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# The Distant Shore: Nationalism in Yu Dafu's "Sinking"

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## I

Yu Dafu's 郁達夫 (1896-1945) most well-known story, "Chenlun" 沈淪 (Sinking, 1921),<sup>1</sup> has generally been seen as representative of the Romanticism which characterized much of the literature of the May Fourth period. It has been described as one of the first psychological stories in the history of modern Chinese fiction and its significance in Chinese literary history is seen to lie in its radically new focus on the personal, the profoundly subjective (something traditionally reserved for the "high" genres of poetry), presenting for the first time a fictional landscape drawn through the mind of a single character.<sup>2</sup> The mind through which the story unfolds is, moreover, a modern mind, alienated from society, turned in on itself, and ultimately divided. Chinese narrative would seem to have abandoned its traditional focus on social and ethical interaction for the internal conflicts of the fragmented psyche of characters with a psychological identity apart from the social world.

Two approaches to this story have emerged in Western criticism. The first, represented by C. T. Hsia, interprets the story without irony, as straight autobiography, with little distinction between protagonist and author. Onto this rather conventional Chinese autobiographical reading Hsia imposes a standard of Western psychological realism, a perspective from which the story can only appear as mawkish sentimentality.<sup>3</sup> The second approach salvages the story from this irksome mawkishness with irony. Michael Egan, for example, finds ample textual signposts for interpreting ironic distance between the narrator and protagonist. For the Western reader it is all but impossible, if we are to accept the story as a valuable piece of 'high' literature, to read it without disassociating the emotionalism and patriotism of the protagonist from both the narrator and the author. The unabashed sentimentality and melancholia expressed by the protagonist invariably appears stale and hackneyed to the reader whose literary tastes have been shaped by Romantic irony and modernist skepticism. By bringing irony to our reading we engage in a "secret communion" with the "imagined" author behind the back of the unknowing protagonist whom we transform into a pitiable mock hero.<sup>4</sup> By directing attention to the story's inner struc-

<sup>1</sup>All quotations are from C. T. Hsia and Joseph Lau's translation in *Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas 1919-1949* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). The original text used is from *Yu Dafu xiaoshuo ji 郁達夫小說集* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi, 1985), pp. 16-50.

<sup>2</sup>This is a view shared by Michael Egan, "Yu Dafu and the Transition to Modern Chinese Literature," in Merle Goldman, ed. *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 309-324; Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); and C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

<sup>3</sup>Hsia, *History*, pp. 102-105.

<sup>4</sup>The terminology used here is that of Wayne Booth in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 300.

tural dynamic, irony invites the reader to disregard any direct relationship between the real author, and the historical context in which he was writing, and the fictional world. The story is thus enshrouded in "literariness" and given a universal appeal.

For Yu Dafu's contemporaries, however, the story's value lay not in this complex of ironic tension between author, implied author, narrator, and protagonist but in the novelty of "real" emotional turmoil unleashed through the text into the social world of the reader. Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 comments on the story may be taken as typical of positive contemporary readings:

His [Yu Dafu's] fresh new tone is like a spring breeze blowing through China's decaying society awakening at once countless youthful hearts at that time. His audacious self-exposure is like a flash of lightning in a storm to the hypocrisy of the old literati deeply hidden under thousand-year-old carapaces, and sends these canting moralists and pseudo-scholars into a frenzy of shock. Why? It is because his undisguised frankness makes them feel their pretenses difficult to sustain.<sup>5</sup>

Yu's portrayal of sexual frustration, shame, depression, and mental instability offered fresh insights into a previously unexplored world. As Jaroslav Prusek has observed, the literary impulse of writers of very different styles such as Mao Dun 茅盾 and Yu Dafu, representing the conventional "realist" and "romantic" poles of May Fourth literature, is essentially the same: the "determination to lay bare the naked truth."<sup>6</sup> What we have come to accept as the edifice of May Fourth literary factionalism between the realists and the romantics begins to collapse and reveal itself as a polemical facade.<sup>7</sup> This romantic story acted on the reader in much the same way as a piece of realist fiction would: it laid bare "new" reality as a way of subverting spurious visions of reality imposed by tradition. Integral to this reading is an understanding that the story derives from the actual experience of the author. To separate the author from narrator and/or the fictional world of the story would be to deny it its origins in reality and eliminate, for the Chinese reader, much of its power.

This does not mean that we should not continue to read the story ironically. There are instances in which the reader clearly knows more about the protagonist than the protagonist knows about himself and is meant to laugh at him for this lack of self-knowledge. But the ironic reading is dangerously discriminative for it emphasizes those scenes in which the author seems to be mocking the hero and excludes, or downplays, such themes as nationalism which are treated with little ironic equivocacy. On the nationalist theme, Egan writes:

Unfortunately, the analogy between the respective conditions of China and the story's protagonist is not a good one. The attempt to make nationalism and anti-imperialism issues in a story that is a pathological character study must be considered a failure. From the internal evidence of the story, nationalism and anti-imperialism have no

<sup>5</sup>Cited in Yu Dafu, *Nights of Spring Fever and Other Writings* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1984), p. 8; from Guo Moruo 郭沫若, "Lun Yu Dafu" 論郁達夫 (On Yu Dafu) in *Chuangzao she ziliao* 創造社資料 (Materials on the Creation Society) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin, 1985), pp. 803-4.

<sup>6</sup>Jaroslav Prusek, "Mao Dun and Yu Dafu" in *The Lyrical and the Epic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 143.

<sup>7</sup>Literary antagonism between the *Chuangzao she* 創造社 (Creation Society) and *Wenxue yanjiu hui* 文學研究會 (Literary Research Society) gave rise to the view of two diametrically opposed kinds of literature based on the models of Western Realism and Romanticism. The literary views of the two schools are theoretically at odds (the one seeking the representation of social reality, the other the autonomy of art from life). In actual literary practice, however, each school was heavily influenced by the other.

bearing on the psychological deterioration of the protagonist. They are introduced almost as an afterthought and are irrelevant to the development of the story.<sup>8</sup>

Egan sees the plot of "Sinking" as "essentially apolitical and individualistic, as opposed to social and ideological."<sup>9</sup> If we read the story as sustained irony (what Booth calls stable irony) then the fervent nationalist sentiments expressed by the protagonist must be as suspect as all his fallible perceptions of self and the world around him. These are but the babblings of the pitiable mock hero. And yet the nationalist theme, which Egan believes is "tacked on, as if out of obligation," is so glaring and expressed with such ardent sincerity as to demand thoughtful review.

