

LI TUO

1985

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Such was 1985: although various exciting events occurred, people did not think that this year had any special significance. Nor did they realise that in the future they would often look back at 1985 (or, to use a more popular and vivid Beijing expression: look back after each step). However, as time goes by, the uniqueness of 1985 and the profound significance of the changes that quietly took place that year, as well as their omnipresent influence on China, have become increasingly evident and exciting to consider. These days, the year 1985 has become a topic that can make the eyes of many mainland intellectuals shine with excitement. People ceaselessly ask and discuss the question: what was going on during that year? Why should so many changes all have happened then? How should we evaluate these changes?

However, I do not intend to answer or discuss these questions with a straight face right now as I write what will follow under the title '1985'. That would be too serious. I only want to talk about 1985 and randomly at that, but I do want to mix it with some memories to draw out the talk or rather, play it down. Certainly, no matter how randomly I do it, I know that it is hard for me to escape the fate of making a myth out of 1985. Yet I do not want to escape this fate. How can I escape it? Once a person realises that whatever they say actually has nothing to do with what is signified in their speech or writing, that this is a game of power, they should relax and play the game rather than look around in hesitation.

In discussing the year 1985, I believe that it is best to start with what led up to it. However, this requires a lot of writing and research. Furthermore, it calls for a serious academic attitude. I do not want to do it this way, not only because that will run counter to the purpose of this paper, but also because I cannot bear it--my heart just cannot. Why must exact facts, cold analysis or ruthless 'internal logic' kill an extremely vivid, though obscure, bit of the past? Let it live. Therefore, although I know clearly that most of the events of 1985 germinated at the end of 1983 or the beginning of 1984, and that we need to go there to create a plausible explanation for 1985, I still just want to talk about my own experience. I do not mind that its fragmentary nature will cause my version to lack the necessary authority.

I remember on one night either at the end of 1983 or the beginning of 1984 (I don't recall the exact date) some friends, including Chen Jiangong, Zheng Wanlong and A Cheng came to my home to eat Mongolian hotpot. The room was small and so was the table. We could only

sit tightly around the table, our hands and feet knocking against each other. It was not very convenient. What was exciting was the glittering and steaming copper hotpot in the centre of the table. The mixture of smells of mutton and charcoal was so tantalising that the crowding at that moment became a kind of comfort. As usual, A Cheng told stories. At that time he was already known among friends for his ability to tell stories. He once told me that during the years he spent labouring in the countryside he used to make a living telling stories. Many of the 'educated youth' who had been sent to work there would save their scarce supply of meat, cigarettes and wine to reward A Cheng when he made the rounds of their residential area to tell stories.

Interestingly enough, among the 'long stories' that he was good at telling was *Anna Karenina*. To suit the taste of his listeners he had to delete the character 'na' at the end and so it became, in Chinese, simply 'Anna Kalieni'. He was so famous that some writers would treat him to wine just to seek out his stories. Although we urged him time and again to tell stories, he still refused to be hurried and concentrated on his food and drink. To muffle our anxiety, he chewed loudly with relish and said occasionally "Eat. Eat first". He did not raise his sweaty head until after he had eaten like this for nearly an hour. Then he produced the big pipe that he always had with him, slowly packed it, ignited it and inhaled a couple of times. After that he said unhurriedly, "OK. Today I'm going to tell a story about playing chess." Then he stopped and continued to smoke one drag after another. Knowing that he was trying to keep us in suspense, we had to beg him again and again: "Go on! Go on!" "There's no hurry", A Cheng answered with a smile, and only after all this did he calmly tell us the story of 'The King of Chess', all the while drawing on his pipe and spewing clouds of smoke. Of course the story was still quite different from the novella he wrote later. For example, the character who was to become Wang Yisheng was then simply called the King of Chess. However, the basic structure was already there. The climax of the story, for instance, was the episode where several opponents took turns playing with him. Many details were identical to those in the novella. To this day I still remember how our friends trembled with fear as they listened with bated breath to this episode, as if everybody was walking a tightrope with A Cheng in the sky. The originally brightly-lit room was suddenly a lot darker. Now that I think about it, due to the lack of tones, gesticulations and facial expressions, the novella *The King of Chess* is, in many aspects, far inferior to A Cheng's storytelling version. The former is not as rich as the latter. Friends who are familiar with him might ask him to tell the story once more, but I am afraid that he would decline to do so. At that time, however, the situation was just the opposite. After listening to the story, Chen Jiangong, Zheng Wanlong and I all urged A Cheng to write it down. In our eyes, A Cheng was principally a painter, an important member of the 'Stars Art Exhibition', a guy with a wide range of knowledge, gifted in many ways and uncannily clever. Yet nobody was sure whether he had what it takes to be a good writer. (Actually, among the friends at the table, I seemed to be the only one who knew of his interest in writing, because he showed me several stories he had written, probably when he was working in the countryside in Yunnan Province. He did not pay much attention to writing, nor did he think that he should work hard at it.) But why did that matter? Everyone tried to get a word in to give him some advice. It was chaos,

