Crossing Boundaries: The Transnational Third Space of Contemporary Chinese-Francophone Writers

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CROSSING BOUNDARIES: THE TRANSNATIONAL THIRD SPACE
OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE-FRANCOPHONE WRITERS

by

PAULA S. DELBONIS-PLATT

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French to satisfy the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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by

Paula S. DelBonis-Platt

Adviser: Francesca Canadé Sautman

Over the past two decades, a group of Chinese writers who pen their works in French, their adopted language, have garnered prizes in France and received international acclaim. The transnational voices of these writers have drawn attention to Chinese history, literature, and human-rights issues, as well as to their own diverse intersections with French culture. The four Francophone-Chinese writers studied—François Cheng (b. 1929), Gao Xingjian (b. 1940), Dai Sijie (b. 1954), and Shan Sa (b. 1972)—constitute themselves as subjects at least partially through their Chinese birth and French citizenship or residency and through the production of literary works that range from realist and historiographic to experimental novels and avant-garde theater productions. This study examines the ways they inhabit a world that is “between,” a space resonating with Eastern and Western literary, historical, cultural, and political references, arriving at what Cheng calls a “third way,” or in Homi Bhabha’s words, a liminal “Third Space,” integral to transnational literatures, but especially to those by Francophone writers who are part of the Sinophone diaspora. This study examines the narratives that unfold and subjectivities that are constructed in this enunciative Third Space. It considers the transcultural nature of the literary border crossings of these four writers in their works and their lives, the ways in which these writers and their texts exist in a Third Space, a notion that is sometimes problematic as conceived by Bhabha but which has been productively expanded upon by others, including Benita Parry, Edward W. Soja, Julia Lossau, Karin Ikas, and Gerhard Wagner. Gayatri
Chakravorty Spivak’s ideas on the tension between borders and borderlessness, viewed through the study of border poetics, encompass the boundary-crossing narratives of writers like Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa. This study focuses on the counternarratives that are created through the intertextual use of Western literary works, ranging from Balzac and Romain Rolland to Freud and Lacan, in Dai Sijie’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (2000) and *Le Complexe de Di* (2003); the avant-garde experimentation of Gao in his plays and novels; and the ex-centric subjectivities constructed in two works concerning the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising, Gao’s *La Fuite* (1992) and Sa’s *Porte de la Paix céleste* (1997).
To the millions of people around the world displaced by war, poverty, and persecution,

including my grandparents Maria Civita Saccoccia DelBonis

and Biaggio (De Bonis) DelBonis,

who left Naples on a ship bound for Boston with $14 and a nine-year-old child,

and to their descendants,

including my late father, Alfred DelBonis, and my loving children Nathaniel and William Platt
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tell; however, over the past eight years, we’ve become family, and such loving bonds fill me with hope. I am grateful, too, to the many friends who provided help and encouragement to make this dissertation possible and the Methodist pastors and laypeople, from my great-great-grandfather Rev. Arthur J. Meyers to the present, who informed my thinking on and commitment to social justice.

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Introduction

This dissertation, focused on four Francophone-Chinese writers—all born in China but living in France and writing in French—is being completed at a time when the world reacts with shock to the global plight of more than 60 million people fleeing their land of origin, a human migration on a level not seen since World War II (Graham). The political and economic impact along with the social and moral crises that such a large number of displaced people creates commands the attention of individuals and their governments as they seek solutions for the vulnerable people fleeing war, persecution, oppression, and instability and for the nations from which they come. Peter Sutherland, special representative to the United Nations Secretary-general for International Migration and Development, has called 2016 “the year of migration and multilateralism,” driving home the transnational nature of the situation of immigrants, refugees, and those seeking political asylum (“Migration and Multilateralism”). However, this sort of displacement with the lexicon it generates for discussing the rising narratives of those living in voluntary exile or seeking political asylum is not an entirely new phenomenon. While the acclaimed status, resources, and disparate situations of the four authors studied here are dramatically different from those of the refugees of 2016, most of whom struggle for bare survival in their flight from their homelands, the current refugee crisis also draws parallels with those “scattered seeds” that have become known through the term “diaspora”1 (Galchinsky 185). These are the “‘expatriate minority communities’ (1) that are dispersed from an original ‘center’

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1 The term “diaspora” is said to have been coined in English in 1876 and comes from the Greek term diasperiein, from the prefix dia-, meaning “apart,” and speirein meaning “to sow or scatter” as seeds to sprout (McClennen 15). However, use of the Greek term—as a translation of the Hebrew term galuth, meaning exile, is found in the book of Deuteronomy in the Bible, and is said to date from before 400 BCE (Swete 2-3; Van Seters 16). Initially, “diaspora” was used to refer to the exile of Jewish people in the sixth century BCE out of Israel, primarily into Babylonia (McClennen 15; Galchinsky 185).
towards at least two ‘peripheral’ places; (2) that maintain a ‘memory, vision, or myth about their
original homeland’; [and] (3) that ‘believe they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted
by their host country’” (Clifford 304).² As one can easily note, at least two if not all three of
these categories also pertain to those who migrate in mass and under conditions of immediate
danger, to the recent refugees along with the four writers studied here, all of whom have emerged
on the global stage partially through their diasporic situations.

The four writers studied here—François Cheng (b. 1929), Gao Xingjian (b. 1940), Dai
Sijie (b. 1954), and Shan Sa (b. 1972)—arrived in France during earlier waves of displacement
as highly educated individuals who left China for reasons of intellectual freedom and became
part of the Francophone literary world, writing and successfully publishing in their adopted
language, while maintaining a toehold in the Sinophone diaspora through their subject matter,
their translingual work, and their publications throughout Asia beyond the censorship that three
of them faced in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Only Cheng’s 1949 arrival in France
predates the surging exodus of intellectuals from Mainland China that began in 1979. Dai settled
in France in 1984 and Gao in 1987, not long after completing their “re-education” during the
Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when urban educated youth were sent to perform hard labor in
rural China. The flight of Chinese writers and intellectuals increased after the 1989 Tiananmen
Square uprising, and the youngest of the four writers studied here, Shan Sa, arrived in France in
1990, leaving China specifically in response to those events in which she and her family were

² James Clifford, writing in the journal Cultural Anthropology, draws on the work of political
scientist William Safran. In his essay “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and
Return” (1991), Safran includes other conditions which are often present in diaspora, including a
desire to return if the situation were different, a commitment to restoration of the homeland, and
a sense of group consciousness (304-05). Safran’s essay was published in the journal Diaspora,
one of a growing number of journals, such as Public Culture and Diaspora, Transition, Habitus,
Mosaic, and Calaloo devoted to the study of transnational cultures and literatures.
peripherally involved. Of the contemporary surge of transnationalism, Arjun Appadurai has
noted “[t]he diasporic public spheres that such encounters create are no longer small, marginal,
or exceptional” (10). This is true of the Chinese diasporas around the world that have produced
the abundant Sinophone, Anglophone, and Francophone literature⁴ that has captured
international attention.

My study will focus on four Francophone writers currently residing in France—Cheng,
Gao, Dai, and Sa—all of whom received major critical acclaim around the dawn of the new
millennium in the form of international prizes, French publishing awards, and prestigious
appointments. The oldest of the four writers studied here is Cheng, who in 2002 became the first
Asian member of the Académie Française. These four prominent writers have followed similar
paths from China to France and have addressed competing notions of Europe and Asia in their
lives and their literary texts. In his text Le Dialogue, Cheng has said of this diasporic existence,
“Il est indéniable que je viens d’une certaine terre et d’une certaine culture. Connaissant mieux
 cette culture, je me fais un devoir d’en présenter la meilleure part. Mais du fait de mon exil, je
suis devenu un homme de nulle part, ou alors de toutes parts” (F. Cheng, Cinq méditations 21).
My study will thus investigate the ways in which these Francophone-Chinese authors create and

³ A more extensive biography of Sa is included in Chapter Four of this study, which concerns the
literature of Tiananmen Square.
⁴ This dissertation focuses primarily on Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa as Francophone writers.
Francophone refers to those “having, or belonging to a population using French as its first or
sometimes second language (“Francophone”); however, as Margaret Majumdar points out,
individuals labeled as Francophone are often specifically identified thusly “by their origins, [and]
they are perceived as francophones (i.e., non-French)” (11). The International Organisation
Internationale de la Francophonie broadens its emphasis beyond the shared language to promote
an ideology, the so-called shared “humanist values promoted by the French language.” In
Francophone Post-colonial Cultures: Critical Essays, Majumdar writes about the ways in which,
through Francophone discourse, “the French language has acquired a new role, less essentialist
and more instrumental, in which it has the function of linking together, and acting as a
communicative vehicle between, the different spaces of particular concrete cultures—‘un fil
conducteur’” (Salhi 7).
contest meaning across borders through notions of exchange and flight and expand transnational subjectivities beyond those embedded in the entrenched paradigms of nation-states. I will also study the ways in which these four authors create new narratives in those increasingly visible peripheral spaces that take shape across a threshold of transcultural difference, in a space which can be deemed a literary “Third Space,” in which messages are negotiated and transformed through articulations of difference.

I analyze the texts of these Francophone-Chinese writers through the lens of transnationalism, the “exchanges, connections and practices across borders, thus transcending the national space as the primary reference point for activities and identities” that can create a “greater degree of connection between individuals, communities and societies across borders, bringing about changes in the social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes of societies of origin and destination” (International Organization for Migration). Transnationalism can further be viewed as a growing social movement in which national boundaries play less of a role both internally and externally, forcing, in the words of anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton “the emergence of a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders” (ix). Schiller and Georges Fouron further describe transnationalism in this manner:

The polarity of these identities, reflecting the continuing enmeshing of migrants in a web of social relations that cut across national boundaries, is best understood as a new kind of migrant identity, that of “transnationalism.” . . . Transnationals are migrants who are fully encapsulated neither in the host society nor in their native
land but who nonetheless remain active participants in the social settings of both locations. They construct their identities in relation to both societies.\(^5\) (330)

Source and destination communities do not always share contiguous borders, but the links between these sites and the transnational narratives they generate bind them in what sociologists Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald call “imagined communities” (1177). The Francophone-Chinese writers studied here constitute a community only via their origins, their French residency, and shared literary themes; however, they are part of a Chinese diaspora that can be termed “transnational.” While scholars such as Waldinger and Fitzgerald question the increasingly ubiquitous use of that term, Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa are indeed transnational writers as their lives and literary works are engaged in a process of “extending beyond” nation-state relations “in a world of mutually exclusive nation-states, [as] rather, persons with foreign attachments [that] are open to question” (1177, 1181, 1192). As scholars leap to study transnationalism in fields ranging from sociology and geography to political science, cultural studies, and literature, migrants constitute one part of a rather complex nexus of concerns. As Waldinger and Fitzgerald state, “[M]igrants do not make their communities alone” (1178). The role of nation-states in oppressing or forcing the expulsion of individuals remains an important historical question for these privileged expatriate authors as it is for less-privileged refugees now fleeing persecution. While some social scientists have erroneously seen transnationalism as erasing the differences between “here” and “there,” looking at issues of assimilation, many now see the notion of home-coming as apt to encompass both origin and destination, both “here” and “there” (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 1179-1180). In this study, I see the latter dominating the

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\(^5\) Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron are writing in this article specifically about Haitian-American transnationals; however, Glick-Schiller writes more broadly about this issue with Linda Basch and Christina Blanc-Szanton in the foundational work cited by Waldinger and Fitzgerald, “Toward a Definition of Transnationalism” (1992).
works of these four Francophone-Chinese writers and I consider the ways in which their narratives create meaning through a rejection of binaries within a so-called Third Space.

In narrative form, Dai Sijie’s *Par une nuit où la lune ne s’est pas levée* (2007) embodies many of these theories of transnationalism. It is the tale of an unnamed Jewish protagonist, a woman who travels throughout Asia seeking the man named Tumchooq, whose name matches that of an unknown language in which a long-sought, half-torn Buddhist scroll is written. After the two parts of the scroll are found and deciphered, the narrator learns that Tumchooq had been arrested in Tokyo, despite his monastic attire, and deported to Laos. From French and Italian to the mysterious Tumchooq language, to Pali-Burmese, Chinese, Japanese, and English, the linguistic threads of the tale are assembled, drawing on texts and characters, both fictional and drawn from life, such as Hu Feng, the Chinese critic condemned by Mao. The difficulty of reducing transnational texts to reflections of their multiple national and cultural referents is summed up by Feng in a transcript in Dai’s novel, that states:

> Je ne peux me permettre de te raconter le texte, non parce qu’il manque la fin, mais que la beauté de cette langue est intraduisible. Presque trop belle pour survivre en ce monde. Ni moi ni aucun écrivain chinois actuel, à mon avis, n’est capable de rendre la moitié de son charme, il ne peut faire qu’une traduction, mot à mot, un squelette sans chair ni vie. (215)

To read the text in this limited way, Feng suggests, is to find oneself unable to taste its beauty. Still, Feng compares the beauty of a text that is read and understood—to the extent of one’s capability—to seeing an image emerging from the darkness and shadows, or to a plane taking

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6 Hu Feng (1902-1985) was a well-known leftist literary critic who protested literary control of artists and writers by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). His views, particularly those emphasizing the subjectivity of writers, were condemned as “counterrevolutionary,” and he was imprisoned from 1955 to 1979 (Denton 155).
off, rising from the runway, with forests, rice paddies and clouds emerging and being viewed with new clarity. It is this illumination and emergence of meaning that is central to Dai’s novel *Par une nuit où la lune ne s’est pas levée*. Furthermore, those who experience the beauty and power of a text often find that its words and ideas have become a part of them and that they can no longer live without them, achieving a kind of intimacy with the text itself.\(^7\) In Dai’s novels the characters at times inscribe their words on something other than paper, for instance on the inside of sheepskin jackets as in Dai’s *Par une nuit où la lune ne s’est pas levée* and his earlier novel *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (2000). The ink bleeds, appearing like veins, joining the organic garment and the human body. In piecing together transnational texts, the reader discovers, Dai seems to suggest, what he didn’t know was there. The sutra on the silk scroll written in the tûmchouq language is finally deciphered in total, creating meaning and expanding understanding. It depicts a lone man on a mountain path on a moonless night, who stumbles and falls, grabbing a tuft of grass and hanging in the dark over what he believes is a fatal chasm, unable to maintain his grasp. It reads:

\[
\text{BIENTÔT SES MAINS SONT À BOUT DE FORCE, ET COMME UN CONDAMNÉ À MORT À SA DERNIÈRE HEURE, IL JETTE UN ULTIME REGARD VERS LE BAS, OÙ IL NE VOIT QUE LA PROFONDEUR DES TÉNÈBRES INSONDABLES . . . “LÂCHE TES MAINS, RÉSONNE À SES OREILLES UNE VOIX. LA TERRE EST LÀ, SOUS TES PIEDS.” LE VOYAGEUR CONFIANT S’EXÉCUTE ET ATTERRIT SAIN ET SAUF SUR UN SENTIER QUI SE TROUVE À MOINS DE TREnte CENTIMÈTRES SOUS LUI. (366-70)}
\]

The narrator evokes resuscitated and exhumed languages. He speaks of reading texts with a sense of passing through mirages made up of words in numerous languages, some of them no

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\(^7\) This notion of intimacy and understanding of a text is reminiscent of Roland Barthes’ deeper exploration and understanding of a text via *la jouissance* in his critical work, *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973). Barthes captures the double meaning of the word “inter-dite”—what is forbidden and what remains unsaid or between utterances (Barthes, *Le Plaisir* 36).
longer spoken, resurrected reminiscences in languages such as Tokharian, ancient Persian, Sanskrit, Pali, and Chinese, dating from before the birth of Christ. He compares this translingual work to geological investigations of landscapes, carried out step by step and stretching over years, and resulting in new revelations and illumination.

David Der-wei Wang, writing on the international Chinese fiction that began to emerge primarily in the 1990s, describes the effects of this transnational expansion of Sinophone literature in the Anglophone and Francophone realms. Changing political dynamics in China and global technological advances, Wang suggests, have pushed many Chinese writers outside of Mainland China and allowed their works to be published and voices to be heard beyond China’s borders, causing the margins or diasporic elements of the Sinophone world to take on greater significance. “[I]t points to a landscape,” Wang states, “where dialogues between many different Chinas become possible, a negotiation that does not establish a republic of Chinese letters but rather creates a real heterogeneity of contemporary Chinese literatures” (Running Wild 241).