The nationalist sentiment, as we shall see, has absolute "bearing on the psychological deterioration of the protagonist." To disregard the protagonist's patriotism and the place of nationalism in the story as a whole is to accept unquestioningly that May Fourth writers embraced, without equivocation, the Western humanist model of self which sees individual consciousness as primary and ultimately unconnected to the national collective. I am following the lead of Leo Ou-fan Lee who has described the themes of "sex, racism and nationalism" in this story as closely interconnected. Though Lee also underplays the nationalism in the story, he recognizes the essential interrelationship between the private self and the nation, and he asserts that the "nationalism of Yu Dafu in Japan was... personal and psychological, not exclusively political or ideological."<sup>10</sup> The nationalist theme in "Sinking" amounts to much more than the pitiful laments by the protagonist for the weakness of his homeland ("China, oh my China! Why don't you grow rich and strong?" 中國呀中國! 你怎麼不富強起來 p. 128), it informs the entire story through spatial imagery, the theme of sexual desire, and the use of poetic subtexts. An analysis of these three aspects of the story will demonstrate the centrality of the nationalist theme which the ironic reading tends to gloss over. My reading will be grounded in an intentionality, not the private authorial intention so abhorrent to the New Critics, nor the psychologizing of Leo Ou-fan Lee's Eriksonian approach to history, but a social, historical and cultural intention which motivates the production of literary texts.

When we look beneath the radical ideological posture of May Fourth iconoclasm and the Western origin of the many ideas they adopted, we see a period of great intellectual paradox and emotional tension.<sup>11</sup> The paradoxes are readily apparent when we stand back to look at May Fourth thought as a whole, but they are also to be found within the literary *oeuvre*, and within particular works, of individual writers. It is perhaps especially in its understanding and representation of the self that the May Fourth appears most equivocal. Fiction, and to a lesser extent poetry, were

<sup>8</sup>Egan, p. 320-1.

<sup>9</sup>Egan, p. 321

<sup>10</sup>Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, p. 91. Jeannette Faurot writes that the protagonist in "Sinking" has "a sense of personal identification with China, a feeling that he as an individual is China in miniature" ("Nationalism in Modern Chinese Literature," *Literature East and West* [1987], p. 22).

<sup>11</sup>In my understanding of the paradoxical nature of the May Fourth I have drawn from the work of Chang Hao 張灝, Lin Yu-sheng (*The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979]), and Mark Elvin (*Self-Liberation and Self-Immolation in Modern Chinese Thought* [Canberra: Australian National University, 1978]). Chang Hao, for example, has described at least four central tensions in May Fourth thought: rationalism and romanticism; skepticism and religiosity; individualism and collectivism; nationalism and cosmopolitanism ("Xingxiang yu shizhi: Zai renshi Wusi sixiang" 形象與實質：再認識五四思想 [Form and Substance: A New Understanding of May Fourth Thought], in Wei Zhengtong ed. *Zizou minzhu de sixiang yu wenhua* 自由民主的思想與文化 [The Thought and Culture of Liberal Democracy] [Taipei: Zili bao, 1989]).

the privileged realms through which the tensions and paradoxes of the May Fourth self were represented. After analyzing how these tensions are expressed in "Sinking," a representative May Fourth literary text, I will broaden my discussion in an attempt to trace the origins of the paradox of self to both the specific historical exigencies of the May Fourth period and, drawing from the work of Thomas Metzger, to an internal dynamic which had been a "predicament" for Chinese intellectuals long before the onslaught of Western imperialism. In the process some new directions for the reading of May Fourth literary texts, which confront and account for their complexities and ambiguities, may emerge.

## II

One should recall that "Sinking" was both written and its action takes place in Japan. For young Chinese students studying in Japan, this island nation was symbolically ambiguous: it stood in their minds as both the cause of Chinese national humiliation (i.e. defeat in the 1894-95 war, the Twenty-one Demands, and the Treaty of Versailles) and the shining paragon of an Asian nation which had successfully modernized along the Western model. No doubt Yu Dafu was simply drawing on his personal experience as an overseas student in Japan for fictional material, but the effect of the setting of the story goes beyond documentary realism to evoke in the Chinese reader a sense of national shame and to raise in his mind haunting questions about why Japan had succeeded in national modernization when China was failing so miserably. The image of a Chinese student learning from the Japanese underlines this shame felt by Chinese. The contrast with the days when China was learned master and Japan humble pupil could not be more dramatically conveyed.

The protagonist of "Sinking" is the proverbial exile. His mind, which Egan is right to call the center of the story, separated from the cultural "We," becomes unanchored and drifts freely in a sea of self-consciousness. Trite as it may be, the setting of the island becomes a physical projection of the alienated consciousness cut off from the culture through which it has always defined and understood itself. The setting of the island separated from continental China, establishes a fundamental tension between "here" and "there," the isolated self and the absent motherland and, by implication, between modernization and tradition. The protagonist is caught in the paradoxical bind of the self-imposed exile: his conscious rejection of the motherland is continuously undermined by an obsessive desire to return to it.

The imagery of "here" separated by a vast gulf from "there," implicit in the general setting, is repeated again and again in the more particular spatial imagery of the story and the protagonist's physical movement within it. After translating Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper" in part one of the story, the protagonist gazes at the sun setting across the plain where a mountain appears to float in a hazy mist. The mountain stands on what is described as "the distant shore (*bi'an* 彼岸) of the plain, the western horizon" (525). *Bi'an*, meaning literally "that shore," is a Buddhist term denoting the land of enlightenment as opposed to *ci'an* 此岸, "this shore," the mundane world of life and death. Yu Dafu uses the term in several instances in the story to indicate distant ephemera across a vast expanse of space. When walking aimlessly from his hostel the morning after the infamous voyeur incident (section 5), the protagonist comes to a crossroads near the crest of a hill. He feels an urge to turn south

and follow the road which leads down onto the plain and to "the city on the distant shore." On that "distant shore" across the plain he views "a dense forest which cut into the blue sky." He thinks this must be the location of the "A temple," a Shinto shrine, or *shengong* 神宮. (That the *shen* of this term is the same used in the ancient designation for China, *Shenzhou* 神州, certainly lends it symbolic possibilities.) The protagonist turns back, however, to continue along the road on "this" side of the plain. He eventually finds himself in a hillside park covered with plum trees. So enthralled is he with the beauty of the park that he decides to leave the hostel and move into a cottage there, thus completing what has been throughout the story a gradual movement away from society. Significantly, the park faces south across the plain and affords the protagonist a clear prospect of the "distant shore." Throughout this gradual movement away from China, from the company of other Chinese to the solitude of the hillside plum garden, the protagonist's gaze has been steadily directed across to the "distant shore."