especially when A Cheng calmly tossed a question at us, his glasses glistening: "Is it going to work? Can this be written into a novella?" Advising turned to scolding, even bullying, the copper pot steaming all the while; it could not have been more chaotic around the dining table.

Perhaps I have written too much about my recollections, but I am seeking to convey the atmosphere then and there, which permeated the entire literary arena. The expression 'the new takes the place of the old' became popular at that time in the media. Our hearts were filled with an indescribable joy whenever we read the expression or used it ourselves. I think that such an atmosphere in the literary arena was also a product of a situation where the new really was taking the place of the old in all areas of life: many writers had started to have doubts about the values implied by the concept of 'collectivism'. However, old habits were still powerful. The writers always unknowingly took writing as some kind of collective undertaking. At the mention of 'the literary cause', even the most idiosyncratic and naughty writers would get serious. Thus, with the inspiration of a strong sense of mission, writers, poets and critics of different backgrounds, different inclinations and different dispositions formed countless 'small circles', small coteries, small centres. I dare say that from 1983-1984, such literary circles could be found all over mainland China. They were ubiquitous, like hot winds whipping around, stimulating each other and making an unprecedented literary storm.

A couple of days ago Zhang Zao, a poet, told me that things like this often happened among a group of young poets in the Chengdu area: after finishing a poem, one would spend a whole night travelling by train to a friend's home. They would then read and analyse the poem and unwittingly spend an entire day in heated disputes and discussions. I was very much moved by this. I can understand this kind of passion. Behind or within the frantic, or even morbid, passion is a kind of pain one experiences when one has to live with a gradual spiritual suicide. In mainland China, every clear-headed and reasonably self-reflexive intellectual experiences this kind of pain: bit by bit you have to commit suicide, to kill the self that contains all your past pursuits and the values for which you lived. From this point of view, Bei Dao's poem, 'The Answer', can be viewed as a proclamation of spiritual suicide, and that is why it created a huge sensation. Of course not everybody could go through the painful and tormenting process of spiritual suicide. Some people lacked courage and others made it clear that they were merely putting on an act.

I believe that all the changes that occurred in 1985 were closely related to this collective spiritual suicide among the intellectuals, especially if we look upon spiritual suicide not only as a real occurrence, but also as a metaphor that has broader implications. To a certain extent, this kind of spiritual suicide provided the motive power for the formation and existence of the innumerable small circles in literary, artistic and scholarly arenas, as well as the cementing power to hold these small organisations together. Maybe it is funny, a comedy: why should a group of people gather together if they were going to commit suicide? Why should it be so lively and noisy? I admit that this question embarrasses me. I can only say that the Chinese cultural tradition lacks a lifestyle which permits a single person to live

alone, interrogating his heart and developing his thoughts, ever since the Spring and Autumn Period (722-481 BC), the habit of thinking of Chinese intellectuals has been collective: The Confucian *Analects* is a prime example. It cannot be merely a coincidence that later books such as the *Analects of Zhu Xi* and *Records of Transmitted Learnings* consist mostly of questions, answers and correspondences between thinkers and their disciples.