Wang and others acknowledge the difficulty of situating writers who may have begun a work in Mainland China, finished it in France, published it in Hong Kong with Taiwanese support or at a European publishing house, seen it translated into more than twenty-five languages, and received acclaim predominantly in Europe and the United States. This issue of transnational identification rose to the forefront of literary discourse when Gao Xingjian won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000 and was often mentioned as its first Chinese recipient, cited by the committee “for an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama” (“The Nobel Prize: Gao”). However, he also faced rebuke from both the Chinese Foreign Ministry and the Pro-Beijing Association of Chinese writers, which claimed, “He is French and not Chinese and the reason he won the award is more political
than literary” (“Beijing Attacks”). Such transnational literature—so-called because the works of these writers go beyond the mere binary points of their birth in China and residence and/or citizenship in France—incorporates publication in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Belgium, and elsewhere; films shot in Vietnam, as well as in China and France, as in the case of Dai; performances in Sweden, Germany, Poland, and in other countries, as with Gao; and writing in Switzerland as was the case of Sa with her first novel, Porte de la Paix céleste. Still, such lists of nation-states, a mere convenient shorthand used to describe the writers themselves, obscures the new spatiality of these writers, best explored by drawing on the tension between borders and borderlessness cited by Gayatri Spivak, the social imaginaries of Charles Taylor and Walter Mignolo, the consideration of globalism versus postcolonialism of Misao Miyoshi, and the nomadic subjectivities of Rosi Braidotti, which I will be discussing in turn as they apply to the narratives of Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa. Furthermore, such transnationalism begins to meet the sociological domain of intersectionality, suggesting “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations” (McCall 1771). Intersectionality is a

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8 The criticism of Gao’s Nobel Prize was reported by the BBC: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/970184.stm The journal China Perspectives devoted much space to the issue and the nuances of the debate and the response from both Chinese and French circles with a special feature “Gao Xingjian and the Role of Chinese Literature Today,” which is excerpted here: http://www.thechinabeat.org/?p=2489. The debate is summarized in the journal in this way: “[W]hile awarding the prize to a culturally and linguistically Chinese writer who, although he had lived in China for almost 50 years and written largely within the context of contemporary Chinese literature, now held French citizenship and also wrote in French, the Nobel committee seemed to be explicitly rejecting, just as Gao had in his own essays, the idea that the Nobel prize should be ‘representative’ in any way of a nation-state or its literary field” (Veg, “Gao Xingjian”). To make Gao’s transnational status more clear, Sebastian Veg calls him “the first Chinese-language laureate” in the field of literature (Veg, “On the Margins” 34).

9 The preponderance of references to intersectionality in sociology, particularly in regard to feminism, provides a sociological parallel to the literary work of border poetics. Intersectionality theorists, such as Leslie McCall, describe three approaches to intersectionality, which refer to their position toward categorization: anticategorical complexity, intercategorical complexity, and
term uniquely suited to the transnational and transcultural nature of these writers and their texts and indeed alludes to the challenges deriving from a “complexity that arises when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis” (1772). Such combinations of literary, cultural, and sociological theory call attention to both the people and the narratives in order to “recuperate the neglected lived experience” along with the narratives of the diasporic Chinese, and of those “living at such points of intersection, by and large neglected in political, popular, and feminist discourse,” states Yiu Fai Chow—who emphasizes female writers and characters (413). With this transnational literature and the subjectivities constructed within it come the challenges of not only transcultural but translingual practice, which necessitates a mediation of both cultures and languages that at times exceeds the boundaries of any one field of study, if one is to avoid the “old oppositional paradigm” of East and West, which has been rightly severely contested (L. Liu xv-xviii). The writers I discuss here both draw on their cultural traditions and provide a space in which to interrogate and contest notions and foundations originating in the many traditions within China and from Western thought and literature.

These contemporary writers, often designated as écrivains chinois d’expression française, are now broadly included in what has come to be called the “post-Tiananmen literary diaspora,” but comprise a group for which Tiananmen is but one small element and an event of varying importance to each of them within their diasporic experience. It would thus be reductive to label them only in this way, implying a connection with an event in which only one of them, intracategorical complexity. This third term comes closest to situating the Third Space narratives described here in that it neither rejects categories, nor seeks to use them strategically. McCall says that “it interrogates the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself, though that is not its raison d’être” and that “it acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time, though it also maintains a critical stance toward categories” (1773-74).
Shan Sa, was physically involved, and about which only two of them, Gao and Sa, have written literary texts (Kong 16). The discursive practice that, as Belinda Kong puts it, “emphasizes linguistic, semantic, and interactional aspects of culture as well as extralinguistic discourse modalities” allows for discourses that are controversial and at times in conflict (“Discursive Practice”). In particular, she asserts, because of the diversity of viewpoints—such as those proffered by Gao on the 1989 pro-democracy protests in his play La Fuite—it “behooves us to seek alternative models of exile, of the human, and of politics as such” (14). More significantly, the four writers addressed here are of different generations, ranging from ages eighty-six to forty-three, with different styles, genres, subjects, and relationships with both China and Europe, as demonstrated in literary texts situated in many locales around the world and in eras that encompass over 2,300 years. In their works, narrative time indeed spans the lives of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), of the renowned poets of the Tang Dynasty (618-906), of the Tang Dynasty’s Empress Wu (624-705), and the tale of an eight-hundred-year-old Buddhist scroll held by the Emperor Puyi (1906-1967). They allude to many events situated in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including but certainly not limited to the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the aftermath of the 1989 events in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. This multiplicity of discourses and subjectivities creates a much more fertile area of expansive meaning than the myopic constriction of individual prisms formed by one’s own cultural experiences and referents. This study will show that while many of the literary texts produced by these four writers involve Chinese culture and China in some way, they also address European culture and beyond, in a diverse body of work that includes dozens of volumes and themes. While Kong is right to say, with reference to overseas writers who address the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in texts published abroad, that “the gravitational heart of this canon does
undoubtedly lie in the land left behind, weighed with an imaginative if not always emotional nostalgia,” this study goes far beyond that singular historical event. It will show that these four writers transgress linguistic, national, and literary boundaries in ways that emphasize the simultaneous unfolding of multiple meanings. Their work thus occupies an important place in the growing literary field of border poetics, which focuses on the ways subjectivities and narrations concerned with both literal and symbolic border crossings are constructed as productive spaces in which dominant narratives can be forcefully interrogated. Border poetics looks at literal and figurative borders as means of representation, at narratives that involve acts of bordering or border crossing, at individual experiences of border and boundary crossing as well as at grand narratives that include both the formation and erasure of borders. In *Border Poetics De-limited*, Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe write of the ways in which border crossings can be “medial and aesthetic phenomena,” acts of negotiation, representative spatial transgressions that denote cultural difference, and sites for the construction of transnational subjectivities. “Actions of border crossing for immigrants, migrants and refugees are often imagined in the form of narratives of exile,” write Schimanski and Wolfe. “Back before or beyond the border is a place or a condition which has been lost, but which you can return to through the action of memory, or the use of objects to carry traces of a previous ‘time’ or place” (22). These texts often involve retracing, reinterpretation, tales of “embarkation and departure,” reconnection, narration through remembered experiences, and resistance to homogenization (23). Shimanski and Wolfe describe a “sort of rhythm that defines the experience of bordering: the feints and dodges, the cut across, the criss-crossing of time and of the orderly chronotope” (23).10 Both time and space assume a

10 Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work on dialogue is important to the conceptualization of a Third Space in this dissertation, also discusses issues of time and space in narratives using the term “chronotope” in an essay called “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (1937) and
role in these narrations in which interrogations of culture, gender, and subjectivity become central themes.

In the past three decades, much has changed with regard to the status of such writers as Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa, who began to receive literary recognition in the late 1990s. Robert Jouanny wrote *Singularités francophones* in 2000 to describe Francophone writers who do not come out of a “collectivité considérée comme francophone,” meaning a postcolonial tradition, but who have deliberately chosen to write in French (6). This includes a number of significant voices from Central and Eastern Europe, China, and others, drawn to French culture through historic ties between their homelands and France and the ideals of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité* that French society has long struggled to put into practice. Near the start of the new millennium, Chinese writers who pen their works in French have received international acclaim primarily in Europe but also in some Sinophone publications. Sabina Knight thus acknowledges that “the term ‘Sinophone’ may strain to encompass literature written in Taiwanese, other topolects, or other languages. . . . Yet as Chinese authors writing in English and French have garnered major awards, for much of the world these writers have come to represent transnational Chinese literature” (119). However, their transnational status and publication history remain complex as the authors seek at once European, American, and Asian audiences. “The official Chinese reaction to such acclaim has been cold,” writes Artur K. Wardega, an editor in Mainland China of the bilingual publication *Chinese Cross Currents (Shenzhou Jiaoliu)* (Wardega 3). The international audience for such authors indeed remains a predominantly European one, as writers find homes both at mainstream publishers and smaller houses, including Éditions de l’aube in France and Lansman in Belgium (Gao), Albin Michel (Cheng), and Gallimard (Dai and Sa).

in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). Ultimately, time and space intersect and neither one is privileged in the process.
Their works are also read in Chinese translation (or in the original Chinese for many of Gao’s works), outside of Mainland China where several of the works by Gao, Dai, and Sa are banned. One need only visit the Taiwan Pavilion at the annual Frankfurt Book Fair to find the works of these authors and others, with Gao’s works published in Chinese by the Taiwainese Dijiao Press, Dai’s work with Crown Publishers in Taiwan, and Sa’s by Sitak and Yuan Liu in Taiwan. Furthermore, Sa is published by Ming Bao in Hong Kong and Gao and others by the Chinese University Press in Hong Kong. David Der-wei Wang, a Taipei native and professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard, whose works have also been featured at the Taiwan Pavilion in Frankfurt, has said that there is a strong presence of so-called dissident writers there, to which PRC officials have strenuously objected.\(^\text{11}\) Dai has remarked that his books, while banned in China since 2005, are well received in Taiwan (Bruyas). In 2007 he gave readings of the Chinese translation of his novel *Par une nuit où la lune ne s’est pas levée* (2007) in Taipei, screened his film *Les Filles du botaniste* (2006) at the French Institute in Taiwan, and signed books at a French-language bookstore in Taipei called Le Pigeonnier in what might aptly be called a transnational book/film tour. Despite his international appeal, Dai acknowledges that he is seen as writing about China for a European audience. “Because I went to France in somehow ‘favorable’ conditions,” he said, “I was considered like somebody trying to court the French public” (Bruyas). The nature of the international audience for these four authors remains complex, even as they navigate transnational literary circles and audiences. Gao has stated that

\(^{11}\) The presence of such dissident writers, published in Taiwan, at the Frankfurt Book Fair has been a subject of some controversy (Mehta). China’s participation as a “partner country” upset some who were concerned about the country’s censorship and the fair’s well-known objective of “encouraging freedom of expression.” The dispute was much discussed in 2009 when Mainland Chinese authorities sought to prevent some speakers, such as the popular Chinese-Uyghur human rights activist Rebikya Kadeer, from speaking, and to halt the display and promotion of books, including some Taiwanese cooking recipes, which were perceived as “anti-Chinese.” More details can be found here: http://www.taiwantoday.tw/fp.asp?xItem=77587&CtNode=2181
when he began writing his acclaimed novel *La Montagne de l’âme* in Beijing in 1982, finishing it in Paris in 1989, he had little idea of his audience. Only about 900 copies were sold before his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature for this novel, based on a five-month journey of over 15,000 miles through China, and often described as a semiautobiographical “story of one man’s quest for inner peace and freedom” (M. Lee, “Two Autobiographical Plays” xviii). Yet, his works are truly transnational and have been the object of wide recognition and study. It is worth considering the tortuous publishing history of the most celebrated—and most controversial—of these four writers, Gao Xingjian, as described in 2000 by Mabel Lee, his English translator who lives in Australia:

Most of Gao Xingjian’s recent writings have been published in Chinese in Taipei and Hong Kong. A significant number of these have also been published in French, and are now beginning to appear in English. Some of his recent plays were first written in French and then Chinese. His play in French *[Le Somnambule]* won the Prix Communauté française de Belgique in 1994, and his novel *La Montagne de l’âme* was awarded the Prix du Nouvel An chinois by a French panel of judges in 1997. In early 2000, a second edition of *La Montagne de l’âme* went into print simultaneously with the French version of his second novel, *Yige ren de shengjing* which was published last year in Taipei. Noël and Liliane Dutrait’s version is called *Le Livre de seul homme* [sic] *[Le Livre d’un homme seul]*, my English version will be called *One Man’s Bible* [published in 1999 in Chinese, 2000 in French].

This complicated history captures only three of the many languages in which Gao’s works are published. The Chinese University Press in Hong Kong from which Gilbert Fong’s English
translations of Gao’s plays emanate continues to be one important source. As Gao’s works have
been banned in Mainland China since the 1980s, one worries about the future of Hong Kong
publishers and booksellers, one of the avenues for publication of these authors, as the world
witnesses increasing violations of the so-called “one country, two systems” form of governance:
thus a British national, Hong Kong publisher and bookshop owner Lee Bo, disappeared, along
with Gui Minhai, Lee’s colleague who is a Swedish national, and three other associates over a
period of six months in 2015 and early 2016\(^\text{12}\) (Tsang; Yi-Zheng; Hunt and Watson).

The notion of Third Space, even with its gaps and ambiguous interactions can be helpful
in understanding the transformative nature of transnational intersections of ideas and
subjectivities. “Third Space” is a term originally coined by Homi Bhabha as a space of
negotiation rather than negation (Location 37). Bhabha formulated this notion of a Third Space
in The Location of Culture (1994), seeking to reorient the “chasm of cultural difference” that he
perceived specifically in colonial and postcolonial paradigms beyond the notions of “the Other”
and “difference” in some cultural spaces, beyond labels such as “Eurocentric” in others, and
beyond binaries such as the Marxist master-slave dialectic. In opposition to these categories,
Bhabha defined the Third Space primarily as a place of enunciation and signification,
emphasizing the present creation of meaning and construction of subjectivities rather than merely
the historicization of the past. “It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something
comes to be repeated, relocated and translated,” Bhabha writes (51-52). The emergence of a new
iteration—or iterations—“undermines our sense of the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols

\(^{12}\) On March 3, 2016, Hong Kong police reported that three of the five missing Hong Kong
booksellers would be “released on bail pending investigation in the coming few days (“Three
Missing”). The three—Lui Por, Cheung Chi-ping, and Lam Wing-kee—appeared on Feb. 28 on
a pro-Beijing news channel in Hong Kong to confess to helping ship books illegally to Mainland
China.
and icons, by questioning our sense of the authority of cultural synthesis in general” (52). The condition of these new enunciations and dialogues is a mobilization of meaning without fixity, one that can be extrapolated from Bhabha’s postcolonial subjects to contemporary expatriate writers from China. Bhabha’s “Third Space” has valid implications for the transnational writers in my corpus, particularly as a space of reappropriation, cultural translation, and rehistoricization of signs. However, Bhabha’s ideas remain problematic on a number of levels, beside their uniquely postcolonial emphasis, and are thus not universally well received. In addition to emphasizing often unspecified divergent perspectives, Bhabha also extols the status and narratives of “migrants” as the ones who articulate “the idea of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation” and as “people of the pagus—colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities—wandering peoples who will not be contained within the Heim of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation” (Nation 315). It is, however, overly reductive to view migrants, expatriates, and those in exile as “wanderers,” diminishing the importance of the roots they set down elsewhere, which are important to this study; similarly, it is troubling to find the discourse within the nation, which these expatriates have left behind, to be “unisonant.” Bhabha also underestimates and at times undermines the importance of discussions of class, gender, and income disparity (Nation 315). I thus concur with Benita Parry’s critique of Bhabha who deems some of his ideas “immensely troubling” for failing to address notions of real conflict even in his references to colonial and postcolonial sites, merely characterizing them as marked by antagonism (56). Parry further suggests that Bhabha ignores actual material conditions, the exploitation of workers and other disenfranchised classes, and the divisions—one could say the inequalities—they foster, favoring cultural theory instead. Bhabha’s generalities thus seem reductive and do not account
for the true scope of global conflict at play beneath his notion of a Third Space. Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp also points out another shortcoming, namely that Bhabha seems to portray a “utopia of migrant communities” while “glossing over the “differences between exile, expatriate and refugee,” particularly in his well-known early works *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994), drawing largely on the works of European writers and a few “Europe-acclaimed writers of colonial origin,” such as V.S. Naipaul and Frantz Fanon. Bhabha’s prose is dense and ambiguous at times,\(^{13}\) and it is through the writings of later theorists—Edward W. Soja, Julia Lossau, Karin Ikas, Gerhard Wagner, and Frank Schultze-Engler among them—that his ideas may gain more traction and specificity, become usefully and productively situated in sites from Los Angeles to Mexico and Poland, and acquire greater value in relation to the non-postcolonial Francophone-Chinese writers studied here. In my thesis, I will thus supplement his Third Space with other theoretical perspectives, such as Elaine Showalter’s gynocriticism, Roland Barthes’ *Degré zéro de l’écriture*, and Georg Lukács’ Marxist work on Balzac, the latter as an entry to Dai Sijie’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*.

I argue that the Chinese writers considered in this dissertation can be situated—perhaps even situate themselves—in the Third Space if seen as more than simply a crossroad of cultures, and rather, as a space where they can invent themselves through *dialogue*,\(^ {14}\) to use François Cheng’s term (F. Cheng, *Le Dialogue* 71). Notions of border crossing and of “*dialogue,*” prevalent in the works of Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa, provide useful tools for unraveling how these

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\(^{13}\) While the notion of a Third Space has real value to my study, Bhabha’s circuitous prose is problematic at times. In 1998, the journal *Philosophy and Literature* awarded Bhabha second place in its bad-writing contest, which highlighted particular passages by famous scholars, including Bhabha and Judith Butler (Dutton).

\(^{14}\) The term “*dialogue*” is prevalent in François Cheng’s work but harkens back to critic M.M. Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), which is used in this study for its work on subjectivity.
Francophone-Chinese writers traverse geopolitical and formal literary boundaries in order to rethink subjectivity. They indeed inhabit a world in-between, resonating with Eastern and Western literary, historical, and political references, to arrive at what Cheng calls a “third way,” or again in Bhabha’s words, the liminal Third Space. While in Bhabha’s writings, this Third Space may seem ambiguous, for instance, because he readily dispenses with notions of conflict, it becomes clearer in extrapolation by others, including Edward W. Soja’s work on “thirding-as-Othering” and spatiality, geographer Julia Lossau’s use of space not just to differentiate but as a means of location and identification, and Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wager’s use of Third Space in the formation of postcolonial subjectivities. Benita Parry’s challenges to Bhabha’s ideas, along with Lossau’s, prove useful in examining how these writers consider times of dissension in Chinese history, particularly the Cultural Revolution and the pro-democracy movement (Parry 56). On a different plane, Cheng’s references to the Third Way as “la Voie du Milieu” echo the Buddha’s statement that “the Middle Way . . . —producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to . . . self-awakening, to unbinding” (“Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta”). These various notions of “thirdness,” embraced, examined, and questioned together in many ways allow the formulation of distinctive transnational subjectivities to emerge in the work of each of these four writers.