The image of the distant shore remains latent until section 7 when, wakened from an afternoon nap, the protagonist is mysteriously compelled to descend from his hilltop retreat and cross the plain for the first time in the story. As if without conscious awareness, he reaches the Shinto Shrine where he boards a trolley car "without knowing why he should be taking the trolley or where he was going" (不知不覺就乘了上去, 既不知道他究竟為甚麼要乘電車, p. 137). He arrives at an ocean harbor where he embarks on a boat which ferries him westward across a bay. Here he is goaded by his own sexual (and national) insecurity into a brothel. He chooses a room facing the ocean, opens the shutters to the window and gazes out onto the seascape. Hours later, the sky still dark, he wanders along the beach. The narrator describes this final scene: "From afar the lights of the fishermen's boats seemed to be beckoning him, like the will-o'-the-wisp, and the waves under the silvery moon seemed to be winking at him like the eyes of mountain spirits." 看看遠岸的漁燈, 同鬼火似的在那裡招招引他, 細浪中間, 映著了銀色的月光, 好像是山鬼的眼波, 在那裡開閉的樣子. (140-41). Finally, contemplating suicide, he sees a bright star in the distance under which he imagines his homeland. The story ends with the above-quoted lament about the weakness and poverty of his beloved China.

The movement of the protagonist in the final two sections of the story is directly opposite to that which has been related in the first six sections of the story, which narrate his gradual separation from China. In the first two-thirds of the story, the protagonist leaves the comfortable embrace of his homeland to live in the unknown of an alien country to study Western medicine. After a year in Tokyo, he divorces himself from the community of Chinese students by studying in distant N. City where he rejects offers of friendship by well-intentioned Japanese students. He finds an excuse to sever relations with his elder brother and finally sequesters himself in the cottage in the hillside park. He has rejected all social relations for the sanctuary of solitude. As he descends from his hilltop retreat in the pivotal section 7, he is for the first time in the story attracted to, rather than consciously rejecting, something. His mystical journey toward the seaside brothel, then, reverses the separation which the protagonist has sought for himself throughout the first six sections of the story. As he approaches it, however, his unknown goal remains elusive, remote, and ungraspable.

It is by no means surprising to the reader that this final journey should end in a brothel. The themes of sexual desire and eroticism have been salient throughout the story and it is to be expected that they aspire, as it were, to climax. Up to this point, the protagonist's desire has manifested itself in the only sorts of sexual activity that the solitary self can engage in, the anti-social, self-destructive acts of masturbation, which turns the object of desire onto the self, and voyeurism, which derives pleasure from the distance between desiring subject and object. The protagonist's sudden, mysterious movement toward the brothel by the ocean is impelled by the two inter-connected forces of his sexual need and his sense of national inferiority. It is the protagonist's profound sense of lack, both sexual and national, which causes him to mistake the seductive calls of the prostitutes for a combative challenge to be countered with a "declaration of war." Through the assertion of his sexuality he seeks redress for his sense of national humiliation. The subtly suggestive slit up the prostitute's kimono arouses him, but his courage flags and so he conceals his failure with drunken bravado and the pathetic recitation of nostalgic poetry. He leaves the brothel in despair early the next morning and walks along the ocean's edge where he contemplates drowning himself.

This inexplicable urge to throw himself in the sea is preceded by a set of clearly sexual images. The reflection of the moon in the ocean waves, like the blinking eyes of "mountain spirits," seem to draw him toward the water. The moon, of course, is a hackneyed symbol of womanhood and a medium through which lovers separated by distance spiritually unite with each other. The "mountain spirit" (*shangui* 山鬼) is an allusion to a poem of the same name in the "Jiuge" 九歌 (Nine Songs) of the *Chuci* 楚辭. The mountain spirit, according to David Hawkes, is a female deity worshipped as a fertility goddess. Some scholars see the "mountain spirit" as the goddess of Gaotang, the deity of the Wu mountain above the Three Gorges.<sup>12</sup> In both the *Chuci* poem and Song Yu's 宋玉 "Gaotang fu" 高唐賦 (The Rhapsody of Gaotang), the goddess of the mountain is a seductress who couples with lovers and leaves them disconsolate and longing for her return. She is the most potently sexual goddess in the Chinese pantheon. The image of the "mountain spirit" at the end of "Sinking" thus envelops the distant ephemera across the ocean with a strong sense of sexual allurement and paints it as an unattainable object of desire. The moon, the ocean water, and the strong suggestion of a water, or mountain, goddess cloak this scene in the imagery of an allegorical quest for a lover. In the *Chuci* tradition, the poet, in allegorical imitation of the ancient shaman, seeks a meeting with the ever-elusive goddess, but is always disappointed in his quest.<sup>13</sup>

But what is the object of the protagonist's desire? Beneath the need for immediate sexual gratification lies a more profound metaphysical need. What he wants most of all, he declares earlier in the story, is "a 'heart' that can understand and comfort me, a warm and passionate heart and the sympathy that it generates and the love born of that sympathy" (128). What this "modern" alienated self desires is rein-

<sup>12</sup>David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South* (Penguin Books, 1985), p. 115.

<sup>13</sup>There is much in "Sinking" which recalls Qu Yuan's 屈原 "Lisao" 离騷. Like the "Lisao," "Sinking" has "the unsuccessful pursuit of a loved one... as the narrative frame of the poem" (Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987], p. 88). The texts share an ambiguous suicide ending. Though most scholars read the final line of the poem ("I shall go and join Peng Xian in the place where he abides") as a declaration of the poet's intention to drown himself, it may also mean that he intends to "abandon politics and study the occult with a shaman," in other words to live the life of a recluse (Pauline Yu, p. 87).

tegration into the human community through a coupling of *xin* 心 (heart/mind). The physical movement of the protagonist represents a metaphysical need to end the radical isolation which has emasculated his self through barren inwardness. To live in exile, the story may be saying, alienated from one's society and culture is to be very much less than a whole person and the protagonist's journey toward the distant shore marks a deep wish to return to a social and moral whole, to recapture the very Confucian sense of a community of like minds which will replenish lost selfhood.

The meeting of land and water at the ocean shore is thus read as a spatial projection of the duality of the protagonist's mind. The ocean, its vastness and chaos, stands before him as a kind of origin, a time prior to the alienation of modern self-consciousness, to which the protagonist desires to return.<sup>14</sup> The island behind is a physical representation of the isolation of the modern mind, at once attractive and repellent to the protagonist. His sexual misadventure in the brothel ends with a whimper and leads to his anguished deliberations about suicide on the shore. Existential dilemma? In a sense, but of a nature very different from that which emerged with the collapse of Christian faith in the West. The protagonist's existential anguish is the realization that his individual identity is profoundly threatened by the collapse of the cultural whole.<sup>15</sup> Without that cultural whole he is alone; his individual life is meaningless without social relations tied together by shared cultural values and so he suffers a crisis of identity, hastened by a sense of national shame, which pushes him to the brink of suicide. His suicidal deliberations on the shore, between land and sea, reflect the ambiguities of his sense of self caught between modern, Western self-consciousness and traditional Chinese moral and cultural unity.