When this tradition transformed itself in the 1980s into so many small organisations and circles that were doing some frantic thinking, I believe that the new historical circumstances gave it a new nature. If we consider how Deng Xiaoping's reforms caused the market economy to develop vigorously, even feverishly, forming countless cracks and crevices in the fixed structure of socialist China, these small organisations and circles became the embryonic form of some kind of 'public sphere'. Over the decade they would gradually acquire more stable forms and play a more important role in China's development. However, in the early eighties when they were being formed, no one considered, and it would not be possible to consider, these prospects. People gathered together to work on some very urgent problems. After the two earthquakes of the Cultural Revolution and the 'Reforms' (the latter still ongoing), what was not in ruins?

The July issue of *Shanghai Literature* published A Cheng's *The King of Chess*, which led to many repercussions. But this time the repercussions were a bit extraordinary, making the readers as well as the critics feel strange, as they were already accustomed to the kind of interrelationship between the 'Wound Literature'-- dealing with abuses during the Cultural Revolution-- and society whereby the two stimulated and echoed each other. As far as its function was concerned, the literature of the time really played a similar role to journalism. It was considered natural that the line between literature and journalism was a blurry one. Perhaps this was the most important characteristic of mainland Chinese literature between 1976 and 1984, and warrants further exploration. However, it was very hard for *The King of Chess* to be involved in this type of interrelationship. It was not right either for A Cheng's writing career or for the responses of the readers. Thus, praises for the novella could be heard everywhere, but there were very few articles that offered criticism. This formed a sharp contrast with the 'Wound Literature', which had created a sensation. The same indifference had greeted works by the veteran writer Wang Zengqi, who published the story *Monastic Ordination* as early as October 1980. At that time no one realized that such an uneventful story would have any revolutionary significance. On the contrary, it became popular because of its 'harmlessness', which was like a refreshing breeze in air permeated with a strong smell of gunpowder. The critics, thinking that his story was 'harmless' and that it would run its course, politely yielded some space to his writing, probably in order to manifest the special magnanimity of the 'literature of the new period'. What is interesting, however, is that in the meantime, the 'Misty' (*menglong*) poetry school came under attack and was in a difficult situation. The critic Xie Mian came to its defence and was instantly caught up in the cross-fire. He fought on his own most of the time. This should be considered as the point where literature in mainland China got lucky: during those several years, Wang Zengqi's writing was never suppressed. I am not evaluating Wang's writing, or thinking that he is superior to other contemporary writers. I am in hurry to do it, as it will surely be done in the future.

What I mean by the word 'lucky' is that without Wang's stories, Chinese literature in the eighties would have lost a very important thread, which would lead to the 'Root-seeking Literature' of 1985. To my mind, it was 'Root-seeking Literature' that enabled literature in mainland China to bid farewell to the period of the 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' created by Mao Zedong, and to enter a completely new era. However, between 1980 and 1985, this thread was quite insignificant. He Liwei, a young, unknown writer from Hunan Province, whose short story *The Small Town Has No Stories* was published in the September 1983 issue of *People's Literature*, may have been the only one whose writing echoed Wang Zengqi's. It was a year later that another story of He's, *The White Bird* - which had the terseness of a classical quatrain-- received more attention. With the active support of Wang Meng, it received 'China's Best Short Story Award', adding another strand to the hidden thread we talked about. Therefore, the appearance of *The King of Chess* was timely. A Cheng's writing was obviously related to that of Wang and He. Some sensitive people were already aware that their writing was fundamentally different from what had come before. However, the significance of the new writing to contemporary Chinese literature would only be manifested in the 'Root-seeking Literature' which suddenly erupted in 1985.