In the emerging literary field of “border poetics,” as described above, critics examine literary texts and other works by focusing on “the intersection between territorial borders and aesthetic works” (“Border Poetics”), a useful grounding for the works in this study that include geographical borders. To define border poetics, one might consider an example often cited by critics, Grace Paley’s poetic representation of border identities in her short stories “Other Mothers” and “Mother,” in which she depicts borders between filial and maternal roles with the
emphasis on the separation created by rooms (e.g., “I wish I could see her in the doorway of the living room”; “As a matter of fact, she did stand frequently in various doorways looking at me . . . the darkness of the hallway behind her”; “At the doorway of the kitchen she said, You never finish your lunch. You run around senselessly. What will become of you? Then she died”; “Naturally for the rest of my life I longed to see her, not only in doorways, in a great number of places . . .”) (Piloni 102-103). Paley’s short story “The Long-Distance Runner” is also replete with images of mothering paired with old and new homes, doorways and thresholds, and is also categorized as a border-poetics narrative. Rwandan tales where those locked in brutal conflict due to their ethnic identification meet on a grass mat to discuss matters are further cited as examples of border poetics, as tales that involve the metaphorical border—that one could even call a Third Space—of the meeting on a grass mat. The burgeoning field of border poetics includes writers who explore literal borders—such as the United States/Mexico border—theoretically, as does Gloria Anzaldúa, or in poetry, as does Pat Mora in her collections Borders (1986) and Chants (1984). In the latter, individuals are at once at odds with others across the river and with themselves (e.g., “an American to Mexicans / a Mexican to Americans / a handy token / sliding back and forth / between the fringes of both worlds, / by smiling / by masking the discomfort / of being prejudged / bilaterally” (Chants 52; Fox 219).

Border poetics has thus embraced the subjective mediation of borders and cultures and my study will show how notions such as containment begin to break down in the symbolic and geographic borderlands of transnational literary production. One such narrative where literal border crossings take place is Cheng’s Le Dit de Tianyi (1998). Tianyi, a painter, goes to study in Paris, staying on after his visa has expired, and reluctantly returns to China nine years later to
help a friend and endure numerous hardships during the Cultural Revolution. The novel is divided into three parts, “Épopée du Départ,” “Récit d’un Détour,” and “Mythe du Retour.” Cheng’s protagonist Tianyi, finding himself in France with an expired visa, states:

Je savais que mon destin serait d’errer. Tant que je vivais en Chine, j’avais l’illusion d’être enraciné dans un terroir, dans une langue, dans un courant de vie qui continuait coûte que coûte. J’étais à présent sans racines sur cette terre d’Occident qui m’attirait tout en se fermant à moi. . . . Mon existence n’était plus seulement en marge; elle était illégale. Illégalité. Non-droit à existence. L’Europe à qui j’avais confié une grande part de mes rêves était-elle un refuge pour moi? (274)

Tianyi, who had been associated with clouds since his youngest days, then experiences the fear that he will become a sacrificial lamb in the politics of the Cold War era. His friends in exile, he mentions, don’t ask so many questions and manage to savor life’s sensual pleasures and allow it to devolve into a series of anticipations. As for him, he becomes at times a lost creature without family or identity, at times he is immersed in conviviality and culture, or finds points of connection, both human and geographical, as when he sees the Loire as he once saw the lower Yanzi between Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Tianyi’s long monologue within Cheng’s novel provides a voice to the “wandering cloud” in sharp contrast to Zhang the Mute—who is reminiscent of the

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character of the Silent Man in Gao’s controversial play *L’Arrêt de bus*—represented as a beating heart, a place to commune in feeling only, at times absorbing insults and criticism at political meetings, an ear that listens attentively rather than a voice.

François Cheng, né Cheng Baoyi, best highlights the transnational in-betweenness that is prevalent in the works of all four writers, Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa. Cheng’s connections between dialogue, symbiosis, and boundary crossings in his 2002 work *Le Dialogue: Une Passion pour la langue française* simultaneously capture the sense of emerging into an opening and that of confronting barriers and obstacles, drawing on centuries of Chinese thought and Western scholarship (8). For him this dialogue “a illuminé mon long cheminement,” which has led to a cultural and linguistic adventure that he admits he could not have envisioned at the start of his life in Nanchang in the Jiangxi province of China. This adventure was accomplished in spite of “barrières difficiles à franchir” that required him, the voyager, to overcome reductive cultural monoliths during the ongoing cultural interrogation that is part of the boundary-crossing journey (8-13). Concerning his long relationship with the French language, Cheng stated, at his inauguration at the Académie Française:

*Mais c’est en tant que Français que je m’adresse à vous. Je suis devenu un Français de droit, d’esprit et de cœur, cela depuis plus de trente ans, depuis ma naturalisation bien sûr, surtout à partir de ce moment où j’ai résolument basculé dans la langue française, la faisant l’arme, ou l’âme, de ma création. Cette langue, comment dire tout ce que je lui dois ? Elle est si intimement liée à ma vie pratique comme à ma vie intérieure qu’elle se révèle l’emblème de mon destin. Elle m’a procuré cette distanciation par rapport à ma culture d’origine et à mes expériences*
vécues et, dans le même temps, elle m’a conféré cette aptitude à repenser le tout, à transmuer ce tout en un lucide acte de re-création. (“Discours de réception”)

His imagery, based on the intangible quality of dialogue and the more geographical opening of paths, elicits a sense of distance from which to view his connection both to Chinese culture and to his new homeland, to two geographical places, to multiple cultures. While acknowledging the unique qualities of each individual journey and each subject, Cheng sees value in the collective aspects of culture and language, while favoring the fluidity of exchanges and circulation (13).

Admitted to the Académie Française in 2002, that illustrious body founded by the Cardinal de Richelieu in 1634 to safeguard the French language and literature, Cheng acknowledged the sense of home and hospitality he feels in France and in the French language:

Tôt soumis à l’exil et à l’errance, combien je connaissais cette sensation de mélancolie qui s’emparait de moi . . . ce soir-là, sur la route de Flandre, je me sentis envahi d’un intime sentiment de retour, tel celui qu’éprouve tout marin en train de regagner le port, habité que j’étais par le pressentiment d’être accueilli un jour par votre chaude hospitalité. Je savais que le retour en question n’avait pas pour destination un petit chez-soi, mais une vraie patrie de l’esprit à laquelle j’ai tendu toute ma vie. (“Discours de réception”)

Cheng treats this sense of border crossing, exile, and return in his writing, particularly in *Le Dit de Tianyi*. He explores personal connection in his novel *L’Éternité n’est pas de trop* (2002), set during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), between individuals of different classes, the noblewoman Lan-ying and the court musician, later a doctor, Dao-sheng. The latter is also described by Cheng as a wanderer, making Dao-sheng a character who experiences “le double sentiment que connaissent tous les vagabonds: d’un côté cette impression d’une liberté sans contrainte et de
l’autre la nécessité tout de même de choisir une direction” (24). Dao-sheng’s fear of the future and the unforeseen was erased in his wanderings, Cheng states. Similarly, Cheng himself appears to surmount the sensation of missing his homeland through his connection to China, explored through his fiction and his studies and translations of Tang dynasty poetry.

Gao Xingjian, on the other hand, has been honored even more widely and stirred far more controversies, both in and out of China. His receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature in December 2000 drew attention not only to his novel, Lingshan [Soul Mountain/Montagne de l’âme], written in Chinese, but to his experimental plays, several of which were penned in French. Gao, now seventy-six, traveled throughout China and then on to Germany and then sought political asylum in France after several of his works were banned in his homeland, including L’Arrêt de bus (1983) and L’Autre rive (1986). After leaving China in 1987 and seeking political asylum in France, he elicited further criticism by penning La Fuite, which, albeit not a work of social realism, concerns itself with the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. He was declared persona non grata by the People’s Republic of China, but he also encountered criticism for his own criticism, voiced through a character in the play, of the pro-democracy demonstrators. Gao became a French citizen in 1998. He is known for his semi-autobiographical novels, La Montagne de l’âme and Le Livre d’un homme seul, which recounts his harsh experience of the Cultural

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16 Claire Conceison states that, according to Western sources, the performances of the play were stopped after about a dozen performances. This is noted in Yan Haiping’s Theater and Society, vii). However, Conceison’s research at the Beijing People’s Art Theater in 2001 showed that the seventeen scheduled performances did run but that plans to revive the play a month later were canceled due to the controversy and to ensuing government criticism of the play. Some criticism alluded to in an article by Gao toward the end of the play’s run did pertain also to the experimentalism embedded in the use of polyphonic dialogue rather than comparisons to Samuel Beckett’s En attendant Godot (Conceison, “Fleshing Out”).

17 The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) includes Gao’s biography and photograph on its website as part of a feature on “Prominent Refugees,” highlighting his status in China as a blacklisted writer, his writings in exile, and his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature: http://unhcr.org/3b7255171c.html
Revolution which made him destroy many of his literary works out of fear of denunciation. However, he later continued to move further into the area of experimental drama and film, as well as displaying his paintings. Chapter Three looks closely at the experimentalism of Gao’s plays.

Dai Sijie also endured re-education from 1971 to 1974 during the Cultural Revolution, and those experiences became the more nostalgic source for his semiautobiographical novel *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (2000). The international bestseller status of that novel, and the subsequent film of the same name, drew on the disparate literary discourses of China and France. He spent time in a re-education camp in Sichuan due to his middle-class background and moved to France in 1984, although he did not seek political asylum. Dai maintained his Chinese citizenship and passport, remaining free to travel to and film in China; however, he was denied permission to film three of his Chinese-language movies in China, and they were shot in France and in Vietnam. *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* was written in French, translated into twenty-five languages, and published in over thirty-five countries, but it was banned in China along with the film version that he had shot in China. “It wasn’t that I touched the Cultural Revolution,” Dai said, as indeed “educated youth literature” and “scar literature,” two genres described in Chapter Two of this study that could include Dai’s more nostalgic tome and Gao’s darker *Le Livre d’un homme seul* respectively, are published in China. “They did not accept,” Dai said, “that Western literature could change a Chinese girl. I explained that classical literature is a universal heritage, but to no avail” (Riding). His subsequent novel, which will be studied in this dissertation with an eye to Dai’s intertextual use of Western works was *Le Complexe de Di* (2003), which concerns a myopic Chinese psychoanalyst who brings his interpretations of Freud and Lacan back to China, where the messages are either banned or misunderstood. Dai’s film *Les
*Filles du botaniste* (2006), set in China, was denied permission to be filmed there because the script involved a same-sex love story; it was filmed in Vietnam instead. Dai said that he wrote in French initially to attract an audience, but as of 2005, he said that his dreams of returning to China and writing in Chinese would remain unfulfilled. “With some money over the last three years, I had a dream that I would be able to write and live in China,” he said, citing the fact that China is fascinating for an artist because it is changing, so alive, and also corrupt, “but it hasn’t worked out. The censors won’t accept my books, films or projects. My dream of writing in my own language has not been fulfilled. It is very sad” (Riding). His most recent novel is *L’Acrobatie ariénne de Confucious*, published in 2008.

The youngest of the four authors treated here, Shan Sa, began to make her mark on the French literary scene shortly after her 1990 arrival in France. Her novel, *La Joueuse de go*, won the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens, on the heels of her 1998 Prix Goncourt du Premier Roman for her novel *Porte de la Paix céleste*, which involves a wanted Tiananmen Square participant and her would-be People’s Liberation Army (PLA) captor. Sa, born Yan Ni, arrived still a teenager in Paris to study, having left China after peripheral involvement in the student protests and the denunciation of her father for providing shelter to protesters. She pursued higher education in France, relying on support from a grant from the French government and family support from her father’s position as a professor at the Université de Paris. Less controversial in her subsequent novels, Sa said she returns to China regularly to visit family, although her work in France and Switzerland as a writer and artist has consumed her. Her works, while popular and sometimes geared toward young adult readers, have been published in thirty languages, and she has had exhibitions of her paintings around the world, including in Shanghai from 2009 to 2011.
Virtually nothing has been written on these four Francophone-Chinese writers as a group, who are gathered here in this study because of their presence in France and international acclaim; however, much critical attention has been focused on them as individuals, particularly Gao, Dai, and Cheng. This study is unique in the way it considers them together, with their counternarratives, ex-centric spaces, experimentalism, and border-crossing narratives, finding sites where their narratives intersect thematically. Rosalind Sylvester, in her book *Traits chinois, lignes francophones*, looks at François Cheng and the Chinese writer and translator Ya Ding (b. 1959), along with Ying Chen (b. 1961), a Francophone Chinese-Canadian author who has written such novels as *La Mémoire de l’eau* (1992), *L’Ingratitude* (1999), and *Le Champ dans la mer* (2002). Silvester approaches Francophone-Chinese writers in France and Quebec by exploring themes of identity, migration, and minority literature. Belinda Kong has published a volume focused on four writers who have depicted the 1989 Tiananmen Square events in their works of fiction, Gao, Ha Jin, Annie Wang, and Ma Jian, choosing not to include Shan Sa’s *Porte de la Paix céleste*. She challenges the typical Western views of Tiananmen and conveys the nuances of the so-called “dissident” authors, a term she rejects, through the lens of their privileged subjectivity outside of China. Far more scholarship has focused specifically on Gao Xingjian, tackling his complicated history in China and France from multiple perspectives. Sy Ren Quah in Singapore, for instance, has discussed the voice of alienation in Gao’s plays, along with the notion of space, so important in this study. Quah approaches Gao with an eye to Gao’s experimentalism, which is further explored in Chapter Three of this study, looking at the social and psychological framework of Gao’s avant-garde theater, along with this “fervent call for a literature of humanism” (Quah 164). Haiping Yan, who has edited the volume *Theater and Society: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama*, has published one of the few versions
of Gao’s controversial and banned play *L’Arrêt de bus* in English and analyzes Gao’s place in modern Chinese drama, his Beckettian influences and the “desires of romantic individualism” found in that play at a time when literature and its social bourgeois influences were being discussed at the highest levels of government (xvi-xxii). Following Gao’s receipt of the Nobel Prize, a veritable explosion of research focused as much on his novels and their modernist tendencies as on his plays, including the collection of articles edited by Kwok-kan Tam in 2002. Tam intended to take Gao, a figure he admits was well-known among scholars in Chinese and comparative literature circles, particularly in Taiwan and Hong Kong and even in European theatrical circles, and introduce him to a larger public, focusing on Gao’s aesthetics, his exilic consciousness, attempts to achieve “transcendent subject positions,” and the difficulties of introducing a Chinese Zen subjectivity and other traditional Chinese subjectivities to a larger—often Western—audience (215-18). Claire Conceison has studied Gao’s plays extensively and writes of his transnational status, his de-marginalization and “canonization” after winning the Nobel Prize, his dramaturgy, his avant-garde and absurdist plays, and she has brought his play *L’Arrêt de bus* to the college stage. Thomas Moran’s interesting 2002 study, expounded further on Gao at the Modern Language Association conference in Boston in 2013, demonstrating Gao’s interest, albeit a minor one, in the environment, as he chronicles the problems of deforestation, threats to species, including pandas, golden monkeys, cranes, and tigers, contrasting such human destruction with other pristine environments (Moran 207). In 2010, the journal *Chinese Perspectives* devoted its edition to the study of Gao, with writers such as Sebastien Veg approaching Gao’s marginality, his Frenchness, and his ambiguous relation to modernism. Others, including Gao’s French translator Noël Dutrait, explored his individualism and “dissident’s embodiment of morality,” particularly in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech and his
Tiananmen Square-inspired play *La Fuite* (1992). Furthermore, Jessica Yeung’s *Ink Dances in Limbo: Gao Xingjian’s Writing as Cultural Translation* (2008) is credited with striking a middle ground between those who adore Gao and those who criticize him, as she analyzes Gao through the lens of “cultural translation,” looking at his work through the Western paradigm of Modernism from the 1980s to the formation of his “diasporic subjectivity” after moving to France and continuing to write into the new millennium.

Dai Sijie’s work received popular attention due primarily to the bestseller status of his novel *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* and the subsequent film. Because its story was perceived as paying homage to the great works of Western literature—and French literature, in particular—critics such as Dorothée Fritz-Ababneh, in her 2006 study, looked at Dai’s use of intertextuality, as defined in Chapter Two of this dissertation by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. Still others, such as Kevin Carollo, situated Dai in the new, more diverse landscape of contemporary Francophone writers that includes writers such as Dai, Ya Ding and Shan Sa of China, Linda Lè and Anna Moï of Vietnam, Andreï Makine of Russia, Pavel Hak of the Czech Republic, Agota Kristof of Hungary, Ali Erfan and Marjane Satrapi of Iran, and Venus Khoury-Ghata of Lebanon. Carollo thus questions the role of the nation, as do others, in literary studies and in politics and poses the question “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?”—a question that has been asked since the nineteenth century, if not earlier, while noting that it is also still raised in France by the extreme right party, the Front National (115-16).