The ending of the story is manifestly open and the reader is left to ponder whether or not the protagonist actually carries out the suicide. Even if solid textual evidence were provided to confirm the drowning, which some see in the story's title,<sup>16</sup> the reader is still able to interpret the suicide in at least two ways: a final desperate act of social alienation or a metaphysical reintegration with his true object of desire, his motherland which he sees under a "trembling star in the farthest reaches of the western horizon" (141). The sexual urge has driven the protagonist from "this shore" (his hilltop retreat) to "that shore" (the oceanside brothel), but his desire is unfulfilled and he redirects it toward a new object across the sea, on a further distant shore. Sexual desire seeks to recapture a primitive metaphysical state before the separation of subject from object, of I from We. In the final two sections of "Sinking," sexual desire has driven the protagonist from his hilltop isolation to his seaside

<sup>14</sup>I have drawn in my discussion of landscape as a projection of consciousness from James Applewhite's study *Seas and Inland Journeys: Landscape and Consciousness from Wordsworth to Roethke* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985).

<sup>15</sup>This sense of the inextricable relation of individual and cultural identities is prevalent in May Fourth nationalism. Witness Wen Yiduo's 聞一多 poem "Wo shi Zhongguoren" 我是中國人 (I am Chinese, 1925): "I am Chinese, I am a Chinaman,/ In my heart are the hearts of Yao and Shun,/ My blood is the blood of Jing Ke and Nie Zheng,/ I am heir of Shen Nong and the Yellow Emperor" 我是中國人, 我是支那人/我的裡有堯舜的心,/我的血是荆軻蟲政的血,/我是神農黃帝的遺孽 (Wen Yiduo shiji 聞一多詩集[Collected Poems of Wen Yiduo] [Chengdu: Sichuan renmin, 1984], p. 284). And his "Aiguo de xin" 愛國的心 (Patriotism): "This heart is the shape of a cherry tree leaf! It is a reduction of a map of China/ Who would steal her map?/ Who would steal my heart?" 這心腹裡海棠葉形是中華版圖底縮本;/誰能偷去伊的版圖?/誰能偷去我的心 (Wen, *Shiji*, p. 288).

<sup>16</sup>Reflecting back from 1931 on the period in which he wrote "Sinking," Yu Dafu writes of witnessing the "sinking" *luchen* 陸沉 of his homeland. See "Chanyu dubai" 儀餘獨白 (Self-confessions) in *Yu Dafu xiaoshuo ji*, pp. 831-33.

longing for the distant motherland, firmly establishing the absent cultural and national whole as the true object of his metaphysical desire. Suicide executed may stand either as a form of sexual union with, or a complete rejection of, the object. Suicide unconsummated is equally ambiguous for it can be interpreted as a desire for union with the object or, again, as an implicit rejection of the object. The protagonist is caught in a paradoxical bind with both tradition and modernity.

On several occasions in his non-fictional writings, Yu Dafu makes explicit the link between the private libidinous act and his feelings of nationalism. In his 1936 account of losing his virginity in a Japanese brothel, he equates sexual desire with a sense of intense national shame. "The insults and mistreatment suffered by the people of a weak country," he writes, "are felt most deeply and most unbearably in relations between the sexes, the moment when one is hit by the poison dart of Eros."<sup>17</sup> When he awakens the morning after to the realization of his loss, tears begin to fall: "Why, why did I do it. My ideals, my ambitions, the passion I hold for my country, now what is left, what is left?"<sup>18</sup> It is as if, in engaging in sexual intercourse with a Japanese, Yu has committed adultery and deceived his motherland, the object of his true passion. Even in 1917, still a student in Japan before the writing of "Sinking," Yu Dafu sees sexual relations as a betrayal of his country: "I can no longer love, nor enjoy sex, not to mention wealth and fame. And yet I have one love and that is the love of my country... The nation is my life. If it perishes then my life too will end."<sup>19</sup>

For Yu Dafu, the libidinous act is the critical site at which national identity is in crisis.<sup>20</sup> If we read the Japanese prostitute as emblematic of the lure of Japan's successful westernization (Japan representing for the May Fourth generation an imperialist nation which had modernized along Western models), the seduction of the protagonist into the brothel becomes a metaphor for imperialist entrapment. To yield to his desire for this Japanese prostitute would be to concede his national inferiority and relinquish his national identity to the West. It is interesting that in the fictional re-

<sup>17</sup> Yu Dafu, "Xue ye" 雪夜 (Snowy Night) in *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao* 郁達夫研究資料 (Research Materials on Yu Dafu) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin, 1982), vol. 2, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> Yu Dafu, "Xue ye," p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Yu Ting 于聰 "Yu Dafu shengping shilue (shang) 郁達夫生平事略 (上) (A Brief Account of Yu Dafu's Life) in *Wenhua shiliao congkan* 文化史料叢刊 6 (1983), p. 53.

In his preface to *Sinking*, Yu Dafu recognizes the nationalist theme in the story as "the oppression of Chinese overseas students by Japanese nationalism," but he says that it forms only an "embellishment, to draw a background" in the story, for fear that the story would be taken as "propaganda" (*Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao* vol. 1, p. 185).

<sup>20</sup> My reading of the unity of sexual desire and nationalism in this story has drawn much from Fredrick Jameson's provocative concept of "national allegory." That the private and libidinal are allegorical representations of the national situation is inevitable in a third-world country, argues Jameson, because of the critical threat to its existence posed by the imperialist West. Jameson boldly states that "All third-world texts are necessarily ... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*." "Third-world texts", he elaborates, "even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic -- necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (Fredrick Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" in *Social Text: Theory/Culture/Ideology* 15 [Fall 1986], p. 69). Jameson's theory has been much criticized for its reductive view of the third-world and its attempt to impose on third-world literature a single, all-encompassing "theory of cognitive aesthetics" (Aijaz Amhad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" in *Social Text: Theory/Culture/Ideology* 17 [Fall 1987]). Jameson vastly simplifies the May Fourth relationship with the West, which is at once the source of its national predicament and its salvation. Nor does he properly understand the profound ties to tradition which, as I will argue below, informed the May Fourth understanding of modernity.

creation, so similar to that of this "true" account, the protagonist passes out before carrying out the sexual act with the prostitute. The purity of his desire for his motherland remains intact, unsullied.

## III

Literary subtexts, so salient in "Sinking," underline the nationalist theme and reinforce the story's central conflict between tradition and modernity. Citation of other texts is of course a common practice in Chinese literature of both the high and low traditions. What is striking in this story is the juxtaposition of literary texts from both the West and China. This melange sets Yu Dafu's story off from both traditional Chinese literature (to which Western literary texts were unknown) and its modern counterpart (which generally scorned tradition). The protagonist cites poems by Wordsworth and Heine; he reads Emerson, Thoreau and George Gissing; he makes allusion to Nietzsche, Gogol and the French painter Millet. But he also reads the Qing poet Huang Zhongze 黃仲則; alludes to Tang poets Wang Bo 王勃 and Rong Yu 戎煜; and quotes from his own traditional verse. Intellectual iconoclasts of the May Fourth period for the most part consciously rejected traditional literary discourse as artificial and inappropriate for the expression of sincere emotion. They turned to nineteenth-century European literature (especially the Romantics) as models for the unfettered expression of subjectivity they sought to liberate in themselves. The protagonist of "Sinking" weaves his way among a heterogeneous mass of texts in search of a discourse by which to understand his anxiety and fear, but he is caught precariously between modes of understanding the self which are diametrically opposed.