In January 1985, Tibetan Literature and Shanghai Literature respectively published Zhaxi Dawa's novella *Jizai Pishenshang de Hun* and Zhen Wanlong's short story *Laobangzi Public House*. After that, almost every month novellas and short stories that can now be classified as 'Root-seeking Literature' would be published in magazines. For the readers who were interested in literature, as well as the critics, that was a happy festival. Moreover, during this year, Liu Suola published *You Have No Alternative*, Ma Yuan published *The Seduction of Gangisi*, Zhu Xiaoping published *The Chronicle of Shangshuping*, Can Xue published *Mountain Cabin*, Zhang Xinxin and Shag Ye published *Beijing Voices*, and Liu Xinwu published *The Telephoto Lens on May 19*. These authors and their writings demonstrated some creative tendencies that were completely different from those of the 'Root-seeking Literature'. The literary scene looked as gorgeous as a riot of autumn colours. It was really an exciting year.

However, not everyone understood what happened: that the era of 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' had finally come to an end. 'Worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' lasted for a few decades and was a cultural construct closely tied up with the name Mao Zedong and his vivid imagination. I believe that future historiographers, cultural historians and literary critics will write many books to review the history of those years, and will realize more and more deeply what kind of profound impact it has had on China. For several years, criticism of 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' never ceased, but the critics often neglected the fact that Mao successfully achieved his goal, which was to create a kind of completely new mass pop culture congruent with the revolution under his leadership. Those who are interested in it may pay attention to the 'new yangge' movement which became popular after the publication of *Talks at the Yan'an forum on Literature and Art*. This was Mao's first opportunity to practice revolutionary pop culture after he put forward the 'worker-peasant-soldier' direction. If we look at the achievement of revolutionary art and literature in the next decades, including representative works in poetry, fiction, theatre and

music, I believe that it is easy to conclude that they were merely the continuation and expansion of the *yangge* movement. What the literary critics failed to understand for all those years was that, if what they were faced with was a kind of pop culture, they could have treated it as such, no matter how new or how creative it was. However to take a step back, it was impossible for the critics to sober up before the eighties, because at the heart of the ideology established by Mao was the pop quality of literature, art, and culture.

The literary metalanguage developed from the Yan'an Forum had two functions. On the one hand, it encouraged popular literary discourse to spread unchecked. On the other hand, it strictly monitored any literary efforts to deviate from popular level, because no matter how weak these efforts were, they might constitute a betrayal and opposition to the value system whose slogan was to 'serve the workers, peasants and soldiers', or in other words, to 'serve the people'. Such betrayal and opposition, of course, were never permissible. Mao himself was highly vigilant. Although there were various political and economic considerations, the fundamental reason that he started one political movement after another in the cultural arena (including the Cultural Revolution) was that he wanted to firmly defend the purity and consistency of this value system. I cannot offer any incisive criticism on revolutionary pop culture in this paper, nor do I intend to do so. I mentioned it just to explain the literary and social environment of 1985 when 'Root-seeking Literature' thrived. According to popular critical opinion, the 'Wound Literature' that emerged in the seventies and the 'Reform Literature' that emerged in the early eighties had innovative significance, and even started a new literary period. This opinion is not without its reasons, as the 'Wound Literature' and the 'Reform Literature' indeed brought some new dimensions to the literary scene. As literary discourse, not only were they different from the 'Model Operas' staged during the Cultural Revolution, but they were different from the literary and artistic works produced during the previous seventeen years, between 1949 and 1966. Therefore there was a subtle and complex oppositional relationship among the literatures of these three periods. Nevertheless, 'Wound Literature' and 'Reform Literature' did not change the power structure underlying the discourse of 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art'. On the contrary, the opposition and union of these three literatures formed a kind of strategy which suppressed the emergence of a new literary discourse.