François Cheng’s novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* (1998) received attention following his elevation to the Académie Française. Rosalind Sylvester looked at the first-person mise-en-abîme narration in the tri-partite novel, the ways in which the narrator “souhaite transcender les deux situations [l’Orient/l’Occident] et achever une permanence et une universalité du dit”
(Sylvester 101). Other critics, such as Beatriz Mangada Cañas, question whether Cheng’s work contributes to the nostalgia and exoticism of the East with which Chinese writers sometimes imbue their texts for Western audiences. However, Cañas praises Cheng’s ability to incorporate into his works cultural memories in a kind of dialogue between cultures, adding a specificity and erudition that other works often lack (106). Shan Sa’s novels have attracted popular attention from French audiences interested in novels about China, and her works have been honored with the Prix Goncourt du Premier Roman for *Porte de la Paix céleste* in 1998, the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens in 2001 for her novel *La Joueuse de go*, the Prix Cazes-Brasserie Lipp in 1999 for *Les Quatre vies de saule*. However, perhaps because of their more popular and less academic appeal, her novels have received little scholarly attention on their own. Nonetheless, her novel concerning the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising deserves particular attention in conjunction with Gao’s play about the same time and event, *La Fuite*.

The first chapter of this study will look at the ways all four authors engage with crossing borders, producing texts that explore narratives and symbolic representation of liminal and border spaces. The authors and their critics explore the tension between actual bordered spaces and imagined borderless spaces, as described for instance by Gayatri Spivak and through the notion of the Third Space, used by Bhabha and others, as described above. Borderlessness in the narratives of Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa can then be viewed productively through the social imaginary of Walter Mignolo, the Third Space of Homi Bhabha and others, the cultural translingualism of Lydia Liu, and Buddhist notions of Middle Way and nonduality. Cheng’s *Le Dialogue* typifies this literary form of border crossing, as he uses his own autobiography and the long history of Chinese culture and thought to support his dialogic notions and exploration of in-betweenness (*l’entre*) in his critical works and poetic studies. Gao’s novel *La Montagne de l’âme*
Typifies wandering as a form of border crossing, with Gao’s narrational shifts and protagonists designated only “I,” “you,” “he,” and “she”; his emphasis on silence; and his allusions to the pain of inhabiting bordered spaces. Sa’s poetry, collected in *Le Vent vif et le glaive rapide* (1999) also explores notions of liminal states and the invisible forces, such as wind and silence, that transfigure landscapes and humans. Gao’s notions of crossing borders, from cities and intellectual circles to rural areas and peasantry during his time of being “re-educated” during China’s Cultural Revolution, collected into his semiautobiographical novel *Le Livre d’un homme seul* (1990), further convey the contraction of meaning that occurred as works were destroyed and voices silenced through execution, torture, and fear during that difficult time, which Gao refuses to discuss in interviews, referring would-be questioners to this novel. Such notions of contraction and expansion of meaning, along with literal and figurative border crossings, are further explored in some of Gao’s avant-garde plays and short stories.

The second chapter of this study turns to the author Dai Sijie and the use of intertextuality in two of his novels, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (2000) and *Le Complexe de Di* (2003). Intertextuality—the notion that every utterance exists in relation to other utterances, eliciting a polyvocal intersection of voices—produces counternarratives in the works of Dai, specifically referencing Western works in these two novels. Dai’s 2000 novel draws attention to Western writers such as Balzac, with his class consciousness; Flaubert, with his views on marriage and class; Romain Rolland with his heroic characters that embody the power of individualism. These French authors play a part in the process of freeing the young female protagonist from her restricted life in a village high on Phoenix Mountain where she has met Ma and Luo, two youths sent to be re-educated during the Cultural Revolution, and whose friend has brought with him a valise filled with banned works. The novel also provides an entry into counternarratives through
the theme of the censorship that was widespread in China during the 1960s and 1970s, limiting readers only to state-sanctioned narratives supported by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Dai then turns his attention in his 2005 novel toward intertextual references to Western psychoanalysis through the humor-laden story of a protagonist named Monsieur Muo, whose doctoral studies in psychoanalysis in France, where he has immersed himself in the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, cause problems when shared with the Chinese populace in the open market upon his return.

A different type of border crossing is the subject of Chapter Three of this study, which looks specifically at the experimentalism of Gao’s avant-garde theater from the 1980s when plays such as *L’Arrêt de bus* and *L’Autre rive* were banned in China, to French works, such as *Quatre quators pour un week-end*, and his transnational work combining drama, opera, and dance, *La Neige en août*. This chapter explores Gao’s form along with his ties to Western avant-garde theater, including the works of Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht, his Buddhist and Taoist influences, and his insistence on the sovereignty of the individual.

Lastly, Chapter Four looks at the ex-centric spaces inhabited by characters in two literary texts concerned with the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising, Gao’s play *La Fuite* and Sa’s novel *Porte de la Paix céleste*. The authors Gao and Sa narrate events in the various unstable peripheral spaces in which protesters hid in the aftermath of the massacre—the warehouse and forest where characters portrayed as protesters must hide. They examine ex-centric spaces—which include writing and publishing narratives of the event freely from outside of China—from different perspectives, including that of enthusiastic but naïve protesters, a cynical middle-aged man who criticizes the pro-democracy movement, family members of those involved, strangers on the street, an ambivalent lieutenant from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) who
participated in the crackdown, and others. As Gao and Sa portray the subjectivities of these characters, they explore themes of hope and despair, desire, childhood dreams, and flight. The work of such critics as Linda Hutcheon who writes of ex-centricity and Rosi Braidotti who explores nomadic subjectivities add to the critical terms through which such narratives of flight may be viewed.

The lexicon to speak of such writers who exist beyond traditional paradigms of subjectivity and beyond the scope and terminology of national literatures must be developed with respect for multiple positionality rather than through terms such as “hybridity,” a merging of terms, advocated by many, including Homi Bhabha. Terms such as “exilic,” “diasporic,” “migrant,” and “postnational” begin to chip at the manufactured realities that have dominated literature and the so-called canons for centuries, and the narratives and drama of Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa contribute to that new field of study, whether it takes place under the aegis of border poetics, comparative literature, simultaneous language studies, Francophone and Sinophone, or of area studies. “The emergent literatures of deterritorialized people and literary studies beyond the confines of national literature paradigms have as yet no name or configuration,” Azade Seyhan wrote in Writing Outside the Nation (2001) as these authors came under the aegis of their respective language designation or that of one or more of their diverse locales (9). The group involves a diverse range of people that may be called at times “post-national formations,” “translocal solidarities,” “cross-border mobilizations,” and “postnational identities,” as both Seyhan and Arjun Appadurai point out (Seyhan 9). Writers such as the poet Ji Xian, writing in Modern Poetry, consider the diverse literary influences that are a part of each writer’s œuvre, at once the impact of “horizontal transplantation,” the type of intertexts from different cultural and linguistic traditions, and “vertical inheritance” of China (Sze xviii; L. Wong 79-80). While
benefitting from such multiple traditions, the writers themselves seek at times to resist the abundant labels and collective belongings ascribed to them, to be heard as individuals rather than as representatives of a group, an important distinction, which Gao makes throughout his works.

At the least, in a world in which the voices of immigrants and those in exile are clamoring to be heard, these writers help us to challenge the all-too-stable notions of “national literary space” that allow too little space and weight to the “small literatures,” the so-called minor literatures, and voices on the margins and in diaspora that deserve attention. As French writer Pascale Casanova writes in *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), it behooves academics, readers, and publishers to go beyond the “divided zone that reaches across territorial boundaries, an invisible laboratory in which a national literature has been created that is irreducible to the borders of the nation that its authors helped fashion” (207). Such “cleavages” may indeed breed incongruence and a less unitary space; furthermore, they may appear to be a means of challenging the hegemony of the political nation-state and allowing other literatures to emerge, marked at times with revolts and subversion, at times with what appears to be assimilation and appropriation.
Chapter 1 — Border Crossers and Cultural Translingualism

Writing on the new “border-crossing” character of contemporary Chinese literature, David Der-wei Wang asked the following question, “How does one classify a work produced on the mainland and published in Hong Kong with a Taiwan sponsorship, which receives its first acclaim from readers in the United States?” (Running Wild 214). The writer’s work may be banned in Mainland China; he or she may have chosen to study or write abroad or have sought political asylum. He may return to China to shoot a film, only to have that film only shown abroad. Indeed, national or geographical labels often fall short in categorizing contemporary literary works whose cultural consciousness has been transformed throughout history by writers who cross multiple borders. Earlier generations often referred to works that resulted from border crossings as émigré novels or expatriate works. While Joseph Conrad, Samuel Beckett, and Eugène Ionesco, who substituted one European language for another, writing in a language other than their mother tongue, may be among the most celebrated literary and culturally translingual writers of the past hundred years, contemporary multilingualism has expanded exponentially beyond the European continent. It is receiving renewed attention in the era of globalization, an era marked by constant intercontinental movement, exile, and mass displacement in the face of the wars, systemic oppression of minorities, human rights abuses, and natural disasters of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Kellman ix). The Francophone-Chinese writers François Cheng (b. 1929), Gao Xingjian (b. 1940), Dai Sijie (b. 1954), and Shan Sa (b. 1972), typify the outward expansion of the Sinophone diaspora into France that occurred primarily in the wake of China’s Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and continued with a new generation following the Tiananmen Square uprising (1989). These writers’ works highlight how they question and engage with physical borders that are being crossed increasingly often as well as
with the metaphorical boundaries they reject, at once promoting a broadening of literary horizons—which requires their own sorts of mediations—and causing their readers to become aware of a sense of estrangement and dissension. Such works also expand the realm of literary interpretation beyond postcolonial paradigms, which critics such as Gayatri Spivak have questioned. Spivak in particular has contested the usefulness of postcolonialism as a theoretical model in the twenty-first century, an era of globalization in which one can theoretically, albeit not always practically, imagine “a borderless world.”

In effect, writers such as Gao, Dai, Cheng, and Sa, whose experiences are rooted in the twentieth-century nationalism and political conflicts that impacted their immigration from China to France, do not inhabit what Spivak calls “a borderless world” at all. Rather, they create new literary and cultural spaces through their geographical, linguistic, and narrative border crossings. Their world is one that might be termed a world of “transversals,” in which meaning can never be attained simply through mimesis and transparency. Their writing is structured instead by an alternation of silence and dialogue that yields at times a sense of reductive contraction and at others an expansion of meaning, all taking place in a non-dialectical Third Space.

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18 Spivak’s comments were made at the 2013 Modern Language Association conference in Boston in a talk titled “A Borderless World” and in a panel discussion called “Between the Postcolonial and the Global.” Spivak sees postcolonialist theory now as primarily useful in the study of historical texts, rather than applied to contemporary ones. Spivak alluded to how her earliest childhood in India and in Bengal was “scarred by bordering.” Contesting the dominance of postcolonial studies in the analysis of transnational literatures, Spivak stated: “I sensed that borders were lies. The earth came unmarked except by natural boundaries.”

19 Homi Bhabha discusses this Third Space in The Location of Culture (1994): the mobilization of two spaces in “passage through a Third Space” that produces meaning (53). Bhabha’s theory of a Third Space was influenced by Walter Benjamin, in particular his “meditations on the disjunctive temporalities” of historical events and what Bhabha calls “interstitial ‘conditionality’ that opens alongside the transcendent tendency of dialectical contradiction,” which he terms a Third Space (W. Mitchell).
Critics such as David Der-wei Wang have demonstrated how the Sinophone literary map continues to be redrawn both geographically and within translingual literary texts and demands an increasing emphasis on the margins, the borders, and sites beyond Mainland China. These include the sites where French language and culture intersect with the Chinese language and culture as in the works of writers such as Gao, Dai, Cheng, and Sa. Some have attributed the redrawling of this map to numerous influences, including the cultural and political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution and of the Tiananmen uprising, technical innovation, engagement with Western educational institutions, and what is termed the “diaspora of [M]ainland Chinese writers” (D. Wang, *Running Wild* 240). This redrawing then creates a new global valorization of the formerly marginal such as literature by Chinese authors writing in French. The term “Sinofrench” is increasingly being used to describe works located at that particular cultural intersection in film or literature in which France and China interact through intertextuality, language, or sites of production (Bloom, “Transnational Chinese” 200). Michelle Bloom also coined the term “francochinese” to designate that particular “cultural contact zone” of French culture and Chinese culture (202).

That contact zone has become quantitatively significant. One study showed that more people of Chinese birth live outside of Mainland China than the entire population of France, which is approximately sixty-six million (“Mapping Migration”). While the largest population of Chinese outside of Mainland China remains in Asia, in such places as Hong Kong, Thailand, and Malaysia, many live in the United States (3.46 million), Britain (300,000) and France (600,000).

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20 This intersection of production sites is most visible in Gao Xingjian’s Nobel-prize-winning novel, *La Montagne de l’âme*, which Gao describes as “written from 1982 to September 1989, Beijing and Paris” (506). While Gao has penned other works in French, *La Montagne de l’âme* (Chinese: Lingshan) was written in Chinese; however, it was banned, along with Gao’s other works, and has met greater acclaim in the West in the French translation by Noël and Liliane Dutrait and the English version translated by Australian Mabel Lee.
It is the Chinese diasporic literary production that has moved abroad, primarily to the United States, England, Canada, and France that is primarily known to Western literary audiences, and includes writing about Chinese events, culture, and experience, and non-Chinese themes. Such terms as “diaspora,” “sinofrench,” and “francochinese,” however, do not come without the problems associated with the external construction of the subjectivity of people sharing two cultures. This way of redrawing the Sinophone map ascribes a cultural dependence on, if no longer a political link to, the Chinese “homeland” even after decades have passed since the individuals involved left China for other countries, such as France (Shih 1-16). Nonetheless, Gao and Sa write of the Tiananmen Square incident; Cheng, Gao, and Dai write of the Cultural Revolution. Other culturally translingual Chinese writers residing outside of France include Ying Chen, author of *La Mémoire de l’eau* (1993 in French), *L’Ingratitude* (1996 in French), *Le Champ dans la mer* (2002 in French), and other novels written in French, who moved to Quebec, Canada, in 1989, and then to Vancouver; Ha Jin, author of *War Trash* (2004 in English), *A Map of Betrayal* (2014 in English), and other novels, who stayed in the United States as a result of the Tiananmen Square incident; Ma Jian, author of *Beijing Coma* (2008 trans. from Chinese to English), *The Dark Road* (2013 trans. from Chinese to English), *Red Dust: A Path Through China* (2001 trans).

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21 These figures represent individuals of Chinese ethnicity residing in those countries, whether they were born there or immigrated from elsewhere. About 14,000 individuals with Chinese citizenship reside in France. Over 40,000 Chinese students reside in Europe while pursuing higher education. In France, only 47.6 percent of those studying at universities return to China, according to the Migration Policy Institute. China represents the third largest source of “regularized” migrants to France, following Algeria and Morocco, and France, Italy, and Spain, together, have “regularized” about 60,000 Chinese from 1990 to 2000.

22 F. Elizabeth Dahab explores the works of Ying Chen and others in *Voices of Exile in Contemporary Canadian Francophone Literature* (2009).
from Chinese to English) and other works, who lives in Great Britain; and Yiyun Li, author of *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2005 in English), *A Sheltered Woman* (2015 in English), and other novels, who also lives in the United States. The international literary world has responded to this redrawing of the Sinophone-transnational literary map in numerous ways. One example of expansion was the renaming of a prominent conference of Chinese writers from outside of Mainland China (Holden and Ng 118). Originally called *Tai-Gang wenxue guoji yantao hui* (International Conference on Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature) at its inception in 1982, it was renamed *Tai-Gang ji haiwai huawen wenxue guoji yantao hui* (International Conference on Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Overseas Chinese Literature) in 1986, and in its fifth year (1993) it changed again to *Shijie huawen wenxue guoji yantao hui* (International Conference on Global Chinese-Language Literature). The Sinophone literary roster thus includes those who live beyond Mainland China’s borders, those who write solely in Chinese, and those transnational writers, such as Gao, Sa, and Dai, whose literary works are in Chinese, along with another language, such as French or English, often creating a liminal space in which different sides of the borders are in conversation with each other. The move from the center to the margins and the emphasis within international publishing on voices from the Sinophone diaspora has given these border crossers a prominent literary voice, and indirectly, a social and political one.

Contemporary theorists conceptualize the Third Space, so named by Homi Bhabha, in different ways and with varying emphases. All support the idea of in-betweenness that marks the work of Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa, as the discursive sphere in which Bhabha builds on concepts

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23 A number of Francophone writers from the Communist Second World found themselves writing works in their native language, only to be unable to publish there, finding publishers and an audience abroad. This is the case of Ma Jian, whose *Stick Out Your Tongue* (亮出你的舌苔或空空荡荡) (1987) and *Beijing Coma* (肉之土) (2009) were banned in China and translated and published in English. This was true of some Central and Eastern European Francophone writers as well.
of dialogue, which will be further explored in the second chapter of this study, combined with work by Mikhail Bakhtin and the intertextuality of Kristeva. The work of Gloria Anzaldúa and others focusing on borders create a physical and liminal space that also becomes a Third Space, neither one locus nor another, but between them. This kind of work on borders sets the tone for the growing area of studies called border poetics, focusing on texts that explore the narratives and symbolic representation of bordered spaces, border-crossing experiences, and their cultural lineages. Expanding on this idea, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasizes the conceptualization of borderlessness—a notion that entails experiencing borders through their inherent permeability—and the ways it still relies on the very presence of borders to allow the notion to exist.\(^{24}\) What emerges from this Third Space exploration is a polyvocality that mediates a multiplicity of realities within a psychological and metaphysical space that is closely linked to the physical border crossings that engendered it. Some theorists, such as Walter Mignolo, rely on the “social imaginary” to scrutinize the newly imagined space, while others, such as Masao Miyoshi, focus on the space as mediated by nation-states and transnational corporations, creating a new twenty-first-century reality for its translingual,\(^{25}\) transnational citizens and noncitizens alike. However, all of these approaches further the paradigm shift, which corresponds, in the case of Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa, to a shift to a Third Space that is neither fully Chinese nor fully

\(^{24}\) In a 2013 talk at Boston’s Modern Language Association meeting on “A Borderless World,” Spivak compared this tension between borders and borderlessness to the tension inherent in medicine that can cure but also become poison, but she situates it in the realm of thought and the imagination rather than in reality itself. At times, the desire to secure borders, Spivak cautioned, can become “a poisonous habit.”