To be sure there is a common thread to the Western and Chinese texts, as both treat the theme of solitude; but the solitude in each is of a very different nature. On a train bound for N. City, for example, the protagonist composes a seven character regulated-verse poem on a post-card placed on top of a volume of Heine's poetry. In his poem the theme of parting, so familiar in the Chinese literary context, is manifest: the poet reluctantly separates himself from friends and his native land for travels afar. How different from the tone of Heine's poem (literally juxtaposed to his own) which the protagonist recites immediately after his own. Here the poet takes leave of society with scorn to reside on a mountaintop from where he can smile (contemptuously?) on those below.

The Western texts depict the active and willing pursuit of solitude, an "image" of Western Romanticism that Frank Kermode has termed "the cult of isolated joy."<sup>21</sup> All of the Chinese poems cited, alluded to, or written by the protagonist describe a reluctant solitude imposed on the poet by parting or exile. The last of the protagonist's own poems is a densely allusive regulated-verse poem with nearly all of the references related to the theme of exile. Half drunk, gazing out the window of the brothel toward China, the protagonist recites his composition, the final three lines of which read: "But how many could pass through the capital/ Without heaving five long sighs?/ Looking homeward across the misted sea,/ I too weep for my beloved country" 五噫幾輩出關難, 茫茫煙水回頭望, 也為神州淚暗彈 (140).

<sup>21</sup>Frank Kermode, "The Artist in Isolation," in *Romantic Image* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957).

What I will call the discourse of self, how selfhood is constructed through language, is vastly different in the Western and Chinese subtexts. The figures depicted in the Western texts revel superciliously in their rejection of the mundane world; solitude is actively sought for its sublimity, for bringing self closer to the divine. The Chinese texts lament the same separation; their "protagonists" seem to be constantly gazing nostalgically over their shoulders to what they have left behind. While Heine, Zarathustra, and Thoreau disdain society, the Chinese poets express a longing to return to it. This gulf between the two discourses is made explicit at the beginning of the story when the protagonist, after reciting aloud Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper," attempts to translate it into Chinese. He despairs at the futility of using one language to understand another: "...he suddenly felt that he had done something silly and started to reproach himself: 'What kind of a translation is that? Isn't it as insipid as the hymns sung in the church? English poetry is English poetry and Chinese poetry is Chinese poetry; why bother to translate?'" 忽又覺得無聊起來，便自嘲自罵的說道：'這算是甚麼東西呀，豈不同教會裡的贊美歌一樣的乏味嗎？英國詩是英國詩，中國詩是中國詩，又何必譯來對去呢！(126)

But where does the protagonist of "Sinking" stand in the midst of these contrastive discourses? He is caught awkwardly and anxiously between them. The iconoclastic trend of the May Fourth period demanded rejection of the traditional discourse of self. Writers and intellectuals cast themselves into a cultural void from which they desperately sought to escape through surrogate discourses from the West. The difficulty was that Chinese writers lacked the philosophical and religious foundation upon which the models they sought to imitate stood. It was as if they were putting on strange new clothes which fit poorly and in which they felt awkward and ill at ease. Though the protagonist of "Sinking" attempts to live out the view of self offered by these Western texts (he sees himself as Zarathustra and like Heine leaves the world for a hilltop retreat), he finds the radical isolation of this life too much to bear and so is drawn back to China and its traditional trope of the exile longing nostalgically for his homeland.

In some sense, this tension between the West and China is delineated before the protagonist is "exiled" to Japan. Section 3 of the story is a flashback which relates the protagonist's early schooling and how he came to study in Japan. His educational history is a string of failures and disappointments; he transfers for various reasons from one Western-run missionary school to another, returning temporarily after each withdrawal to his "studio" (*shuzhai* 書齋) at his home near Hangzhou. It is in his studio, surrounded by the Jiangnan scenery and the books of his father and grandfather, that the protagonist feels most at ease. But here "he was more and more enveloped in a world of fantasy, and it was probably during this time that the seeds of his hypochondria were sown" 他的幻想愈演愈大了，他的憂鬱病的根苗，大約就在這時候培養成功的(129). Already in the story, the conflict between the modern West (as represented by the missionary schools he was forced to attend) and traditional elite China (symbolized by the studio) is clear. The protagonist's vacillation between the alienness of the West and the "fantasy" of traditional China is reinforced, as we have seen, through the interweaving of poetic texts from the two cultures. The open ending of the story leaves unresolved this battle of discourses of the self. How is the individual, wanting desperately to deny the allurement of tradition and faced with the alienness of Western conceptions of self, to

understand, define, and represent that self? This was perhaps the most keenly personal question faced by May Fourth writers and intellectuals. "Sinking" gives literary form to the anxiety which May Fourth writers felt so very deeply in the clash between these two different views of self. The conflict, of course, has no resolution, giving rise to textual ambiguity and incompatible readings. "Sinking" is both a psychological portrait of radically alienated consciousness attempting to understand itself in social isolation and a nostalgic longing to return to the comfort of a traditional community of like minds in a unified moral cosmos.

#### IV

The dual demands of iconoclasm and nationalism pulled the May Fourth intellectual self in opposing directions. A strong subject, perceived as autonomous from political power and conventional social values, offered the necessary position from which to engage in the destruction of tradition. The Western concepts of self-consciousness, enlightenment, and critical autonomy allowed the intellectual to break free of the strictures of Confucian ritual and ethics, *li* 禮. From this new vantage Confucian ethics could be exposed as a set of specious social conventions designed to prop up an authoritarian and oppressive political system. The individual was free to claim himself as the possessor of new truths and new ethical values.<sup>22</sup> The immediacy of the imperialist threat, however, mitigated against any wholesale acceptance of Western liberal-humanist models of selfhood and forced May Fourth intellectuals to re-embrace, whether they consciously recognized it or not, a more traditional moral collectivism which demanded the sacrifice of self for the goal of social cohesion and national survival. May Fourth intellectuals stood precariously between the Western models they adopted in their iconoclastic attack on tradition and the continuing appeal of traditional values of moral and ethical harmony which lurked beneath the nationalism they needed in their resistance to the West.