An example of such suppression would be the criticism and disputes which followed the publication in the early 1980s of several novels by Wang Meng, such as *The Voice of Spring* and *The Dream of the Sea*. These novels had a very unique literary form because he employed a narrative style in imitation of the 'stream of consciousness' technique (or rather, a parody of it). Some readers, however, immediately wrote to the newspapers, complaining that the novels were unintelligible, and literary critics actively echoed these complaints. A dispute ensued. The focus of the dispute was whether the writers would forfeit their revolutionary responsibility if they wrote unintelligible works. To tell the truth, the dispute would have been an idle one under different historical circumstances. However, because Wang Meng's style ran counter to the orientation towards 'the masses' prescribed by revolutionary pop culture, the dispute not only gave rise to an extremely heated response in wider society, but the participants also believed that they were defending their unbending

principles concerning the direction of literature. What is noteworthy is that the dispute did not lead to political suppression, as the political environment had greatly changed. It was the attempted suppression of one discourse by another. Wang Meng's style certainly deviated from the literary norm established by the 'Model Operas', 'Wound Literature' and the literature of the 'seventeen years'. Therefore its legitimacy would certainly be doubted. It made Wang Meng's novels look like visitors of unknown identity, constantly under the host's surveillance, though not evicted yet.

The dispute about Wang Meng's novels was merely the beginning of the conflict between old and new discourses in the eighties, and the many conflicts in its wake were similar to it. In view of this fact, I believe that when reviewing literary developments in the past decade, the critics have to look squarely at this fact: disregarding their popularized artistic style or the values contained in the works, 'Wound Literature' and 'Reform Literature' not only had no fundamental difference from 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art', but were a new stage (and probably also the last stage) of the latter. Therefore we may say that the 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' were not shaken up until 1985, and that they continued to monitor the production of literary discourse according to the standards of revolutionary popular literature set up by Mao Zedong. However, along with the emergence of 'Root-seeking Literature' in 1985, I believe that the history of 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' finally came to an end. This is not to say that examples of 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' would never appear again. Rather, it was no longer dominant as a cultural form, and the 'worker-peasant-soldier literature' at its centre was no longer the sole narrative discourse in literary narratives. Over the years there have been many attempts to create another literary discourse outside of the domain of 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art'. However, they were either suppressed and forbidden as a discursive taboo, or they could not express themselves at all (they did not qualify as a discourse). The enchanting scene where 'a hundred schools of thought contend' remained illusory. Therefore, people were very happy, indeed wild with joy, at the changes in the literary scene during the year 1985. Now that we think about it, there might be a better reason: instead of having just one voice, millions of people could now have dialogues with each other. It is self-evident how important that was for those who were enduring the torture of drawn out spiritual suicide.

True, 'Root-seeking Literature' played an instrumental role in the 'sudden change' during 1985, yet I do not think that we should exaggerate its role. I do not believe that a simple cause and effect relationship existed between the emergence of 'Root-seeking Literature' and the end of the era of 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art'. It would not be true to say that the former caused the latter to come to an end. As a cultural phenomenon and a complicated historical process, the rise and fall of 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' had to do with many factors, and was definitely not shaped merely by the works of a group of writers. Moreover, the flourishing of 'Root-seeking Literature' lasted only a bit more than a year. In 1987 very few works had this inclination. Wang Zengqi, a lonely old fellow, was the only one left who still carried on calmly. Therefore, the main function of 'Root-seeking Literature' during the 'sudden change' in 1985 was its opposition to 'Wound Literature' and 'Reform Literature'. These oppositional forces were not balanced, because in comparison,

'Root-seeking Literature' was really weak. Fortunately, however, in the world of literature there were many other 'streams' that converged with 'Root-seeking Literature' and built up a great momentum. Besides, what is more important is that such a sudden change not only happened in cultural arenas such as fiction, poetry, painting, films, music, theatre and literary criticism, but they happened everywhere. It could be said that 'every place that had a well had a change'.

