditional Chinese culture. Reading the story itself becomes a challenge because the reader is led into a labyrinth created by Yu Hua with his re-interpretation of the numerous incidents, anecdotes, and local tales told and retold by generations of people throughout Chinese history. At first glance, the reader may find a loss of logic in "World like Mist" which seems to be a collage of all the abnormalities one can learn from the folktales available even today in any place in China. However, a more sophisticated reader will see in the structure reframed by Yu Hua his serious reflections upon a hidden nonrationality deeply rooted in the cultural tradition and

which has been controlling people's lives for a long time. To have a full understanding of the story, one must be aware of the nonrationality in "World like Mist" and of the modern experience the author struggles to transmit to the reader in his unique narration.

When studying the modern and contemporary Chinese writers, Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg has noticed an association with the *zhiguai* 志怪 (lit.: "recording the abnormal"), *chuanqi* 传奇 (lit.: "conveying the marvelous"), and *biji* (lit.: "writing brush notes") traditions in classical Chinese literature and states some writers, "have been utilizing parts of the *zhiguai* for modernist or postmodernist purposes."⁹ While the traditional elements in these genres do play an important role in the "constitution of Chinese literary modernity," Wedell-Wedellsborg's analysis of Yu Hua's "World like Mist," fails to grasp, to some degree, the real intent of the author. Together with his great passion and effort to exhaust all the storytelling strategies available in the traditional *zhiguai*, *chuanqi* and *biji* fantasies, Yu Hua further cuts into the deeper structures of daily life and people's modes of thought. These structures and modes of thought, for instance, the ethical values, big family structure, superstition, and so on, mix the essences and dregs of traditional Chinese culture and make up the unavoidable parts of modern Chinese society. By exposing to the reader in an intensive and exaggerated manner almost all the abnormalities and absurdities sometimes still visible in modern China, which seem to be unquestionable to many common people, Yu Hua completes a successful parodic and enlightening creation in "World like Mist" using a traditional form of a Chinese fantastic story. The traditional literary fantasy has thus become both a legacy inspiring Yu Hua's writing and a target of his modern attack.

The author first detaches himself from an enclosed Chinese community manipulated by, in Jung's term, "a collective unconscious,"¹⁰ and then satirically entwines another huge, mysterious, and spidery literary web in which all the abnormal and irrational are involved, and more importantly, conspicuously displayed. By means of parody and irony, the story forms a unique expressivity of the author's modern experience. This is why almost all the characters have no names, and are called by different numbers. The time and space settings in the story are also very ambiguous. As the title indicates, Yu Hua is telling us a story about a misty world, in which everything is drifting but revealing the truth to the reader. The elusiveness of the time and space settings strengthens the uncertainty of individual fates under the control of a misty "collective unconscious" which initiates people's imagination, impacts their decision making, and finally motivates their action. It is invisible but casting a determining force into reality everywhere.

Wedell-Wedellsborg views "World like Mist" as "a weird piece of writing" full of "incest, rape, suicide, and murder, all woven together with traditional ghost-lore, death rites, spirit-wedding, dreams of premonition, and the idea of inescapable fate." Rather, instead of following "the conventions governing the *zhiguai* genre," Yu Hua's story intentionally breaks the normal rules of the genre. On both the narrative and

semantic level, Yu Hua aims to ignore the fixed and conventional social structures one observes on the surface of various phenomena, and looks into the internal relationships of the human beings and objects in the world. This is reflected in Yu Hua's own writings from this period:

The eight stories collected in *World like Mist* are moist and glum, also fateful and elusive. As a result, both the connection between the characters and their surroundings and the relationship between characters or surroundings themselves are drifting. This was the direction of my efforts in the 1980s. At that time, what I strived to find are the modes through which all people and things are internally linked to each other, but not the obvious and external logic. . . . When I wrote "World like Mist," the structure (of the story) has abandoned an imitation of the actual events. It seems that in order to exhibit more events and enable the world (in the story) to manifest a great variety of complications, I employed the structures of juxtaposition and chiasmus. But as a matter of fact, I have already established my views on the structure of the world, and started to break away from the realistic evidence provided by the actual world. ("Wo nengfou xiangxin wo ziji," 168-69)

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In "World like Mist," Yu Hua is more preoccupied with a transcendental exploration of the characters' existence and their essential relationships among each other. In the story, because of their uncontrollable fates, almost every character is sooner or later directed to the fortune-teller who is the center in the "World like Mist." They all are dying for unexplained reasons. It is not the fantastic and legendary incidents, but the internal logic behind these fantasies the author seeks. Yu Hua's "World like Mist" essentially differs from the traditional genres as defined by Wedell-Wedellsborg.