\(^{25}\) Martha Cutter points out the broadening use of the term “translingual” in a critique of Steven Kellman’s *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft* (2003). Kellman defines translingual writers as those “fluent and accomplished in more than one language” (xiii). Lydia Liu and Ruth Spack instead reserve the term for writers who, in Cutter’s words, “cross-culturally appropriate, criticize, and reinvent language” and Spack adds that the translingual writers thus cross into a new subjectivity (Cutter 199). Gao, Cheng, Dai, and Sa meet both the broader and more focused definitions as translingual writers.
French. It illustrates a literary pull that has been occurring in the twenty- and twenty-first centuries away from Mainland China toward writers from the Sinophone diaspora, often writing in French and/or English, many of whom have left Mainland China because of issues of censorship and human rights abuses that will be explored in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

**Border-Borderless Tension**

The continued existence of actual borders and writing while constructing one’s subjectivity in relation to those national and cultural boundaries become important elements in the works of these transnational writers and in their cultural translingualism. Indeed, their work is not effecting translation merely from one’s language but also from one’s culture into another’s language and cultural foundation, often when cultural equivalencies do not exist and are in a “perpetual state of becoming” (L. Liu 16). Such literary production in a culturally translingual space includes the works of those who write exclusively in their second language, of those who continue to write in their first language and maintain an attachment to the first language despite dislocation, and texts involving movement between linguistically different sites (“Colloquium for Research”). As a result, to talk about the works of diasporic Chinese writers, a new critical apparatus must be forged and critical tools must be rethought. One such tool is a paradigm called “new transnationalism,” which points toward Spivak’s borderless world, and underscores the tension between the borders that continue to exist and their permeability (Jacklin et al.). Spivak indeed states, “Therefore, the idea of borderlessness has a performative contradiction within it which has to be kept alive.” However, the notion of “borderlessness”—which evokes the
limitations of artificial nation-state constructions, the porousness of artificial frontiers, the surge in transnational corporations, the stream of capital and information, and technological tools, such as the Internet, that make that flow across borders possible—rose to prominence in scholarly discourse primarily in the late twentieth century, partly in response to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, and has begun to shift in the new millennium. While questioning the stability of borders with an emphasis on their dynamic nature, geopolitical scholar Heather Nichol and international legal expert Ian Townsend-Gault in their volume *Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World* (2005) also speak of a type of retrenchment, of efforts to reinscribe the importance of borders, and of an emphasis by policy makers and states to highlight and prioritize the local over the global in the early twenty-first century.\(^\text{26}\) The 2016 refugee crisis has thus elevated tensions concerning border controls on both sides of the Atlantic, in the European Union with regard to the refugee crisis and in the United States in political debates leading up to the 2016 presidential election. Now residing in Europe, the writers I discuss represent the lived experience of those who cross borders as expatriates, or in the case of Gao, as a political asylum-seeker. Concerning Gao’s place in the Sinophone diaspora and the Francophone world, Claire Conceison describes him as a “transnational, translingual writer” and situates his work in the following manner:

\(^{26}\) European Council President Donald Tusk chaired an emergency summit of the European Union (EU) in March 2016 that discussed the closure of a Balkan route from Greece to northern Europe, a key route for migrants (Baczynska and Taylor). France and Germany are two of eight countries in the twenty-six nation Schengen zone—which has guaranteed free movement to more than 400 million EU citizens since its establishment in 1995, abolishing passports and other systematic border controls—that instituted emergency border controls in 2015 in response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe. “The number of illegal entries from Turkey to Greece remains far too high,” Tusk said in March 2016. French and German leaders were trying to shore up and restore the Schengen travel agreement, which many see as crucial to the functioning of the EU; meanwhile, the EU criticized Greece for having “seriously neglected” its responsibility to control the external border of the so-called “border-free” Schengen zone (“Schengen Zone”).
He represents a lived experience that is increasingly common, so we need to shape new perspectives and categories to accommodate the actual conditions of contemporary global literature. . . . Gao’s global importance as an author, in my view, has to do with this approach to literature that is not bound by nation-state or [a single] language, and also has to do with the fact that his creative works are broad in range and genre . . . (Wasserstrom)

Furthermore, in the case of these four authors, crossing geographical borders coincides with literary work that has been called “polymorphic,” exploring both French and Chinese culture, texts, forms, and developing highly experimental forms that further defy the boundaries between genres.

The critical shifts that occurred during the twentieth century in relation to Chinese literature have resulted in a new paradigm of cultural translingualism which supposes the translation of one culture into the language of another. Cultural translingualism thus differentiates itself from the literal practice of translation, of translating a word into a different language for instance, by focusing on how each subject translates the ideas that constitute the culture first at the constitutive level of practice and “linguistic transactions,” and then more deeply at the ontological level of individuals and cultures (L. Liu 8-9). Any “assumed homogeneity” that might exist in translation is lost as words and concepts are stripped of their meaning and reconstituted in another cultural context (8). This cultural translation is based not on a secure set of cultural and linguistic practices but on an ever-shifting basis and thus takes place in a Third Space. Rather than seeing this “new paradigm” of a translingual approach as fraught with difficulty, we can view it as a “resource for producing meaning and for consideration of what the writers are doing and why” (Horner et al. 303, 305). This space thus
moves away from the monolingual and monocultural traditions that became dominant in eighteenth-century European tradition, often allied with “an occidental ambition” or “the ideology of Enlightenment” (de Certeau 133, 166; Canagarajah 19). “Devising new paradigms to explain how communication works in contact zones is not just a theoretical need,” writes A. Suresh Canagarajah. “[P]eople are not relying on ready-made meanings and forms (as posited by Structuralist language models) for communicative success in contact zones. . . . They are co-constructing meaning by adopting reciprocal and adaptive negotiation strategies in their interactions” (26-27). The authors studied in this thesis indeed “make meaning from fluid repertoires of semiotic resources in social practice,” a method that is both deconstructive and reconstructive because of the absence of fixed linguistic and cultural structures to result in ongoing meaning-making (28).

The writers whom I study here move beyond geographical border crossings to attain a type of “border thinking” which refers to a “social imaginary,” the ways in which humans imagine their social selves and represent them in stories, creating a representational thinking that mediates diverse and often difficult social realities (C. Taylor 23-24). Spivak, one of the foremost thinkers in postcolonial theory, nonetheless began to challenge this approach in the 1990s with the publication of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* and *Death of a Discipline*, both directed toward earlier thinkers, such as Marx and Kant, and toward the notion of globalism. Spivak has been called the guardian at/in/of the margin, and she argues that those, especially writers, who are designated as “other” have to find rhetorical strategies for “resisting the commodification of marginality,” often through narrative devices and strategies (Morton 29-30). Such devices are indeed used by Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa, as shall be seen further in Chapter Two of this study, for instance in Dai’s use of intertextuality and counternarratives in two of his
novels, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* and *Le Complexe de Di*, and in Chapter Three, which examines Gao’s experimentalism in avant-garde theater. Of some writers who traverse borders, Spivak states that their “imaginations are crossing and being crossed by a double aporia—the cusp of two imperialisms” (Spivak, *Death* 12). She considers the ways in which, in other circumstances, particularly in postcolonial studies, where much earlier analysis was situated, many individuals with fewer resources than the writers studied here reside in a state of struggle, deprived of resources, access to institutional power structures, and systems of support (Spivak, *Aesthetic* 189). Such situations continue to exist, of course. Unlike Bhabha, however, Spivak suggests that she is not “exoticizing or romanticizing” these individuals or those who live in an aboriginal state, close to the land of their birth (189). Physical and imagined crossings both destabilize the notion of the nation in relation to literature, instead emphasizing the authors and their works through the use of language that inserts them into an entirely different linguistic realm such as “Francophony.” The authors I study can thus belong both to the Francophone realm and to the Sinophone in varying degrees, and can be associated neither to a single nation nor to the political sphere of area studies. Some writers, claims Spivak, are moving to a global sphere, in which “[t]o be human is to be intended toward other . . . [and] we must persistently educate ourselves into this particular mindset” (Spivak, *Death* 73). Such a movement may be able to at once recognize the voices of these privileged expatriate writers as well as embrace work for social justice to address the fundamental inequalities and oppression present in both Eastern and Western nations.

Tensions persist between the benefits of increased mobility attendant on transnationalism—sometimes identified under the rubric of a “cosmopolitanism” that runs from Hegel to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s text *Cosmopolitanism* (2007), viewing xenophobia,
ethnocentrism and other -centrism as dangers afflicting international relations—and the systemic issues created by the flow and accumulation of capital by some and by the displacement of people from their homelands. The increasing borderlessness that results from these two factors can contribute to the decline of some nation-states, on the one hand, and to the rise of transnationalism and transnational corporations (TNCs), political turmoil, and technology, on the other (Miyoshi, “A Borderless World?” 735-39). People, capital, and ideas move across borders at an increasing rate and some see this as reducing the nation-state’s hegemony and as an impetus for the academic study of the “plurality of presences”—with the risk of forgetting the nation-state’s role in the displacement of people. One must also consider that the euphemistic term “multiculturalism” can in fact act as a cover for the harm caused by transnationalism and transnational corporations that wreak havoc and uproot people against their will (Miyoshi, “A Borderless World?” 744, 751). The reasons for governmental and corporate hegemony are political, or, when transnational corporations are involved, they stem from the desire to maximize profit that ignores the welfare of people (746). Thus, while literary and cultural theories of increased borderlessness abound, they do not fully account for the harshness of reality. Some theoreticians of border crossings both in literary and geographical terms, like Miyoshi, place a much-needed emphasis on the human price paid, when the “coherence of a total nation-state is unswervingly desired and maintained,” when corporations are “obviously no agents of progress for humanity,” and when a transnational class of citizens bumps up again demands for homogeneity both of population and of beliefs (Miyoshi, Trespasses 144-145).

27 In Chapter Two, I will consider censorship in China extensively in relation to two of Dai Sijie’s novels, Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise (2000) and Le Complexe de Di (2003) that treat censorship both at the time of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and in the twenty-first century. My fourth chapter looks at the construction of subjectivity in two novels that concern
Miyoshi points toward the need for resistance in the face of these and other oppressive forces—such as neocolonialism, the use of political, cultural, economic, or other pressures to reify unequal power relationships in favor of wealthy nations and individuals.

Contemporary concepts such as border studies and “border thinking” have implications with regard to Francophone-Chinese writers. Walter Mignolo has described the “social imaginary” of representational thinking and systems that help mediate differing cultural and linguistic realities, such as those created by Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sijie. Border crossings may involve the exportation of one idea, often from a European culture, to another local history and culture, establishing the perspective of subalterity (Delgado, Romero, and Mignolo 10). For Mignolo, to “think otherwise” signifies the ability to move beyond already established categories, through such positions as double critique, pensée autre, double consciousness, and transculturation, which are all already established. Mignolo also aims to find both new terms and content and a new epistemology of the border, one that is “infected” with the border itself and adds to and expands rather than replaces existing narratives (11). “Border thinking,” Mignolo says, “on the other hand, allows you to imagine possible futures in which the richness of thought and creativity in language comes from the borders, more specifically, from the subaltern side of the border” (13). This reconfiguration, Mignolo hopes, will allow discourse to move away from the outdated dependency theory that long viewed poorer or less-developed nations only as sources of resources and cheap labor for wealthier nations, regardless of the ways in which individuals in these nations viewed themselves (Mignolo 54-57). The most useful location is not the location that is geographically defined, Mignolo contends; instead, one should consider the “location-in-movement” and its significance, its capacity to include diasporic people.

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the killing and arrest of pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989, when close to a million students called for changes to a government they called repressive.
immigrants, and refugees, along with exiles who are thus simultaneously linked to two locations while being bound to a “location-in-movement,” abandoning a completely territorial sense of location as articulated by those in power in the nation-state (Delgado, Romero, and Mignolo 15). Border thinking is an essential consequence of these types of dislocations.

Such border thinking can be seen in François Cheng’s writing. His critical work *Le Dialogue* focuses on his work in two languages, cultures, and countries, China and France. He traces his voyage into French, crossing geographic and linguistic borders, “des barrières aussi sévèrement gardées, difficilement franchissables aux yeux de quelqu’un qui n’a pas la chance de ‘naître dedans’” (9). He contemplates ways in which the best of the West—in his eyes, humanism, the emphasis on individual agency, and the idea of the thinker—meet those of the East—alluding to Taoist notions, including those of Yin, Yang, and the Middle Path, which promote ideas of balance, where all is organically linked (15). The link between language, culture, and thought conceived of by crossing borders leads Cheng to state, “Une langue prend en charge notre conscience et nos affectivités. Et à un degré plus haut, elle est ce par quoi l’homme est à même de se dépasser en accédant à une forme de création, puisque toutes nos créations, en sens large, sont un langage” (10). Gérard Genette wrote of “the world in which one tells” and “the world of which one tells,” emphasizing the narrational “boundary” and “threshold” (Daleski 237; Genette, *Seuils* xvii) between them, which expands to create a liminal Third Space where culturally translingual meaning is constructed. This Third Space has increased in importance as notions of borders and borderlessness come to the fore both

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28 Gao also expresses his ties to Taoist and Buddhist thought—despite his avowed atheism—Eastern traditions in which silence is often associated with nirvana, “the ultimate happiness” (*nibbanam paramam dukham*). “Communism is atheistic and materialistic,” Gao said, but he benefits from Buddhist and Taoist influences and claims a “Taoist inheritance,” in particular (from remarks made at 2013 MLA Conference).
geographically and in contemporary literature. Catherine Mayaux thus cites Cheng’s use of the terms “stéréoscopique” and “stéréophonique” to describe this bordered state in which “ses repères et ses valeurs les plus originelles ou authentiques, redonnant paradoxalement à la migrance dont son œuvre est le fruit un ancrage géographique et historique particulièrement stable” (F. Cheng, Le Dialogue 79; Mayaux 99-100). While Cheng’s considerations in relocating to France for scholarly pursuits preceded the unrest of the Cultural Revolution and the later Tiananmen Square incident, those of other Francophone writers, including Gao, Dai, and Sa, came directly from not only witnessing but being subjected to physical banishment and suffering, ideological risks, and intellectual marginalization (Kong 61).

The growing body of critical studies referred to as “border poetics” is based on the consideration of geographical borders and population shifts, such as those from Mainland China to the West in the face of human rights violations during the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square uprising. 29 These have led not only to geographical shifts from China to the West and from the center, i.e., Mainland China, to the less-marginal margins, i.e., the diaspora, but also to the creation of narrative works from the perspective of those authors who made that shift. Border poetics is a field still in its embryonic phase (Pötzsch). Scholars of border culture and border poetics state they have set out “to develop theoretical and practical strategies (a ‘border poetics’) for examining the function of these forms of representation in the intersection between territorial

29 “Operation Yellowbird” is an underground organization that derives its name from the Chinese proverb, “The mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the yellow bird behind” (M. Liu). Between 1989 and 1997, Operation Yellowbird is said to have rescued as many as 500 Chinese dissidents and activists, including fifteen of twenty-one individuals said to be leaders of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests on the country’s most-wanted list. Other individuals have immigrated or sought political exile. Most recently, Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei had his passport returned in July 2015, four years after being banned from leaving China where he was arrested in 2011. He is now in Germany and has a visa for a three-year stay there where his six-year-old son has been living (Phillips).
borders and aesthetic works” (“Border Poetics”). Such critics mainly study border-crossing narratives in cultural expressions by analyzing the ways in which “narrative and symbolic representation is a central element in border formation and experience.” Since textual borders in such works are related to the geographical borders themselves represented in these texts, these representations of borders and border crossings matter “for social, political, and historical processes of bordering” (“Border Poetics”). The field concerns itself with the presence of real borders in texts as well as with their metaphysical cousins. Holger Pötzsch, a border poetics researcher at Tromsø University in Norway, thus states that this domain is concerned with the analysis of border-crossing narratives in literature and film and “that textual or medial borders within or around aesthetic works are related to the borders represented in these works.” Other writers concern themselves first with physical borders, and then with ideological or historical borders, such as the Silk Road, in the case of China and France, Asia and Europe, East and West. Homi Bhabha has thus written of one such transnational writer, V.S. Naipaul, and how “his characters made their way in the world while acknowledging its fragmented structures, its split imperatives, and a prevailing sense of a loss of cultural authority” (Location xi). The development of this split, this loss of connection and home, links the physical and metaphysical border crossings that mark this domain of literature. This split also raises another question: whether writers such as Gao, Cheng, Dai, and Sa, effectively move literary studies beyond Eurocentrism, or whether, for instance, the choice of Gao, a French citizen and the first Chinese

30 Gloria Anzaldúa’s seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is one such work that concerns itself with physical borderlands, the United States–Mexico border.