It was also in 1985 that some younger and more radical poets were shouting the slogan 'Down with Bei Dao!' In their view, Bei Dao, Duo Duo, Jiang He and Yang Lian were old fellows who should have died already. The 'Great Poetry Show, put on by *Shenzhen Youth Gazette* suddenly enabled quite a few forbidden voices to cry out. The voices were so varied and loud that they proclaimed the arrival of a new era of poetry. However, I believe that in the field of painting the changes were more radical than in the field of poetry. As early as 1983 there was an art exhibition featuring works by Huang Yongbeng and four other people. (Several years later it transformed into a school called 'Xiamen Dada.') Huang Yongbeng wrote: 'On a certain spiritual level, it can be said that Zen is Dada. Dada is Zen.' In 1985, not only were there various schools in the field of painting, but a succession of exhibitions featuring modern art were held all over the country. In Hangzhou, for instance, there was an exhibition of works by graduates of Zhejiang College of Fine Arts as well as a '1985 New Space Exhibition', which later became the cause of serious dispute. There was 'The First Exhibition of Hunan "O" Art Circle' in Changsha, 'The November Art Show' in Beijing, 'The Exhibition of New Paintings from Yunan and Shanghai' in Shanghai, 'The Jiangsu Youth Art Week-- the Grand Art Exhibition' in Nanjing, 'Shengsheng Exhibition' in Xi'an, 'The Modern Art Show' in Chongqing, put on by the 'Artistic Circle of the Anonymous', and so forth. I did not have the chance to see most of these shows, but I always kept track of them from *The Chinese Art Gazette* and other art magazines. I remember to this day the surprise and shock I experienced when I first saw works by such painters as Gu Wenda and Wang Guangyi.

We cannot but talk about films when discussing the year 1985. I am probably more familiar with films than with painting. I have a great deal to say, but I only want to mention one thing. In the spring of '84, I was writing a script in the guest house of the Xi'an Film Studio. The production unit of the film *Yellow Earth* also stayed there for a few days. My room faced the stairs and so I could clearly hear the steps of the passers-by. The steps were very slow, as if the guest house were a nursing home, but after Chen Kaige, the director, took his people there, the steps outside my door started to sound more lively. As soon as someone called 'Let's go! Let's go!' I would hear some quick steps and it would be noisy on the stairs for a few minutes. Then the laughter and teasing sounds fading away with the steps, the guest house would fall back into a deadly silence. At such moments, I used to be indescribably moved by the quick steps. Several days later, the production unit left for Shangbei to shoot on location. Some acquaintances and friends got together in the guest house to see them off. It was not until then that I had an opportunity to see the people of the production unit for the first time. I was really amazed: most of them were so young that they looked like kids. I was already used to the prejudice in film circles (in all other circles, for that matter) that people in their twenties were good-for-nothing, only fit for work as assistants or running errands. It was not

until they had endured this for about a dozen years that they could do something more important in the production unit. However, in front of me was this group of young men and women-- all of them in their twenties or early thirties. Male or female, they all wore jeans and sun hats with wide brims. Laughing and joking, in spite of the serious look on the face of Chen Kaige, they boarded the bus fully loaded with equipment. I was moved again. I still remember how I tried to hold back my tears, saying to myself, 'Wait and see. There will surely be a big change.'

The big change took place much earlier than I expected. It happened in 1985, although at that time no one could recognize the deep impact it brought to the country. *Yellow Earth* was completed at the end of 1984. The rolling yellow earth on the screen became one of the most exciting events in 1985.