If we read the story in this way, the author's ingenious juxtaposition and chiasmus of all the seemingly illogical events and coincidences highlights a hidden but more active logic firmly existing in the characters' minds. That is, they believe more in fate than in reason, and the only thing that can prevent their doom is the fortune-teller's mysterious and prophetic instructions which they have to obey without any suspicion. This unconscious belief drives each character to the spider web set up by the evil ninety-year-old fortune-teller, who successfully extends his life with successive deaths of his five children and the raping a young girl to "extract *yin* in order to bolster the *yang*" on the fifteenth of every month according to an old Daoist legend (Yu, "World like Mist" 93-94). Because of the same non-rational belief, the characters—the truck driver, the woman in grey, the midwife, the pregnant grandmother who has an affair with her grandson, and the father and his young daughter who always has nightmares—all come to visit the fortune-teller but end up with tragedy. The reader might have been shocked by the series of deaths, fatal coincidences, premonitory dreams, and all the other weird incidents with supernatural and fateful elements. However, the real horror is in the mysterious force impelling the characters toward the fortune-teller.

Some critics have noticed this mysterious force and thus further inquired into the author's purpose behind this story. For example, Wedell-Wedellsborg posits that, at a thematic level, "World like Mist" does not deny the laws of superstition. Jiang Xiaobo

has noted the author is against certain conventional rules but runs into another rule of being too fatalistic (35). It is significant and very effective that Yu Hua exposes to the reader what people's lives are like, and criticizes the superstition remaining in a culture which was filled with bizarre folktales in its long past. But a key point here is that instead of identifying all these abnormalities as located in the individual, Yu Hua refers them to a cultural phenomenon.

Jung's term "collective unconscious" based on archetypes may explain the characters' reactions:

... the unconscious, as the totality of all archetypes, is the deposit of all human experience right back to its remotest beginnings. Not, indeed, a dead deposit, a sort of abandoned rubbish-heap, but a living system of reactions and aptitudes that determine the individual's life in invisible ways—all the more effective because invisible. ...

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...The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual. ... All the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetypes. This is particularly true of religious ideas, but the central concepts of science, philosophy, and ethics are no exception to this rule. In their present form they are variants of archetypal ideas, created by consciously applying and adapting these ideas to reality. For it is the function of consciousness not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us. (44-46)

In one interpretation, the fortune-teller can be perceived as a symbol of "the collective unconscious" influencing one's reaction to a situation according to a particular archetype. The power of reason has decreased; while the preexistent modes of thought, greatly influenced by traditional folk culture and storytelling, have already determined the characters' fates. Regarding this, "World like Mist" breaks through the normal restrictions set on story writing, such as time and space setting, structure, character, plot, and so on. It reflects upon the original meanings of Chinese society, history, culture and human existence, and questions the nonrationality in the seemingly rational logic that is still shared by many people even in the modern period of China.

Like "One Kind of Reality," Yu Hua's "World like Mist" apparently has a deep and dynamic association with the local tales and folklore. Instead of emphasizing an influence from the generic traditions of *zhiguai*, *chuanqi* and *biji* in classical Chinese literature as Wedell-Wedellsborg propounds in her article, I would argue it is more linked to an oral tradition of storytelling among people, with a much longer history and a closer connection to the human experience of daily life from the very beginning of Chinese culture. Some of the plots in "World like Mist" are adapted from appalling local events that happened in small rural areas of South China, and have been disseminated to the public through storytelling. Although we can find all kinds of strange stories in *zhiguai*, *chuanqi* and *biji* fiction, many of the fantastic elements in "World like Mist"—the practice of augury, dream premonition, the Daoist theory of

yin and *yang*, the death rites, and so on — are from much earlier periods of Chinese history and have constituted certain cultural archetypes in the psychic systems of the Chinese people. For Yu Hua, “World like Mist” is his fighting against certain negative aspects he sees in the traditional Chinese culture and his efforts to establish modern views of the present world with his unique perspectives as an avant-garde artist.