Nationalism and iconoclasm were locked in an uneasy tension, sometimes mutually reinforcing, sometimes hostile and antagonistic to each other. By supplanting the "culturalism" which had traditionally defined the individual's relation to the community, writes Joseph Levenson, nationalism in the late Qing and May Fourth periods opened the way for the iconoclastic assault on the traditional culture.<sup>23</sup> This assault on tradition, moreover, made the psychological need for nationalism all that much more intense. Nationalism gave rise to iconoclasm which in turn fueled nationalism's growth. Yet this cozy inter-relationship denies the fear among certain May Fourth iconoclasts that nationalism held the seeds of traditionalism and would ultimately impede the iconoclast project.<sup>24</sup> For these figures, foremost among whom

<sup>22</sup>May Fourth iconoclasts singled out ethics as the greatest evil of the Confucian ideology. The attack on *li* began in the late Qing period with Tan Sitong's 譚嗣同 *Renxue* 仁學 (On Benevolence, 1896). For May Fourth critiques of *lijiao* 禮教, or ethical system, see Wu Yu 吳虞, "Chiren de lijiao" 吃人的禮教 (Cannibal Ethics, 1918); Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, "Wuren zui hou zhi juewu" 吾人最後之覺悟 (Our Final Enlightenment, 1916) and Lu Xun's 魯迅 "Lun zhengle yan kan" 論睜了眼看 (On Facing Facts, 1925).

<sup>23</sup>Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 95-132.

<sup>24</sup>Here, my argument draws from Li Zehou and Vera Schwarcz' dichotomy of *qimeng* 啟蒙 (personal enlightenment) and *jiuwang* 救亡 (national salvation), forces which alternately dominate generations of modern Chinese intellectuals (Li Zehou 李澤厚 and Vera Schwarcz, "Six Generations of Modern Chinese

was Chen Duxiu 陳 獨 秀, iconoclasm was grounded not in the regressive and parochial force of nationalism, but in "self-consciousness" and "enlightenment," the Western-inspired model of critical autonomy. But even for Chen Duxiu, the most radical and Westernized of the May Fourth iconoclasts, this model of self is ultimately but a tool with which to attack tradition and effect the goal of national renewal.

Despite its romantic and individualist tenor, the May Fourth generation was never unequivocal about the place of the self and the role of mind in this complex interrelationship of the forces of iconoclasm and nationalism. As early as 1915, shortly after the founding of *Xin qingnian* 新 青 年 (New Youth), we see a schism develop in the attitude toward the individual mind. Chen Duxiu's article "Aiguo xin yu zижue xin" 愛 國 心 與 自 覺 心 (The Patriotic Mind and the Self-conscious Mind, 1915)<sup>25</sup> may be seen as representing the "enlightenment" side of May Fourth discussions on mind. This view holds that self-conscious minds, skeptically detached from the social and political world, have the power to illuminate truths concealed by layers of ideological dogma. The self becomes an autonomous essence which has not been determined by social relationships or imposed morality. For Chen Duxiu, the self-conscious, critical mind is based on reason's calculated assertion of itself against the emotionalism of the "patriotic mind" which, when unrestrained, seeks self-annihilation in martyrdom, renewing a very traditional blind faith in authority and rendering the individual a pawn of the state. Li Dazhao's 李 大 劍 retort to Chen's essay stresses the danger of the "self-conscious" mind sliding into "a fog of pessimism" or an "abyss from which one can never return".<sup>26</sup> For Li the self-conscious mind must be given shape and meaning through the more fundamental patriotic mind. These two essays prefigure what would become a central paradox of the May Fourth period surrounding the role of individual consciousness in the process of national renewal.<sup>27</sup>

The May Fourth paradox of self is seen perhaps most clearly in Hu Shih's 胡 適 writings on individualism. His views of self range from the radical egoism expressed in his famous essay "Yibusheng zhuyi" 易 卜 生 主 義 (Ibsenism, 1918) to the anti-individualism of the less well-known "Fei gerenzhuyi de xin shenghuo" 非 個 人 主 義 的 新 生 活 (The Anti-individualist New Life, 1920). Whereas Grieder<sup>28</sup> and Eide<sup>29</sup> see the opposing views expressed in these two essays as reflective of Hu's intellectual "development," we may perhaps better understand them in terms of the

"Intellectuals" in *Chinese Studies in History*. VIII, 2 [Winter 1983-84], pp. 42-56). Rather than see the May Fourth as dominated by the spirit of enlightenment, I am attempting to see the fundamental tension in the May Fourth between enlightenment and national salvation. I am arguing, moreover, that the paradoxes of the May Fourth are inherent in May Fourth thought from its inception and are not merely a reflection of the differences between the early May Fourth (idealist, humanist, cultural) and the later May Fourth (materialist, revolutionary, political).

<sup>25</sup>Jiayin zazhi 甲 寅 雜 誌 1.4.

<sup>26</sup>Li Dazhao 李 大 劍, "Yanshi xin yu zижue xin" 懶 世 心 與 自 覺 心 (Pessimism and Self-consciousness) in *Jiayin zazhi* 1.8.

<sup>27</sup>These two articles, of course, do not embody the complexity and fullness of either figure's thinking. I do not mean to deny the strong individualist tendency in Li Dazhao's early writings, only to suggest that his polemic on patriotism indicates a general direction in his thought toward an emphasis on the "collective will of the people." Though there is a clear difference in emphasis between the two thinkers, both deplore extremist postures, whether patriotic martyrdom or radical isolation of the individual, for either can lead to despair or suicide. For a discussion of these two articles see Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao: Origins of a Chinese Marxist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 21-25.

<sup>28</sup>Jerome Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 97-99.

<sup>29</sup>Elizabeth Eide, *China's Ibsen: From Ibsen to Ibsenism* (Copenhagen: Curzon Press, 1987), pp. 15-22; 35-41.

tensions of the May Fourth period in its attitudes toward the self. The crux of both essays is Hu Shi's interpretation of the "Great Learning" paradigm, the idea that the cultivation of the individual mind is the first in a series of progressive steps toward the goal of the transformation of the external world. In "Ibsenism," Hu Shi cites Mencius' famous phrase *qiong ze du shan qi shen* 窮 則 獨 善 其 身 (in poverty, the scholar attends to his own virtue in solitude). He sees the egoism expressed in this phrase as "the most valuable kind of altruism." Though espousal of a radical egoism is by no means commensurable with mainstream Confucian thought, Hu Shi remains bound within the traditional Great Learning paradigm. In the 1920 essay, he again cites Mencius' phrase *du shan qi shen*, but this time he attacks it along with the idealism of Zhou Zuoren's 周 作 人 "new village" movement, which similarly posited that "social reconstruction must start with the reformation of the individual." From Hu Shi's perspective this idealist individualism (*dushan zhuyi* 獨 善 主 義) wrenches the individual from society and denies the social forces which shape and determine his nature. He reverses his earlier Ibsenism and states that to improve society one must first transform the various forces (institutions, customs, thought, education) which make up society; once society changes, the individual will change along with it. Written just less than two years apart and separated by the cataclysmic events of May 4 1919, these two essays reformulate within the writings of a central May Fourth figure the opposition between an empowered self who through personal enlightenment will bring about social transformation and a passive self shaped by the larger forces of the external world.