After the end of the seventies, 'modernization' increasingly became a word that could mobilize the imaginative power of the Chinese people, who were already used to connecting all current events with 'modernization'. *Yellow Earth*, however, had nothing to do with 'modernization'. The screen was filled with magnificent yellow earth, whereas in comparison, the people in the film always seemed negligible. Such a relationship between nature and human beings reminded one of the artistic conception in the scenery paintings of the Song and Yuan dynasties, of the ancient thought that 'the humans are modelled after the earth, the earth after the heaven, the heaven after the Way, and the Way after nature'. But in what aspect is this idea related to 'modernization'? Of course, the text is always at the mercy of the readers. Our elaborations on the Yellow Earth could always be related to 'modernization' in one way or another and some film critics did exactly that. However, the distance between *Yellow Earth* and 'modernization' was not an isolated phenomenon. In film, there were *The Horse Thief* and *The Sacrifice of Youth*; in music there were Tan Dun and Qu Xiaosong; in painting, there was a big group of artists of the 'New Wave of 1985'. Moreover, there was fiction: *Dad Dad Dad* by Han Shaogong, *The Transparent Red Turnip* by Mo Yan, *The King of Trees* by A Cheng, *Life on a String* by Shi Tiesheng, *The Mud Hut* by Zhang Chengzhi, *You Have No Alternative* by Liu Suola, *The Seduction of Gandisi* by Ma Yuan, *Strange Stories from a Strange Land* by Zheng Wanlong, and many more. Though varied in subject matter and writing style, these works were similar to *Yellow Earth* on one account: none of them had anything to do with the magic word 'modernization', no matter whether one judges from the images used in the works, or from the hermeneutic possibility of the texts. Why did the enthusiastic illusions and the hard thinking of so many writers and artists no longer orient towards the big and exciting theme of 'modernization'? Why? It seems that this question was never raised before 1985.

As a matter of fact, from the early eighties to 1985, writers, poets, painters and other artists were always inspired by the goal of 'modernization', just like other people. I believe that everyone tried to do his or her bit for the process of Chinese modernization. The ways by which they made their contribution were very different: some writers directly reflected and praised the historical process of modernization in their works, under the rubric of 'Reform Literature'. Some other writers believed that 'modernization' in the literary arena meant that

literature itself needed to be modernized. A necessary precondition for this was the *introduction* and the study of modern Western literature (as in the expression 'the *introduction* of Western advanced technology'). Those who held this view were generally called the 'modernists' over the next few years. I do not want to elaborate on the different treatment received by the two kinds of writers, who were both highly enthusiastic about 'modernization'. All those who have experienced or studied those events know about them and so it is unnecessary to mention them again. What I am now ready to recall is just how naive I and my friends were at that time.

In the summer of 1980, the Writers' Association invited some writers to stay at Beidaihe Beach. It was there that I was first exposed to modernist literature. My teacher was Gao Xingjian. The class was held every evening, from dusk to midnight. I was surprised and happy to be introduced to a new way of thinking. When Gao Xingjian mentioned that Breton's 'surrealism' advocated 'automatic writing', several students and I were surprised: how could one write like that? When Gao said that as a matter of fact in the modernist movement some poets, writers and directors, such as Mayakovsky, Aragon and Eisenstein, were left wing revolutionaries, we felt really happy. We had known about them all along, but how come we never knew that they were also modernists? I believe that some readers will find it strange: how could the writers in mainland China be so ignorant? Anyway it was a fact. For many years, due to such ignorance, a great number of young writers and readers were fascinated by modernist literature and seriously believed that the only way out for Chinese literature lay in the study of Western modernism. (Some people still believe so today).

I do not have the slightest intention of rejecting or refusing to study Western modernism. On the contrary, the confusion and puzzlement of those several years was quite worthwhile. Without the strong influence of Western modernism (and postmodernism, to a certain extent), mainland Chinese literature would not have experienced those changes later, nor would there have been the 'sudden change' in 1985. Prior to the emergence of 'Root-seeking Literature', the writers who sincerely hoped for changes could only 'borrow' Western modernist discourse, using it to oppose 'worker-peasant-soldier literature and art' and thereby gain some space for their own writings. However, it was only after the ravenous and often careless study of Western modernism that Chinese writers were finally able to stick their heads out of the well and look at the world of the twentieth century. The importance of such studies cannot be overvalued, because they provided the most basic condition for Chinese literature to carry on a dialogue with all kinds of world literature, past, present and future.

However, after this positive evaluation, I would like to criticize the superstitious worship of Western modernism from 1980 to 1985. A sharp question should be raised: if 'Westernisation', or the superstitions about modernism, caused a serious disaster in Chinese literature after the May Fourth Movement, why then should we repeat history today? To raise such a question causes some inconvenience, since it entails a complete re-evaluation of Chinese literature since the May Fourth Movement, which will bring forth many problems.