Yet, there are always two sides to every coin. In “World like Mist,” the “collective unconscious” is initially an impetus for the power of folktales which have been a rich source and thrilling inspiration for Yu Hua’s creative writing. In this respect, Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), a Chinese modernist writer in the first half of the twentieth century, has already designated a direction:

The rebellious fighter has arisen from mankind, who, standing erect, sees through all the deserted ruins and lonely tombs of the past and the present. He remembers all the intense and unending agony; he faces squarely the whole welter of clotted blood; he understands all that is dead and all that is living, as well as all yet unborn. (120)

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Yu Hua’s later worldly renowned novels, to some extent, echo Lu Xun’s suggestions and more profoundly penetrate the existence of common people in twentieth-century China. While “only the rich and complex interaction of a whole people can innovate an alternative modernity suited to China” (Feenberg), Yu Hua is getting closer to the Chinese essence and knows better how to share his modern experience with all his readers by “see[ing] through all the deserted ruins and lonely tombs of the past and the present” and “remembering all the intense and unending agony.” His interposition has always been connected to a long past and attempted to touch the ground of the Chinese tradition.

CONCLUSION

“One Kind of Reality” and “World like Mist” are only two examples in Yu Hua’s short stories, but they illustrate a typical characteristic in Yu Hua’s writing, and even in all the other avant-garde’s works. The Chinese avant-garde are primarily indigenous writers. It is impossible for them to explore and represent a real Chinese modernity in a discourse borrowed from “the other,” either Western Modernism or traditional Chinese culture. However, they can never be separated from these two either. Since the Western influences have always been emphasized by critics, Yu Hua’s case shows that associating with the traditional culture, especially the folkloric elements, allows the avant-garde to press closer to the actual states of individual existence in contemporary China that are also inseparable from the long tradition of Chinese culture, and inspires them to cultivate a Chinese literary modernity.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Chairman Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 for the purpose of renewing the spirit of Chinese revolution. It was out of control soon and put the entire country into a disastrous situation. The Cultural Revolution greatly influenced the politics, economy and culture of China, not only in those ten years, but also later.
- 2 For this reason, the avant-garde writers were criticized as the imitators of their Western mentors, although Zhang Xudong used "a playful impulse" to describe an important feature of the avant-garde. See Zhang Xudong, "The Avant-Garde Intervention," 154. This paper, however, will focus more on the indigenous aspects of the Chinese avant-garde.
- 3 In the field of modern Chinese literary studies, much research has been carried out on Yu Hua's narrative strategies which are associated with both Western and Chinese traditions. For example, in "Haunted Fiction: Modern Chinese Literature and the Supernatural," Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg studies Yu Hua's writing and the tradition of Chinese fantastic stories.
- 4 The Chinese *xin ganjue pai* (New Sensationism) was a fiction school of Modernism influenced by Western Modernism and Japanese New Sensationism, and emerged in Shanghai from the end of the 1920s to the beginning of the 1930s.
- 5 In 2005, Yu Hua published his latest novel *Xiongdi* 兄弟 (*Brothers*) after 10 years since his last well-known novel *Xu Sanguan mai xue ji* 许三观卖血记 (*Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*).
- 6 The story of the tragedy was widely spread in that area after it took place. I heard about it when I was young, especially the dramatic and stunning incident that the father of the baby ordered the boy to lick the blood on the ground and "lashed out with his foot and landed a kick right in Pipi's crotch" when Pipi was licking the blood.
- 7 *Goujian* 勾践 was once defeated and captured by the King of *Wu* 吴, Fuchai 夫差. In the following ten years, *Goujian* "Woxin changdan" 卧薪尝胆 (sleeps on firewood and tastes gall bladder) in order to remember the shame of being defeated, and to strengthen himself and his army. King *Yue Goujian* eventually defeated King *Wu Fuchai*.
- 8 The *wu lun* 五伦 (the *Five Cardinal Relationships*) in Confucianism are constituted by father and son, ruler and subject, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and friends.
- 9 *Zhiguai*, *chuanqi* and *biji* are different types of traditional Chinese literary stories. *Zhiguai* usually refers to the stories recording the abnormal and the supernatural, and *chuanqi* also covers social anecdotes besides *zhiguai*. *Biji* originally means notes on military, political, and juristic issues, or records of a famous person's thought and speech which are complement of official history of a dynasty. In the later imperial period, *biji* develops into three categories: historical, textual research, and story-

like notes. Here *biji* refers to the story-like notes which include *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*.

- 10 For the theory of “the Collective Unconsciousness,” refer to “Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche” ([1927] 1971).