31 The Silk Road, also known as the Silk Routes by historians, was known to have been used as a commerce route connecting Asia, parts of the Middle East, and Europe beginning under the reign of China’s Emperor Wu during the Han Dynasty in 130 BCE; however, the same routes were used earlier, as early as 500 BCE when sections of it were known as the Persian Royal Road (Mark). The use of the Silk Road ceased in 1453 CE; at that time the Ottoman Empire closed trade with the west.
writer to win the Nobel Prize are evidence of that body’s and of those writers’ entrenched Eurocentrism. In order to overcome the risks of “essentialist, fundamentalist, anti-European critique,” border thinking and its inherent tensions provide “a critical response to both hegemonic and marginal fundamentalisms,” including Eurocentric fundamentalism, seeking a broader canon, critical dialogues that aim toward achieving a “pluriversal” as opposed to universal world, and inclusion of previously marginalized people (Grosfoguel).

**The Problematic of the Third Space**

I will argue here that the voices and narratives of transnational Francophone-Chinese writers Cheng, Dai, Gao and Shan Sa inhabit the Third Space, discussed above. Homi Bhabha writes, in a passage that exemplifies what he thinks the Third Space might be, “The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious” (Location 53). Thus, this kind of productive space lends itself neither to “mimicry” nor to transparency. It does not facilitate the interpretation of information passed from one to another but is a space in which meaning is created that belongs neither to one space nor the other, a space that Bhabha describes as lacking in “primordial unity” and fixity (55). By entering this dialectic space, one may be able to evade binaries and, in Bhabha’s words, “emerge as the others of our selves” (56). In the to-and-fro between lands, such as France and China, Bhabha allows for a creative space that favors a fluidity of “cultural identification and discursive address” so that people, nations, and literary narratives emerge as subjects. Bhabha, playing with the concept of
“dissemination” and the embedded word “nation” in The Location of Culture, looks closely at spaces in which nations move to the margin and migrants’ exiles to the spotlight, spaces that are less homogenous, less centered, and focused on the work of the “articulation of cultural differences and identification than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism” (201). Some critics have envisioned Bhabha’s forays into the concept of Third Space as an academic “talisman” that offers the possibility of reconceptualizing the notion of difference (Lossau 63). Geographer Julia Lossau, writing in “Pitfalls of (Third) Space: Rethinking the Ambivalent Logic of Spatial Semantics,” sees the ambivalence in the function such a space serves in cultural and social theory, allowing first, the coexistence of different cultures, narratives, and identities, but also in more problematic fashion, a space of identification and of locating subjectivities. Furthermore, Lossau takes exception to the use of spatial language and terminology—involving a type of determinism and fixity that recalls positioning oneself with a Geographic Information System (GIS)—for such symbolic endeavors, and shows their pitfalls if misconstrued. “If third space is not thought of as a category of observation but transformed into a spatial unit, it is converted from a marker of difference to an element of traditional identity politics,” Lossau writes (72). In essence, the danger rests in elevating and attaching oneself to an identity of disidentification, as I will explore further in this chapter through Gao Xingjian’s rejection of ideologies, of what he calls “-isms.”

Lossau and a number of other critics have also seen difficulties with the way Bhabha framed his discourse of the Third Space as well as in the current terminology of transnationalism. Ulrich Beck, for instance, sees this space as identified with a view of subjectivities across space, rather than across time and history, and rejects this “spatial bias” (22). Others, including Edward Soja, reject the First Space–Second Space dualism of Bhabha’s work and the associated linearity
of his Third Space. Acknowledging the importance of the spatial border-crossing perspective, Soja sees it as expanding to become a strategy against forms of oppression and a starting point for new approaches, including his own, which he terms “critical thirding-as-Othering,” by which he suggests the possibility of going beyond linearity to lateral or spatial forms of logic that create new possibilities for knowledge of the self and others. Geographer Julia Lossau argues that Bhabha’s linear ideas bind one to a “territorial trap” of spatiality, identity, and homogeneity—spatial language and spatial subjectivities—that limits radical subjectivities from emerging in the shadow of the nation-state and restricts the non-spatial narratives that one can create. It may thus be helpful to envision spatiality as more of an imagined notion than a territorial concept, which is far easier to do in works such as Gao Xingjian’s short story “La Crampe,” in which land and water borders are more abstractly and allegorically envisioned than when the borders involve China and its provinces, as they do in the highly territorial travelogue of his novel *La Montagne de l’âme*. In both works, however, the protagonist deals with dislocation, in one case, being held offshore by currents and in the other, wandering, often lost, through the Sichuan mountains. “Due to their unstable positionalities, these subjects dissolve the boundaries between cultures and nations that have gone unquestioned for a long time,” Lossau writes (65). Such narratives of travel and unstable sitting permit new spaces to open. “Borderline existences . . . are linked to concepts of multiple identities which depict subjects as able to partake in different cultures at the same time,” Lossau adds. Others have questioned whether Bhabha’s vagueness in defining a Third Space is deliberate, involving what is often termed by critics such as Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner a transnational (Ikas and Wagner prefer postcolonial) position of the speaking subject (98). “Doing so, the thinking subject does not only generate a new space but rather opens
a new position for his- or herself,” Ikas and Wagner state. A kind of “double negation” results in a new spaciousness that goes beyond mere duality.

Boundary crossings into this imagined Third Space inform the Francophone space described in David Der-wei Wang’s redrawing of “center versus margin” on the imaginary map of the Chinese diaspora, which he highlights via noteworthy writers’ increasing acclaim in translingual circles within Western countries, as they write in both Chinese and the language of their adopted homelands. For Wang, while marginal literatures from outside and throughout Mainland China need to be taken seriously as a critical component of the Sinophone diaspora, dialectical ideas have been replaced by a new paradigm which captures the new multiplicity of the works being produced by Chinese natives outside of China, such as those who have resettled in France. Wang writes: “This should not be taken to mean that the marginal can occupy the center, as if the old notion of dialectic struggle were being revived . . .” (Running Wild 241). The boundary crossings in the lives and literature of these four exemplary Francophone-Chinese writers have thus become a part of such a negotiation and create a third way, whether one refers to it as a Third Space or not, at the very least an in-betweenness that constitutes the spaces and exchanges in this ongoing dialogue between individuals and cultures.

**Spaces of Silence: Expansion and Constriction**

The Third Space of cultural translingualism through which I am reading the works of these four writers is at once one of silences, both isolating and freeing, and one where meaning is at times constricted and at times expanded. Between constriction and expansion, linguistic silences and mobilization of meaning, between departure and return in the physical sphere of
border crossings, the Third Space of cultural translingualism, expressed through the literary works of François Cheng, Gao Xingjian, Dai Sijie, and Shan Sa, is not the same for everyone. For some, it is a welcomed space, for others a place of painful exile. For some it is a place of multiplicity and for others of emptiness. For some, it is a place of solace, for others, of fear. What it entails cannot, at any rate, be universalized. Of “[t]he enigma of language,” Homi Bhabha writes, “namely that it is both internal and external to the speaking subject, that there is an articulation of the self with others which marks the emergence of the self and which the self does not control . . .” (Location 210). François Cheng looks to traditional Chan (Zen) Buddhist ideas to find that Third Space, situating it in a doctrine that pervades Chinese thought and has long been part of the exchange with the West; it is the traditionally Chinese way of envisioning the living universe, the breath that enlivens it, and humankind’s situation within it, as humans seek to navigate the diverse obstacles placed in their path (F. Cheng, Le Dialogue 14-15). Cheng writes: “Car le fonctionnement du Souffle est ternaire; on distingue en effet trois types de souffle qui agissent en concomitance: le Yin, le Yang et le Vide-médian. Ce dernier, un souffle en soi, est là lorsque le Yin et le Yang sont en présence” (15). The polarities that are denoted by the terms Yin and Yang are often taken in binary fashion in Western culture, with Yin representing qualities such as the feminine, passivity, coldness, and darkness along with the moon and negative spaces, and Yang representing qualities that can be described as masculine, active, hot, and bright along with the sun and positive space. Yet, many overlook the multiplicity of “le Vide-médian” and Cheng’s statements echo the Buddha’s statement that “the Middle Way . . .—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to ... self-awakening, to unbinding” (“Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta”). The Third Space or Middle Way allows a transnational subjectivity to emerge in the work of Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa. Cheng further ties the Middle
Way to the Confucian triad of earth (i.e., the natural world), heaven (i.e., a guiding force), and humans (F. Cheng, *Le Dialogue* 16; Tu, “Ecological” 256). The heavenly domain throws the Yin into relief, whereas, the earth is exemplified by the Yang. Man inhabits the interstitial and regulatory realm of the Middle Way, also called “la Voie du Milieu” (16).

Scholars have considered this Middle Way and the move away from dualism as one away from Eurocentric ideas toward Eastern ones, particularly as Buddhism journeyed from India and Nepal where it originated in the sixth century BCE and into China in the third century BCE, with its talk of the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-Fold Path, and the Middle Way or Path. As Buddhism made its way into China, crossing borders, it encountered Taoism, the indigenous religion (Scarborough 19). While Buddhism comes to incorporate some Taoist ideas relating to what is knowable and unknowable, or divided and undivided, one key difference remains that while Taoism is interested in the universe (the “everything”), Buddhism is primarily concerned with the human experience of the universe and the experience of the self. The Buddhist Middle Way reveals an unbinding and dissolution of binaries, which result in an absence. “Nothingness,” Milton Scarborough writes in *Comparative Theories of Nonduality: The Search for a Middle Way*, “then, is essential to the Buddhist middle way. From this perspective, emptiness and nothingness are not empty of reality but full. Reality is simply too rich for the simplifications of language” (19). Thus, the empty space is one of production and a rich expansiveness. One could

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32 The Four Noble truths are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering (literally, “that which is difficult to bear”), the truth of the end or freedom from suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end or freedom from suffering. The first of the Eightfold Path is the fourth of the Four Noble truths and incorporates an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, also called the Middle Way.

33 Buddhism virtually disappeared in India around the twelfth century, which some scholars speculate was due to the all-encompassing nature of Hinduism, the pressure of Muslim invasions, or the pressures of Buddhist monastic life, according to the Asia Society (“The Origins”).
say that cultural translingualism, with its mixture of cultures and languages, provides this space that is paradoxically and simultaneously empty and full. For translingual writers, such as Cheng, eliminating this limiting duality is freeing, both from Western paradigms and from contemporary Chinese political oppression. John Welwood says the following about the harm that these fixed boundaries and borders bring about:

The dualistic mind is essentially a survival mechanism on a par with fangs, claws, stingers, scales, shells, and quills that other animals use to protect themselves. By maintaining a separate self-defense, it attempts to provide a haven of security in an impermanent world marked by continual change, unpredictability, and loss. Yet the very boundaries that create a sense of safety leave us feeling cut off and disconnected. (qtd. in Scarborough 11)

Cultural translingualism explores this connection, this idea that “map is not territory,” and that boundaries are human designations rather than statements of absolute truth.34

The paradoxical nature of human beings’ in-between existence is nowhere more apparent than in the number of languages they must manipulate if they are to forfeit silence, a task that some writers accomplish with ease, as when Gao switches between Chinese for novels like his bestselling La Montagne de l’âme (published in Taiwan in 1990 in Chinese as 灵山 or Lingshan, 1995 in French as La Montagne de l’âme, and 2000 in English as Soul Mountain) and French for some of his plays, including Le Somnambule (1995) and Quatre quatuors pour un week-end (1994). Shan Sa, a much younger writer, has also published both originally in Chinese, and then predominantly in her adopted language, French. Author and cinematographer Dai Sijie

---34 Many critics have discussed this idea that “map is not territory.” Most noteworthy is Jonathan Smith’s 1978 work Map is Not Territory, which provides a critique of Francophone mythologist Mircea Eliade’s ideas of the center versus the margin, the idea of spaces conceived through politics and the exercise of power (Cave 142).
has published novels in French, while his cinematic works, including *Les filles du botanistes* (2006), *Niu-Peng* (trans. *China, My Sorrow*) (1989), and *Xiao cai feng* (trans. *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*) (2000) were primarily in Chinese with Chinese actors, subtitled into languages including French, English, and Japanese. An unintended and paradoxical effect of juggling multiple languages may be to create the sense of a sort of bottleneck in which many ideas and multiple versions of words try to force themselves through a constricted space of thought and speech. Julia Kristeva, herself a transnational Francophone writer who immigrated to France from Bulgaria, writing in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), states: “Ainsi, entre deux langues, votre élément est-il le silence” (27-28). The silence comes not out of a lack—a lack of ideas to communicate, a lack of words, a lack of languages—but Kristeva suggests, from having to enter into only the most banal of conversations using approximation, leaving an empty cavern of what one intended to say. The silence is thus at times a space of navigation and negotiation in which obstacles and hurdles present themselves and are to be surmounted or avoided. Speaking of one linguistically and culturally translingual speaker who claimed that he “parlait le russe en quinze langues,” Kristeva says, “J’avais, quant à moi, le sentiment qu’il était mutique et que ce silence étale le poussait, parfois à chanter ou à rythmer des poèmes psalmodiés pour enfin dire quelque chose” (28). The perspective is always indirect, referential to the native tongue, Kristeva seems to claim. It is a hindrance, reducing the capacity and depth of one’s utterances and writings, even as Kristeva, a native of Bulgaria, has penned this work in French without substantial impediments.

While meaning is both constricted and expanded in physical and geographic border crossings, this kind of silence, be it self-imposed or thrust upon the speaker, plays a crucial role in creating multiplicities of meaning for polyglossic writers. Silence, for the Francophone-
Chinese writers, is the place to which one always returns, the place of the self away from the crowd, sometimes welcomed and other times imposed, away from the mirror that one must perpetually create through language. Gao Xingjian, in the most internationally acclaimed work of these authors, *La Montagne de l’âme*, indeed makes silence an integral part of his work, based on his voyage through mountains, villages, and history. At times, silence is associated with the achievement of a state of nirvana (Gao, *Montagne* 471). Despite Gao’s acknowledgment that he is an atheist, his works are reverential toward what he terms “the unknowable” and toward Buddhist and Taoist traditions (Gao, *Raison* 7). Gao writes:

> Le langage est comme une boule de pâte dans laquelle passent des phrases. Dès que tu abandonnes les phrases, c’est comme si tu pénétras dans un bourbier dont tu ne peux plus ressortir. . . . Quand les images sont perdues, l’espace aussi. Quand le son est perdu, le langage aussi. On marmonne sans bruit, on ne sait plus finalement ce que l’on raconte, au coeur même de la conscience subsiste encore un peu de désir, mais si ce reste de désir n’est plus, on accède au nirvana.\(^{35}\) (470-71)

Gao’s ideas on silence and writing resonate with Roland Barthes’ notion of *écriture blanche*, when language is liberated from the servitude it had come to acquire through the history of literature (*Degré* 55). Barthes first captures the sense of silence as “*disloquant*” (54). It becomes a privileged space of chaos, a veritable desert of words, in which one can perhaps find “la fraîcheur d’un état neuf du langage” or which can lead to agraphia, an inability to write and

\(^{35}\) Interestingly, Gao’s English language translator Mabel Lee has chosen to translate the Chinese term used not as “nirvana,” a Sanskrit word, but as “silence.” The word “nirvana” literally refers to a candle that has been blown out and captures an intense peace achieved from a stillness of the mind and a silence, freeing the mind from desires and aversions and other burdens (Gombrich, qtd. in Hwang 20-21).
communicate (54). In the best of circumstances, Barthes writes in the chapter of Le Degré zero de l’écriture (1972) titled “L’Écriture et le silence,” the writer escapes from silence to the emergence of a new, “neutral” writing, based on the indicative, situated amidst the cries and judgments of humanity while not participating in any of them, constituting itself through this absence, which is innocent rather than secretive or a source of refuge. Gao similarly uses silence as a point of departure for a narrative style that is often indicative and marked by its simplicity, such as the use of pronouns as protagonists in the novel La Montagne de l’âme, the use of pared-down sets in the avant-garde plays that were criticized in China for veering away from the theatrical social realism of the Cultural Revolution, and the oppositional points of view expressed on the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising in his play La Fuite (1992), which conflicted with the dominant pro-democracy discourse outside of China, and will be discussed in Chapter Four.

At other times, silence in Gao’s writing is found in the magnitude of nature, free from the precision and denotation of boundaries, and the perception of one’s small place in the world in relation to the natural environment that leads one to a place of silence. Gao writes: “Je passe entre ces énormes troncs dressés qui me forcent au silence. Souffrant du désir de m’exprimer, devant cette solennité, je perds mes mots” (Gao, Montagne 91). Unable to suppress desire, that is, unable to attain the place of nirvana in which a silence and stillness of the mind is achieved, the writer finds that forced silence brings suffering. At times, Gao’s silences are troubled and searing, broken by incomprehensible sounds, as he explores the Shennongjia forest, when the stone workers from the neighboring county of Badong, a remote and mountainous region

36 Barthes cites Camus’ L’Étranger (1942) as an example of this écriture blanche or écriture neutre, citing it as having “un style d’absence” that is almost “une absence idéale de style” (Degré 56).
accessible only by difficult roads or the Yangtze River, stop singing their quarry workers’ folk songs. Gao’s narrator observes and photographs them from his balcony, and their songs make his ears buzz and ring, as the sound hangs in the air, for “un fil de toile d’araignée qui flotte dans le vent a une forme, lui n’en a pas, il est insaisissable” (475). At other times, it is not nature but humankind that makes the silence oppressive, something particularly true for Gao whose plays were banned and whose voice was silenced in Mainland China. Writing of such first-person narratives and “narrational border crossings,” H. M. Daleski states that narrational shifts, often relegating the narrator to the status of an observer, occur when “a strongly marked territorial border is illicitly crossed, and this incurs a penalty—a clear loss of verisimilitude” (244). The switching between a “protagonist-narrator” and an “observer-narrator” allows the author to document a sense of immateriality, conflicted experience, and the pain of inhabiting a border space. From there emerges a paradox of being confined by cultural translingualism, silenced, and simultaneously freed, particularly from a repressive government, as is the case of Gao’s narrator of La Montagne de l’âme, inside the book when he flees to the mountain and forest, and outside the book, when he first experiences exile, and then seeks political asylum in France.