Though the members of the Creation Society were foremost among the May Fourth intelligentsia in promoting radical individualism, similar tensions and paradoxes lie at the heart of their representations of self. This group of intellectuals, among whom was Yu Dafu, drew from the Western Romantic ideals of individualism, intuition, creativity, imagination and genius, in order to find a modern and Western justification for the assertion of their egos against what they perceived as the falsehood of tradition.<sup>30</sup> If Guo Moruo may be seen as typical of the May Fourth Romantics, however, this radical assertion of self is undermined by traditional assumptions about the metaphysical unity of man, nature, and the divine. At the same time as it revels in an omnipotent ego, Guo Moruo's pantheism marks a longing for a world of metaphysical harmony in which distinctions between self and other are obliterated.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>The Creationists never really developed this idea of subjectivity as iconoclasm into an expounded theory; it was rather implicit in their writings. Lu Xun's early essay "Wenhua pianzhi lun" 文 化 偏 至 論 (On the Aberration of Culture, 1907) may be the theoretical treatise which most clearly states this aim. Lu Xun appeals for a strong "subjectivism" (*zhuguanzhuyi* 主 觀 主 義), which he sees as arising through opposition to vulgar morality, as an essential part of the revitalization of Chinese culture: "As the new life begins and the false and hypocritical disappear, will not the interior life (*neibu zhi shenghuo* 內 部 之 生 活) become more profound and stronger? Will not the brilliance of the spiritual life (*jingsheng shenghuo* 精 神 生 活) flourish and develop? As soon as it awakens and leaves the world of material illusion, will not the subjective and self-conscious (*zijue* 自 覺) life extend even further?" (Lu Xun, "Wenhua pianzhi lun," *Lu Xun quanji* [Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1981] vol. 1, p. 55).

<sup>31</sup>Guo's utopian pantheism, in which selves merge into a harmonious whole, is readily apparent in his "Preface to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*" (*Shaonian Weite zhi fanmao xuyin* 少 年 維 特 之 煩 惱 序 引, 1922) and in "The Nirvana of the Feng and Huang" (*Fenghuang niepan* 凤 凰 涅 盘, 1920) in the final rebirth of the two phoenixes in a world in which "In me is you, in you is me. I am therefore you/And you therefore are me" 我 中 也 有 你, 你 中 也 有 我./ 我 便 是 你./ 你 便 是 我 (Guo 9-16). Perhaps the most pronounced sense of the paradox of self in Guo Moruo, self-annihilation in the midst of self-assertion, can be seen in "Heavenly Dog" (*Tiangu* 天 狗, 1920): "I peel my skin/I eat my flesh/I suck my blood/I gnaw on my heart/ I run along my nerves/ I run along my spine/ I run along my brain/ I am I/The I of I is about to

We can see in Guo Moruo's paradoxical view of the self the logic behind his apparent about-face conversion to Marxism and his renunciation of extreme egoism.

In many ways, Yu Dafu is not typical of the Creationists. He tended not to indulge in the radical extremes of a figure like Guo Moruo, never making the religious conversion to Marxism for which Guo is so well known, always maintaining a strong tie to traditional culture through his reading and writing of classical poetry. Yu Dafu's fiction is more confessional than Guo's and lacks the optimism for social regeneration that Guo's poetry exudes. Yu Dafu shares with Guo Moruo an unresolved tension between Romantic egoism and traditional holism, but whereas Guo's poetry melds the two together into an utopian idealism, Yu Dafu's fiction depicts a self troubled and torn by their irreconcilability. In this sense, the protagonist in "Sinking" may been seen as representative of the anxiety and complexity of the May Fourth paradox of self.

The tension in May Fourth views of mind and its relation to the external world derive in part from the inherent antagonism between the iconoclastic and nationalist responses to the wrenching "impact" of Western imperialism. To put it in Levensonian terms: the May Fourth self suffered from a crisis of cultural identity for which an unconscious appeal to tradition was a means of consoling the self in the face of the inevitable advent of modernity. The experience of imperialism was traumatic for Chinese intellectuals and its role in provoking the May Fourth crisis of self should not be underemphasized, but to render the complexity of the May Fourth predicament of self into a neat dichotomy between Western modernity and Chinese traditionalism reduces the attachment to tradition to nostalgic longings, nothing but a "psychological compensation" for Western superiority.<sup>32</sup> From this perspective, we are blinded to the central role played by deep-seated traditional values in the reception of Western concepts like iconoclasm and nationalism. Not only was the May Fourth self caught in the inherent antagonism between nationalism and iconoclasm, the continuing force of traditional values worked against any absolute appropriation of either of those Western models. The May Fourth response to the West was not simply a matter of adopting Western models to resist the West, beating the West at its own game, it was impelled by very traditional concerns.

Lin Yusheng (*Crisis of Consciousness*) and Thomas Metzger (*Escape from Predicament: Neo-confucianism and China's Evolving Political Cultural*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) have each in their own way argued that May Fourth iconoclasm itself was profoundly informed by traditional cultural values and orientations. Lin, for example, maintains that May Fourth totalistic iconoclasm is grounded in traditional cosmological holism and is continuous with the Confucian propensity toward cultural-intellectual change (Lin, pp. 10-55). Metzger suggests that the modern rejection of the past may be rooted in the traditional propensity to transform society with

burst" 我剥我的皮,/ 我食我的肉,/ 我嚼我的血,/ 我嗜我的心肝,/ 我在我的神經上飛跑,/ 我在我的脊髓上飛跑,/ 我便是我呀!/ 我的我要爆了! The paradox of consciousness and "anti-self-consciousness" has been noted in Western romanticism by Geoffrey Hartman (Hartman, "Romanticism and Anti-self-consciousness" in Harold Bloom ed. *Romanticism and Consciousness*. [New York: Norton and Company, 1970] p. 47), but is vastly more pronounced in the Chinese reception of Romanticism. Mark Elvin (1978) characterized this paradox of self in the May Fourth as a tension between "self-liberation" and "self-immolation."

<sup>32</sup>Chang Hao, "New Confucianism and the Intellectual Crisis of Contemporary China" in Charlotte Furth ed. *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 279.

the "lever" of a "universally valid, cosmically grounded spirit of morality" which lies beneath the "moral debris of history" (Metzger, p. 211).