But it also has some advantages, because it links with criticism of the May Fourth Movement and redirects it towards the basic goal of the May Fourth Movement, i.e., that China needed to realise a Western-style modernization. The many upheavals that China experienced since the May Fourth Movement made the goal of 'modernization' now obscure, now clear, but it has never lost its appeal.

At present, an increasing number of Chinese intellectuals are even more superstitious about that goal. An example of this would be the 'Forum on the Methodology of Literary Criticism' held in Xiamen, Fujian Province in March 1983. During the meeting, many people advocated a mixture of the scientific methods used in the natural sciences, such as cybernetics, information science, with aesthetics and art theories. They believed that literary theory could be modernized in this way. Whether these ideas were correct or feasible was unknown, and yet it was not difficult to see how unconditionally enthusiastic many people were about 'modernization' and how superstitious they were about Western theories of discourse. Let me cite another example. In recent years, there are people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits who insist that modernist literature exists in Taiwan and mainland China. They write articles to comment on the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western modernism. Some of them emphasise that the essence of Chinese modernism is the continuation of Western modernism and that Chinese modernism is a part of the world-wide modernist literary movement. These commentaries and critiques often vary in opinion, but they all share the idea that Chinese literature is after all modernized, while the standard of the modernization is, of course, Western.

This criticism of mine will surely be sharply criticized: the emergence of modernism cannot be decided by the subjective will of certain people; if it is a world-wide trend, it is useless to shut one's eyes and to refuse to acknowledge it. However, this is precisely the crux of the problem: is Western-style (There is something wrong with this expression; what and who is the West? But I will just make do with it) modernization (which includes an ideology and other spiritual productions congruent with it) really an irresistible trend? Do we have an alternative? Besides, we should not forget that all Western discourses on 'modernization' and 'modernity' are after all discourses, which represent some kind of will to power. Can we treat them as truth and law?

These are some big questions that go far beyond the scope of literature. The reason that I have to mention them is that they constituted the general background for the transformations of 1985. The significance of the literature of 1985 can be seen more clearly if placed against this background. The writers who were active in that literary transformation did not (as far as I know) intentionally evaluate their works against this background. What was surprising then, and even more so today, is that they spontaneously took the same attitude toward writing. Objectively speaking, they not only rejected the superstitious worship of Western modernist literature that was prevalent during those years but, more importantly, unconsciously questioned the idea of 'modernization'. Such questioning was virtually unnoticed and the critics did not refine it or make a theory out of it. However, the impact of the year 1985 was obvious, which was evidenced by the works of a generation of

even younger writers (Yu Hua, Su Tong, Ye Zhaoyan, Ge Fei, Liu Heng, Li Rui and so forth). These newcomers have suppressed the old-timers who were active in 1985.

At the end of 1984, *Shanghai Literature* and Zhejiang Art Publishing House organised a forum on literature in Hangzhou. The participants included writers as well as critics. This conference was intense, both extremely exhausting and extremely exciting. It seemed to have resulted in some considerable influence on the literary transformations of 1985. Some people even believe that the intention to 'look for roots' in 'Root-seeking Literature' was basically put forward during that conference. I clearly remember that Huang Ziping told a story during his talk at the meeting: 'A young monk asked an old monk what Buddha was. The old monk did not speak and only raised a finger. A few days later, the old monk asked the young one what Buddha was. The young monk did not speak either and then raised a finger. Unexpectedly, the old monk produced a knife and cut off the younger one's hand.' I have completely forgotten the reason he told the story or its context. Besides, he did not make it clear where the story came from (probably from the *Wudeng Hui Yuan*, a collection of Chan-Zen-- classics, but retold by Huang). I only recall that, his face flushed, he used his hand as the knife, whizzed it at his other hand, and then said nothing. After so many years, I still remember the little story and see it as Ziping's own creation. It frequently jumps into my mind and makes me think that probably someone had to cut off all ten fingers.