Thomas Moran attributes this silence before nature to the realization that “nature is beyond rhetoric” (Moran 222-24). The cultural and geographical border-crossing from civilization to nature has thus left the narrator in a confused state, even when he has found what he was seeking. Having looked for old-growth forest, the narrator has only found heavily logged Sichuan tracts, before being oriented toward the pure forest he seeks, filled with spruce, fir, hemlock, azaleas, and birdsong. The language of the cuckoo, which he hears circling him, is not

37 Gao’s characters include “I,” “you,” “he,” and “she”—described as a “polyphony of narrating selves”—although all represent the same narrator, based on Gao’s experiences and travels. This narrative style is explored further in Chapter Three.
his own. He is geographically disoriented: “Un coucou chante, invisible; en haut, en bas, à gauche, à droite, comme s’il tournait sans cesse pour me désorienter” (Gao, Montagne 91). This world is at once one of discoveries and, at times, terror, one in which he is separated from his guide, literally lost in a 3,000-meter expanse of ancient forest at high altitude. He tells the reader that he has neither map nor compass nor the name of the guide who accompanied him, futilely scouring his memory for signs, as his knowledge lacks a foundation and offers only chaos. The narrator states that his memory is failing him and the more he tries to order the images, the more the images blend together, and he then gives in to fatigue and falls on the damp earth (96). When he does cry out for help, hoping for rescue or a miracle, he is met with an echo that fills the space and underscores its isolation. The protagonist states:

Je crie. Je ne peux que hurler, de manière hystérique, comme une bête sauvage . . .

Je croyais qu’en montagne il y avait toujours de l’écho. Même l’écho le plus triste et le plus solitaire serait mieux que ce silence terrifiant. Ici, le son se perd dans l’atmosphère saturée d’humidité et l’épais brouillard. Je réalise alors que je n’arriverai même pas à faire porter ma voix . . . (Gao, Montagne 95)

Forests, according to Robert Pogue Harrison, are spaces “where the logic of distinction goes astray” and “where perceptions become promiscuous with one another, disclosing latent dimensions of time and consciousness” (Harrison x).38 Fleeing from culture, politics, and society—and perhaps even from the limitations of language and of the self—places the narrator

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38 Thomas Moran, analyzing the role of nature in Gao’s work, finds that his use of forests is similar to their use in Dante’s Inferno (c. 1308-21), in that the reader of Dante never learns how he gets out of the dim forest, nor does the reader of Gao’s La Montagne de l’âme learn how the narrator finds his way. The book ends with him lost. Moran also points out the existential angst associated with a park in Jean-Paul Sartre’s La Nausée (1938). The tree with its chaotic branches provides the contrast between rational civilization and irrational nature, indifferent to civilization, in Robert Pogue Harrison’s analysis in Forests: The Shadow of Civilization (1993).
in a transcendent state in which he can observe his multiple selves and the difficulties of living in society and apart from society (Tam, “Gao Xingjian, the Nobel” 14).

In *La Montagne de l’âme*, the divine is not only depicted naturally as a small green frog with one eye open, looking, and one eye blinking, but this representation of the divine is voiceless in the soundless snow. Gao writes:

> Quand Dieu parle aux hommes, il ne veut pas qu’ils entendent sa voix.
> Moi, cela ne m’étonne pas, comme s’il devrait en être ainsi, comme si Dieu avait toujours été une grenouille avec un œil tout rond, intelligent, grand ouvert . . .
> Le langage incompréhensible qu’il parle de son autre œil, en clignant la paupière à l’attention des hommes, il me faut le comprendre. . . . Tout est calme alentour.
> La neige tombe en silence. Je suis surpris par ce calme. Un calme de paradis.

(*Montagne* 669-70)

The narrator acknowledges his own lack of comprehension in this silence that follows his winter exploration after a visit with a friend who has come to talk about his experiences during the Cultural Revolution of being re-educated through hard work on a prison farm. In the friend’s story, silence is what follows a loud whistle and the demand that someone reveal who had tied a bag of harvested peanuts at the peaked top of a tall building. Another friend then visits with his tale, involving his family’s possession of now-buried relics and valuable antiquities dating back to the Shang Dynasty (c. 2070-c. 1600 BCE), the questioning and harassment that the friend is subjected to, and his decision to leave the treasure buried for the future. Yet another seeks his help and he rebukes him: “Cesse de plaisanter,” the narrator responds to his friend’s request that he speak for the people because he is the conscience of the people. “C’est toi, le peuple? Ou bien c’est moi? Ou bien le prétendu nous? Je n’écris que pour moi” (659). The protagonists turn from
matters of truth and conscience to putting on a coat against the cold and getting a bite to eat to satisfy the narrator’s hunger, dealing with the material facts of life. All of these conversations lead the narrator away from certainty toward the struggle against the cold, toward silence—or at least away from public communication toward intrapersonal and limited or secure forms of interpersonal communication.

**Reterritorializing Narratives of Departure**

Gao’s most discussed work, said to be semiautobiographical, *La Montagne de l’âme*, concerns itself primarily with the notion of freedom. The narrator wanders through towns, recounting encounters with many individuals, seeking knowledge that ranges from the scientific (in the reserve for pandas), cultural (through the collection of folksongs, folktales, and folklore), and historic (exploring ruins and historic sites) to religious (seeking knowledge from elders and hermits) and personal (looking inward as much as outward), but he seeks freedom in an organic manner without overarching plans and is open to immersion in the present. Gao tries to reterritorialize a space that is both external and internal without a nameable and dominant character like James Joyce’s Leopold Bloom journeying through Dublin. His protagonist, only known as “I,” “you,” and “he,” journeys through the lesser known regions of China on the outskirts of Han civilization, regions inhabited by the Qiang, Miao, and Yi peoples. He creates a differing type of “nomadologie” to use a term coined by French postmodern critics Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which they have defined as both a knowledge and an art that is nomadic and developed “à l’extérieur de l’appareil d’État” (Deleuze and Guattari 472, 434-527; Thouroude 120). Gao implements what some have called a nomadic subject focused on
subjectivity, which will be further discussed in Chapter Four; in this work, this is a kind of nomadic subjectivity which, as Rosi Braidotti states, maintains “a nomadic and not unitary vision of the subject, [and] instead of impeding ethically relevant positions, constitutes a necessary precondition for the formulation of an ethics which measures up to the complexities of our time” (Saleri). While this nomadic subjectivity is not necessarily limited to being defined in this way, the nomadic subjectivity and style of writing are integral to Gao’s literary works. His geographic wanderings, including a tripartite shifting of protagonist pronouns, further increases the nomadic quality of Gao’s writing.

Gao’s *La Montagne de l’âme* has been most studied for its use of the pronouns “I,” “you,” “he,” and “she” as the protagonists in the novel, an avant-garde choice that attempts to depict the same journey and individuals from alternating perspectives, but the text pushes past traditional literary boundaries in other ways, too. Critics have designated this stylistic choice as constituting a text that defies traditional genres. Torbjörn Lodén, in the essay “World Literature with Chinese Characteristics: On a Novel by Gao Xingjian,” states that the novel, *La Montagne de l’âme* should be first evaluated as a work of art. Lodén writes:

To refer to *Soul Mountain* [*La Montagne de l’âme*] as a “novel” is to use this term for want of a better one. It contains dialogues and stream-of-consciousness monologues, as we may expect from a novel, but also pieces, which look like journalistic reportage, anthropological reports, philosophical essays, and historical treatises. This combination of themes is in some ways reminiscent of classical Chinese writings, but the technique and intellectual content is also informed by Gao’s deep insights into Western culture. Both in terms of form and content, the
result clearly transcends any conceivable Chinese or Western sources of inspiration. (266)

Gao’s nomadic journey and text are, as one critic states, “ancré en Chine” but defy nationalistic and literary boundaries, becoming as another writer put it, a “guide routard céleste” (Thouroude 126). In Chapter Fifty-two of La Montagne de l’âme, Gao writes, “Au cours de mon voyage, les heurs et les malheurs de sa vie se résumaient à la route; j’étais plongé dans mon imagination, avec comme écho ton voyage intérieur; quel est le plus important des deux voyages? Lequel est le plus réel?” (422). Condemning the binary format of debate, and even the grammatical binaries of you and me, singular and plural, him and her, Gao dismisses these questions, both in form and content, and engrosses himself in the journey, the process, the exploration, and the Third Space of the route itself, which separates or joins two, or an infinite number, of disparate locations. The narrator immediately follows this exposition on the journey that is human life with the sense of wandering and hybridity that these disparate elements entail. He states: “Tu es dans ton propre voyage spirituel, tu erres dans le monde entier avec moi en suivant tes pensées, et plus tu vas loin, plus tu te rapproches jusqu’à ce que, inévitablement, il devienne impossible de nous dissocier . . .” (Gao, Montagne 422). The Third Space, in Gao’s work, is often a place of merging and emergence with one person stepping back into the shadows, distance expanding, and another “him” stepping back from a clear form into a vague silhouette. One can feel the constant tug between the individual and society in the interplay of pronouns and the struggles of the narrator, which remain unresolved.

The novel also presents elements of the picaresque novel, with the narrator having roguish properties, passing from town and town and woman to woman, often with connecting dramatic struggles, in which the sense of searching, embedded in adventure, takes precedence
over the human connection. Yet, forgoing the elements of realism as well as satire, so often part of picaresque works, Gao produces a work where there is something of both Thomas Mann resisting the social ascent and instead opting for a journey to restore life in the wake of an erroneous death sentence of lung cancer, and something of Hunter S. Thompson’s blending of the gonzo road trip memoir with his own brand of so-called new journalism in such works as *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972) and *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*. The literary term *picaro*, from the Spanish, means a rogue or adventurer, and Gao’s narrator qualifies on both counts. Gao has crafted a hero following the archetype of another hero and *picaro*, Homer’s Odysseus, who served as inspiration for yet another odyssey, that of James Joyce’s modernist novel *Ulysses* (Mac Adam 123). The hero of such novels does not always act heroically, as Gao’s narrator proves, and when asked by one audience member about the veracity of lived experience in the sexual encounters in *La Montagne de l’âme* and their purpose as they interrupt the flow of travels, philosophical musings, and other matters, Gao responded by saying that he used these sexual encounters in the book as a way of redeeming lost memory, showing how people survive crises and disasters in ways that “reveal the weakness of human beings.”

Gao stated, “Some people are heroes; others are not” and added that the sexual encounters show, in some measure, “the utopias we try to create” in sometimes trying to assume god-like qualities, showing how man may tend to think of himself as a god and demonstrating his flawed nature.39

Gao creates the protagonists “I/je,” “you/tu,” who are two sides of the same person, along with “he/il” and “she/elle,” using the quotidian tool of personal pronouns instead of named

39 Gao made these comments the first time I met him, while speaking on February 26, 2001, at the Florence Gould Hall of the French Institute Alliance Française hosted by the Asia Society, China Institute, and French Institute Alliance Française. The quotes are as translated from Chinese to English by Mabel Lee, who also translated *Lingshan (La Montagne de l’âme)* from Chinese to English.
individuals in a way that neither essentializes the characters nor eliminates the kind of specificity that a travelologue calls for. In fact, Gao specifically avoids the “we/nous” pronoun. The narrator of the *La Montagne de l’âme* states:

> “Tu” et “elle” et “il” et même “ils” et “elles,” même si ce sont des images chimériques, pour moi ont un contenu plus important que le prétendu “nous.” Si je dis “nous,” j’ai aussitôt des doutes, car combien comprend-il de “je”? Ou bien, combien y a-t-il de reflets opposés à “je,” de silhouettes de “tu” et de “je,” de “elle,” que “il,” “tu” et “je” font naître sous forme de fantasmes, ainsi que de “ils” et “elles” qui sont toutes les figures animées de “il”? Rien n’est plus trompeur que ce “nous.” (423)

Gao has spoken publicly of how the “we” voice, to him, is the voice of oppression, speaking for oneself and others with a falsely assumed authority. Gao rejects this type of totalitarian voice and multiplicity, embracing always the individual and the individual voice. And, as such, he has often rejected the role, in the wake of international news of censorship, arrests of artists, and imprisonments in China, bowed out gracefully from being a spokesperson for Chinese expatriates or against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Gao sees and prefers the multitudinous facets of the individual: the “I” as examined from within; the “you” in contact with others, perceived by others, and sensing the panoptical presence of society; the “he,” which is the individual not in the presence of others; and the always changing “she.” Gao also accepts the third-person plural “they” as a composite image with some distance. Indeed, Gao takes an extreme position against the pronoun “nous,” against notions that can range from community and shared empathy to ideology or dogma. Only the first-person plural voice speaks for others with such a presumed authority, or speaks for him without his permission, and is completely rejected.
as complicit in the domination and subjugation of others, as he experienced during the Cultural Revolution and with the banning of his works in the 1980s.

At times, the nihilism of Gao’s view re-emerges in a kind of Buddhist sense of detachment. The self is shared with the world, but the individual’s misery, demons, and painful desires are also conferred upon the world, opening a Pandora’s box of pronouns, misfortune, and unhappiness. The narrator admits that “mon malheur, c’est que j’ai réveillé le ‘tu’ porteur de malchance. En réalité, ‘tu’ n’est [sic] pas malheureux, ton malheur, c’est entièrement moi qui en suis la cause, il vient uniquement de l’amour que je me porte. Ce satané ‘je’ n’aime que lui-même à en mourir” (424). Once opened, that expanding box of pronouns, misfortunes and perceptions can no longer be closed. One wonders if hope even remains inside the box, as in the myth. Can what is done not be undone? Essentialism or singularity is impossible, much like univocality in the face of the Tower of Babel as seen by this Francophone, Sinophone, transnational writer. The novel’s narrator bleakly states, “Je ne pourrai me débarrasser de moi-même que lorsque je me serais défait de ‘tu.’ Mais si un jour je te rappelle, je ne pourrais plus jamais m’en éloigner” (424). He imagines games in which “I” and “you” change places, exchanging images and desires, but he cannot imagine it in the current structure of society and life, which require an utterly new beginning to the writing, the story, and the universe. Speaking at the French Institute Alliance Française in New York in 2001, Gao expanded on the significance of the pronouns, saying that they are not “a game of language” but rather “three different levels by which to enter the work,” albeit one based in a certain artifice to evoke the imagination and the workings of the inner mind.
The book begins in the “you/tu” voice, which Gao, despite his nihilism and rejection of solidarity with others, appears to enjoy and explores deeply. Gao’s narrator in *La Montagne de l’âme* vaguely explains these connections between beings:

Toi-même, tu ne sais pas clairement pourquoi tu es venu ici. C’est pas hasard que dans le train tu as entendu quelqu’un parler d’un lieu nommé Lingshan, la Montagne de l’Âme. Cet homme était assis en face de toi, ta tasse à thé était posée à côté de la sienne et les vibrations du train faisaient tinter l’un contre l’autre les couvercles de vos tasses (11).

The you, a threshold of perspectives, perhaps comes closest to articulating the site and context of the Third Space. It is the place where the two cups collide and make noise, the space of intermingling and creation. Perhaps, therefore, it is no coincidence that Gao himself said that the “you” “allows fantasy to go wild” and also “gives absolute freedom.” As in Gao’s other works, including his short story “La Crampe,” the Third Space of betweenness is a watery place of *va-et-vient*, of change and of memories that fade in and out on a whim and of the inconsistency of language with its ever shifting postmodern signs. It is the “you” who goes in search of a former home, finding neither the heavy black door nor the pile of rubble (Gao, *Montagne* 439). He finds the matter of his childhood elsewhere, where he was not raised, in the glimpse of another door, another courtyard, clothes drying on bamboo poles, in simulacra. That is where both the transnational writer and the one who has watched time pass must find the window into his past, a bath of homesickness in a place that combines the interiority of memory with the exteriority of simulacra, a place that is changed and not of the original. The narrator of *La Montagne de l’âme*

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40 Gao made these comments while speaking on February 26, 2001, at the Florence Gould Hall of the French Institute Alliance Française hosted by the Asia Society, China Institute, and French Institute Alliance Française. The quotes were translated from Chinese to English by Mabel Lee.
compares the changes to memories influenced by alcohol, also undergoing a process of distillation and sweeping one under its spell with its aromas (441). To make contact with oneself, one must be in touch with the “you” of Gao’s narrative voices who in “un instant peuvent-ils réveiller en toi un souvenir. Et c’est seulement dans ces souvenirs que tu peux te protéger sans subir de blessures. En fin de compte, dans ce monde immense, tu n’es qu’une goutte d’eau dans la mer, faible et minuscule . . . des souvenirs vagues, indistincts comme tes rêves,” and in the end they only come forth as “des phrases bien ordonnées, quelques fragments passés au crible des structures du language” (441-42).