To look at the May Fourth dilemma of self in terms of Metzger's notion of "linkage," the central predicament of the intellectual in the late imperial period, may also help elucidate for us the continuing presence of tradition in May Fourth modernity.<sup>33</sup> The goal of all Neo-Confucians, writes Metzger, was "to obtain a living, immediate, emotionally soothing, and elitist sense of cosmic oneness and power by achieving moral purification together with a comprehensive grasp of the cosmos as a coherently linked whole" (Metzger, p. 81). The Song and Ming Neo-Confucians saw "heaven and man as one" (*tian ren he yi* 天人合一) and believed that through the process of self-cultivation selfish desires could be expunged to let emanate one's innate divine nature. Empowered through its connection with the divine, the individual mind could effect the transformation of the outer world and bring about social harmony. Beneath this optimism for social transformation, however, lay a profound pessimism about the possibility of "linkage" between the individual mind and the outer world. Not only was the divine inner nature slippery and elusive, the mind was as much victimized by the force of Heaven as it was empowered by it. The Neo-Confucian self was at once "demigod" and "victim" (Metzger, p. 134), the source of the potential transformation of the world and a passive entity enslaved by the determining forces of Heaven and the political institutions and ethical codes which drew authority from divine immanence.

Metzger believes that the advent of Western technology in the late Qing and Republican periods resolved the predicament of self for the Chinese intellectual by promising the transformation of the external world without the difficult and painful activity of the cultivation of the mind. Metzger characterizes Chinese modernity (including the May Fourth period, of which he makes short shrift) as dominated by "a Panglossian optimism" about the transformation of the outer realm, making the "'inner' predicament of moral purification and metaphysical linkage...less acute and central..." (p. 215), a generalization he has arrived at by projecting back on to the complexity of Chinese modernity the pronounced voluntarism and optimism in Mao Zedong's particular vision of social transformation. For Metzger, modern faith in social progress is at once a continuity with the inherent optimism of Neo-Confucianism's idealist world view, what he calls elsewhere "optimistic this-worldliness,"<sup>34</sup> and a break from the traditional pessimism about the arduousness of realizing the ideal in the real world.

And yet the optimistic promise of science and social progress does not lead the May Fourth intellectual away from a traditional concern with consciousness. The May Fourth understanding of the concept of science implies a continuing allegiance to the goal of linkage. Rather than merely a practical means for the transformation of the external world, science was understood by the May Fourth in largely psychological and cultural terms. Science meant a change in consciousness, the process of enlightenment of the individual mind which would buttress the iconoclastic project.

<sup>33</sup>Theodore Huters' essay "Blossoms in the Snow: Lu Xun and the Dilemma of Modern Chinese Literature," *Modern China*, 10.1 (January 1984), 49-77, has helped me greatly to formulate some of my ideas on the relationship between the May Fourth and Neo-Confucian dilemma of self.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas A. Metzger, "Continuities between Modern and Premodern China: Some Neglected Methodological and Substantive Issues," in Paul Cohen and Merle Goldman, eds., *Ideas Across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honor of Benjamin I. Schwartz* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990), pp. 263-92.

Latent beneath May Fourth pronouncements on mind and nation lies an essential continuity with the Neo-Confucian paradigm of the Great learning and the goal of linkage. As Huters has written: "The idea of linkage seems to have outlasted the idea that only profound mental effort guaranteed its validity."<sup>35</sup> In the same way that the failure of Wang Anshi's 王安石 reforms led to an inward turn in Song and Ming philosophy, the failure of the Republican revolution to fundamentally transform the outer world caused May Fourth figures to revert to a Neo-Confucian preoccupation with mind and its role in social transformation. Though Western science offered the promise of obviating self-cultivation as the initial step in the transformation of the world, May Fourth figures insisted on their roles as enlighteners and changers of consciousness to prefigure social transformation. This continuing preoccupation with mind and social transformation may be viewed cynically as the voice of a dying class desperately trying to reassert its elitist position in the face of inevitable material forces. I would rather look at it as a reflection of the powerful force of tradition which continued to shape Chinese modernity despite, indeed because of, its iconoclasm.

The cosmological unity of heaven and man lying at the heart of the Great Learning paradigm and the goal of linkage informed the May Fourth reception of iconoclasm and nationalism. The self-conscious mind essential to the iconoclastic project is in the end as much a product of Neo-Confucian optimism as of Western liberal views of individualism and moral autonomy.<sup>36</sup> May Fourth nationalism, similarly, maintains beneath its Western facade a deeply traditional core of moral and cultural collectivism. Though we might agree with Metzger's view of the general optimism of Chinese modernity, the May Fourth remains profoundly ambivalent about the individual's role in this transformation. Here lies the key to the paradox of self in the May Fourth. Is the autonomous mind of the individual to renew the nation by leading it out of its dark traditional consciousness, or is the individual mind to be subsumed in the ineluctable forces of history or the collective will of the nation? In other words, a radical demi-god or a victim of the external world? The onslaught of the West, and the dual responses to it of iconoclasm and nationalism, rather than solving the Neo-Confucian predicament reformulated it in the modern language of individualism and nationalism. The self continues to be caught between empowerment and victimization, a tension inherent within mainstream Confucian thought well before the impact of the West.

My rather Levensonian reading of "Sinking" presented in the middle of this paper should by now appear somewhat simplistic. The May Fourth dilemma of self was vastly more complex than neat formulae contrasting Chinese tradition and Western modernity can account for. Paralyzed between the island and the distant shore, Yu Dafu's protagonist encapsulates the complexity of the May Fourth dilemma of the intellectual self's relation to the nation. The predicament of the protagonist is that he is caught in a web of conflicting discourses which offer no fulfillment of very traditional desires for social transformation. The Western model of self needed for the iconoclastic stance is ultimately terrifying to the Chinese intellectual because it cuts him off from the possibility of linkage as a means toward social and national renewal. Isolated egoism has only led the protagonist to a state of mind which was the greatest fear of the Neo-Confucian: a "'dead,' 'bad,' self-centered way, cognitively disoriented

<sup>35</sup> Huters, p. 55.

<sup>36</sup> Huters, p. 50.

by the helter-skelter of happening, feeling out of contact with ultimate reality, subject to anxious feelings of powerlessness and aimlessness in the face of powerful forces threatening to 'overcome' one, and also unable to realize social oneness and to save the world" (Metzger, p. 81). The traditional moral community longed for on the distant shore, the goal of linkage, however, is a "fantasy," a will-o-the-wisp, an illusion no longer possible to recapture. Tradition, for the May Fourth intellectual, was no solution to China's moral, cultural and national crisis.

The dilemma of the protagonist is that much more bewildering because the two shores between which he stands are no longer easily delineated as modern West and traditional China. The May Fourth self was torn between the dual pulls of iconoclasm and nationalism, at once attracted and repelled by both. Neither the traditional view of self as demigod, nor the Western liberal-humanist model of self is possible. Neither Western nationalism, nor traditional moral collectivism can appeal to the protagonist. The Chinese tradition has supplied the necessary cultural foundation upon which Western iconoclasm and nationalism were received, but at the same time it has undermined that reception. And yet, that both China and the West are seen to contain elements of the other also suggests the breakdown of a strict polarization of China and the West and points toward a kind of cosmopolitan universalism which promises possibilities for cross-cultural synthesis and social transformation. Added to the already complex web of May Fourth paradoxes is that of universalist cosmopolitanism and a parochial nationalism.