**The Silence Between**

Silence—as well as attempts to cross the borders out of silence—is linked in the works of François Cheng to the notion of being “entre,” as he highlights the double meaning of the interval and the opportunity for entrance. Cheng feels that it is the silent opening between individuals that breeds understanding, quoting the words of another transnational writer, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke:

Silencieux ami de nombreux lointains, sens
Comme ton souffle accroît encore l’espace.
Dans la charpente des sombres beffrois.
Consens au carillon. Ce qui vit de toi
Deviendra fort par cette nourriture.
Entre dans la mutation, entre et sors. (Cheng, *Le Dialogue* 69)
Individuals are thus transformed both by silence and space and then, by communion with others. The middle space, often marked by silence, makes the to-and-fro of communication possible. Cheng writes: “On connaît l’importance accordée par la pensée chinoise à ce qui se passe entre les entités vivantes, cernées par la notion du Souffle du Vide-médian, tant il est vrai que c’est bien dans l’ ‘entre’ qu’on entre, qu’on accède éventuellement au vrai” (Le Dialogue 46). Cheng finds truth in silence and empty space, which he shows to never be truly empty, but as a place of passage, of silent temporal echoes that electrify humanity. Exemplifying this, Cheng penned the following poem to accompany his etymological musings on the word “entre”:

Entre
Le nuage
et l’éclair
Rien
Sinon le trait
de l’oie sauvage
Sinon le passage
Du corps foudroyé
 au royaume des échos
Entre (47)

The silence of in-between spaces, symbolized by Cheng’s hyphen, eventually gives way to sound, be it the thunder that follows lightning, the kingdom of echoes, or the honking of the wild goose, a bird symbolizing communication and marriage in traditional Chinese culture (Newman 13-14). The breaking of silence is not harmonious but a necessary passage and sometimes a savage act.
The words of Cheng, a long-established Francophone-Chinese writer, echo through the younger generations of Chinese-Francophone writers, as Shan Sa writes in a poem in her collection *Le Vent vif et le glaive rapide*, “Arbre de la falaise / Ton souffle m’a courbée” (10). For Sa, just as the tree—especially the one standing at heights where it is most vulnerable to variable winds, to the force of onshore gusts, and to nature’s invisible forces—is bent, changed, and permanently transfigured, humankind, too, is transformed by the unseen power of silence. This collection of poems is filled with images of silent, unseen actors—“des voyelles muettes,” which one poem’s narrator feels on the skin; “Les fleuves alanguis / Les oiseaux fugaces / Les hautes montagnes . . . Ce ne sont, hélas / Que des reflets / Que des mirages / Un vent violent les chasse”; “Le vent du Nord” that makes the reeds cry (Sa, *Le Vent* 12, 43, 45). Furthermore, the sounds in these poems are often perplexing, inadequate, or secondary to the unseen forces. Love is “Plus joyeux / Plus léger / Plus vibrant / Que le chant de mon pays / Cinq mille ans de neige et de poésie” (15). The narrator of another poem asks, “Quel est ce hurlement dans cette nuit de neige?” (40). Another poem’s narrator, perceiving that northern wind that makes the reeds cry, asks, “Est-ce le chant de mon pays / Qui appelle ses âmes errantes?” (45) One’s name only stands in as a signifier for the self, and the poem collection closes with a poem stating, “Il suffit de m’appeler / Par mon nom d’Origine” (48). Sa does not mention the wind in the title of her collection but merely breath, as though it originated from inside the tree and was not an external force which could shape the tree. “Le vent vif et le glaive rapide / Sont les seules bénédictions / De mes aïeux,” is the full text of Sa’s eponymous poem (47). Sa captures the notion of identity in this work, published when she was twenty-seven, in a mode alluded to by Jacques Derrida in *Glas*, and described by Gayatri Spivak as capturing “the wind that is not spirit—where it has not yet reached the level of adjectival description” (Spivak, *Aesthetic* 176). One could say that the
silence of the breath or the Middle Way shows transformation beyond the symbolic realm.

Both Buddhism and Taoism, like many spiritual traditions, emphasize the role of silence. Jin Y. Park, writing in *Buddhism and Postmodernism*, thus makes the paradoxical statement that “the use of silence has been one dominant speech act in Buddhist literature,” one that Park calls “the multi-layered meaning of silence” (68). The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra,* a Sanskrit text that entered China during the fifth century and emphasizes the importance of inner perception (*pratyamagati*) and self-realization (*svasiddhanta*), focuses on this space of silence as the space of human consciousness and on that consciousness’ connection to the universe (Porter 3-4). One Taoist text suggests that while “the employment of silence looks like difficulty of utterance,” in effect, “[s]incerity is the first step toward (the knowledge of) the Tâo; it is by silence that that knowledge is maintained; it is by gentleness that (the Tâo) is employed” (*Texts of Tâoism* 266). Following the example of the Buddha’s silence, Buddhists still follow those meditative practices that explore consciousness and are viewed as “speaking out” silence or “acting out” silence (Park 69). “When Zen enlightenment is viewed as a non-linguistic pure state, language is understood mainly through its representational function,” Park writes, and notes that, at times, language can become a liability in its representational function, hindering one’s understanding of truth by standing in between the truths and its receiver and creating distortion.

Silence then creates a space which can also be a border and allow one to penetrate two spaces at the same time. François Cheng, explaining this interstitial function of the “entre,” draws on the Taoist notion of the Yin, the Yang, and the Middle Way, with its vital components being the process of circulation, interaction, and transformation, and interaction being both of

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41 A *sūtra* is a collection of principles, truths, or aphorisms and means “thread” in Sanskrit.
42 The Tâo means “the path” or “the way” and is considered to be the universal principal that governs all of creation, described as the “natural condition of life” by Taoist Chuang Tzu (“What is the Tâo?”).
same and different, self and other, sound and silence (87). Milton Scarborough, writing in *Comparative Theories of Nonduality: The Search for a Middle Way* (2009), states that Asian cultures have had a longer history with such notions of nonduality than Western nations. In the sixth century BCE, records show that two terms existed to discuss existence in the East: permanent existence (*asitta*) and no existence (*nasitta*) (15). Buddhism began to change such notions in ways, according to Scarborough, that opened the door to a third or Middle Way. The self consisted of name, form, and a number of interactive processes, including physical sensations, emotions, mood, perceptions, and consciousness. Circular cause-and-effect relationships gained importance, Scarborough writes, reducing the importance of linear narratives. Cheng writes in *Le Dialogue*, “Le Vide-médian est proprement le Trois—que les confucéens traduisent par l’idée du Milieu-juste—, qui, né du Deux, permet au Deux de se dépasser” (87). Cheng thus describes this Third Space, sometimes one of silence, as a place of fecundity, thought, and transcendence. “Le vrai Trois—ni terrain neutre, ni coup de vent qui passe, encore moins compromis qui n’est qu’un sous-Deux—ne peut être là que si le vrai Deux est; mais, une fois là, il est l’authentique Voie qui tend vers l’Ouvert et l’Infini” (89-90).

Furthermore, silence is sometimes a pause, sometimes an internal dialogue, and it can even be language-dependent.43 “Habité à présent par l’autre langue, sans que cesse en lui le dialogue interne, l’homme aux eaux souterrainement mêlées vit l’état privilégié d’être constamment soi et autre que soi, ou alors en avant de soi,” writes Cheng in *Le Dialogue* (79). The pauses come from the plenitude of this translingual space and an approach that Cheng calls “stéréophonique” or “stéréoscopique,” a perspective that cannot help but be

43 One could consult work on semiotics to think about this language dependency. Ivan Fónagy states that even sneezing is language-dependent: the French say “atchoum,” while the onomatopoeia is “han-chee” in Chinese,” and “haptsi” in Hungarian, for example (2).
“multidimensionnelle” (79-80). This silence is the silence of the thinker and the interior world, even though it cannot be free of language. Of language Cheng writes:

C’est qu’un idiome n’est pas seulement un instrument objectif de désignation et de communication: il est également le moyen par lequel chacun de nous se fait progressivement, ce par quoi chacun se forge un caractère, une pensée, un esprit, un monde intérieur mü par des sensations et des sentiments, des désirs et des rêves. . . . Et à un degré plus haut, elle est ce par quoi l’homme est à même de se dépasser en accédant à une forme de création . . . C’est bien au moyen de notre langue, à travers notre langue, que nous nous découvrons, que nous nous révélons, que nous parvenons à nous relier aux autres, à l’univers des vivants, à quelque transcendance en laquelle certains d’entre nous croient. (10)

It is from this border-crossing silence that creative thought emerges in a new ripened form that can be shared with others. It is what some critics call “the language of silence,” a space filled with linguistic polysemy and inherent ambiguity that incite diverse asynchronous interpretations, outside of the linearity of time and space (Fónagy 495).

Gao writes in both French and Chinese, although his novels are primarily in Chinese and his plays, produced for European audiences with European backing, are often in French. Silencing also occurs when Chinese writers see both their works and performances of their works banned, and through the self-censorship that writers, including Gao, experienced during the Cultural Revolution. Gao describes his sense of having “three lives” (Cheung). The first was in China, about which Gao says, “I began writing, drawing, and acting from a young age, and I set

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44 This “language of silence” is common in Eastern languages, called yojō in Japanese, meaning reverberation. It exists in other languages and is called Nachhall, Hinausschwingen einer Stimmung in German (Dombrady qtd. in Fónagy).
up a theater group when I was at university, but in all these areas I faced a lot of problems and political interference, until in the end my plays were banned and I couldn’t publish my works.”

Because the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) involved the denunciation of many for betraying the ideology of Mao Zedong with bourgeois and capitalist ideas, many felt the need to silence themselves out of fear of abuses that ranged from execution of tens of thousands of individuals, torture, and imprisonment to humiliation and relocation to labor camps. Intellectuals faced the greatest risk of punishment, and Gao burned all of his early works out of fear of being denounced during a time he calls the “red terror.” He was, nonetheless, sent to the countryside for forced labor and “re-education,” a time when he continued to write but buried his works, literally, underground, in a place filled with the silence of death. Gao often refuses to discuss his experiences during the Cultural Revolution and instead refers individuals to his novel Le Livre d’un homme seul, in which he captures this time period and his suffering. “People haven’t written enough about this sort of terror,” Gao says. “We should make sure this historical experience is known to future generations, to ensure it does not happen again” (Cheung). In Le Livre d’un homme seul, Gao sets the narrator in a city where people are chanting words such as “Dix mille ans pour le président Mao,” “Vous devez regarder partout et débusquer ces ennemis, ces arrivistes, ces serpents qui se cachent parmi nous, au sein du Parti comme au-dehors du Parti,” and “Le président [Mao] a très justement dit: Jamais les réactionnaires ne lâcheront prise s’ils ne sont pas battus à mort!” (Gao, Livre 56-57). Gao describes being terrified of being discovered by neighbors and the dilemma of whether to speak or remain silent in a world in which intimidation ruled and he realized that “qui cède à la vie sauve, qui se rebelle meurt”

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45 Gao uses the Chinese term laogai, which means reformed by work and designating forced labor (Gao, Livre 59).
During the Cultural Revolution, one’s self-censorship—a form of silencing—had to be total to avoid detection and dire consequences. The narrator recounts the actions of Lao Tan, who had already been subjected to interrogation:

Une fois, la porte fermée, il souleva un coin du store et observa si, dans la cour, les lampes des voisins étaient toutes éteintes. Il remit le store en place et vérifia minutieusement qu’aucun jour ne passait par la fenêtre. Il ouvrit alors la porte du poêle près duquel il avait posé un seau à moitié rempli d’eau, puis il commença à brûler ses manuscrits. Il y avait aussi une pile de carnets de notes et de journaux intimes qu’il avait rédigés depuis son entrée à l’université. Le poêle était petit, il devait arracher les pages une à une et attendre que le feu les ait réduites en cendres avant de les plonger dans le seau d’eau, cela afin d’éviter qu’un morceau de papier pas entièrement calciné ne s’envole à l’extérieur. (75)

Why was this silence, forced upon a person, undertaken by that person him–or herself? Prior to burning the papers, Lao Tan had seen Red Guards—Mao’s military and paramilitary units working under the Chinese Communist Party to eliminate bourgeois elements in society through attacks and persecution—beat an elderly woman to death in a public place in the middle of the day. For him, no trace could exist of the papers he possessed or he could face the same fate. Lao

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46 Gao mentions students attending so-called struggle meetings with rightist senior students were called forward, their alleged crimes mentioned, and without the accused students ever speaking, the accused disappeared (Livre 57-59). Gao says that no one ever saw them or mentioned them again, as if they had never existed. This was also when one first heard the term laogai or laodong gaizao, meaning “reform through work,” designating forced labor. Some did not know that their own parents had been sent to forced labor, which was sometimes, euphemistically, called “labor training.”

47 Lao Tan means “Old Tan,” and it is translated this way in the English edition, not in the French. In Le Livre d’un homme seul his proper name is also given as Tan Xinren, and he is subsequently seized as a counterrevolutionary (83-84).
Tan took the ashes, stirred them with liquid into a paste “pour qu’aucune trace ne subsiste,” and poured noodles and vegetables on top of the ash paste (77).

Silence thus becomes the norm for those who live in fear of punishment, even of being beaten to death. This negative side of silence pervades *Le Livre de l’homme seul*. The character of Lao Tan had also witnessed the public reaction to the beating death of the old woman, who had a sign hung with wire around her neck labeling her as a “reactionary landowner’s wife,” and the response ranged from more silence to participation in the beating. “Les passants se tenaient à l’écart et regardaient la scène immobiles, sans qu’aucun ne tente de s’interposer,” the narrator states (Gao, *Le Livre* 76). Adolescents and middle-school students wearing the old army uniforms of the Red Guard and sporting red armbands were beating the woman. A girl with pigtails beat the woman with a belt, the metal buckle striking the woman’s head. The woman, previously moaning, is then herself silenced. The silence of the crowd is linked to their immobility, a state in which individuals who lack agency are neither free to speak, nor to act, in opposition to Mao, his Red Guard, and the mission of the Cultural Revolution. One needs to be silenced in advance of any action, Lao Tan tells the narrator. Having given a noted writer a manuscript to read, Lao Tan is met with silencing words. He learns that even manuscripts that had nothing to do with the party could get him into trouble. “Il faut réfléchir à deux fois avant de se consacrer à la littérature! Ne donne pas tes manuscrits à n’importe qui, tu ne comprends pas encore à quel point c’est dangereux,” the writer told Lao Tan (78). He later revealed that he was part of the so-called black-gang element—a denounced academic or party official—and told

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48 “Black gang” (in Chinese *heibang*) was a term used in the 1960s and 1970s pejoratively, initially to refer to a select group of anti-CCP individuals and then to any academic authorities or party officials who had been denounced as counterrevolutionary. After 1968, the term referred specifically to who were “unrepentant” as opposed to those who could be reformed (Jian, Song, and Zhou 33).
Lao Tan about the Yan’an Rectification Movement, the early (1942-1944) effort to implement the rule of the Communist Party, which is said to have resulted in thousands of deaths (MacFarquhar, *Politics* 244; Jian, Song, Zhou 33). What Gao and his characters witnessed on an individual scale was being implemented on a societal scale.

Not only are words silenced, but entire histories must be erased, Gao shows, through the destruction of images and photographs that tell a story contrary to the narrative of Mao’s revolution. A photo of Lao Tan’s deceased mother in a YMCA theater troupe in military uniform with the national insignia would thus create problems, and he hopes his father has destroyed it. Lao Tan also destroys a photo in which his father is wearing Western clothing. The narrator states:

> Une vieille photo le représentait avec son père et sa mère. Son père portait un costume à l’occidentale et une cravate. Sa mère était vêtue d’une robe chinoise traditionnelle. Du vivant de sa mère, un jour qu’il l’aidait à sortir les vêtements des coffres pour les aérer, il avait vu cette robe chinoise de soie bleu foncé, imprimée de motifs à fleurs orange. Les couleurs de la photographie étaient passées. Son père et sa mère se souriaient. Entre eux, un enfant maigrelet, aux bras très menus, ouvrait grand les yeux, comme s’il attendait qu’un petit oiseau s’envole de l’appareil photographique. Sans hésiter une seconde, il jeta la photo dans le poêle où elle prit feu aussitôt. Son père et sa mère se recroquevillèrent et il eut soudain envie de la récupérer. Trop tard, la photo s’était enroulée puis à nouveau déroulée sous ses yeux: les silhouettes de ses parents n’étaient plus que

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49 Rodney MacFarquhar, writing in *The Politics of China: The Eras of Mao and Deng*, attempts to quantify the number of deaths “attributable to the Cultural Revolution,” citing those listed in the indictment of the ruling Gang of Four and others. MacFarquhar estimates the death toll around 500,000 (244).
cendres, l’une blanche, l’autre noire, et l’enfant maigre au milieu commençait à jaunir... Le costume de ses parents pouvait tout à fait les faire passer pour des capitalistes ou même des compradores à la solde des étrangers. Il brûla tout ce qui pouvait être brûlé, s’efforçant de rompre autant qu’il était possible avec son passé, enfouissant et gommant ses souvenirs, puisque à l’époque, même les souvenirs étaient un lourd fardeau. (75-76)

Both the imposed silence—the destruction of his voice, his photographs, and memories—and the existence of these distant memories are burdens that pale in comparison to the pain he endures when he actually loses his freedom. A Red Guard–issued wanted poster is attached to the front of Tan’s workplace, seeking Tan Xinren for his history as a counterrevolutionary, and his old notebooks, translation manuscripts, the photos that remained, books in English associated with his translation work, classical poems he had written for a woman, and even an English novel with a scantily clad woman on the cover, are all seized. All of this is cited as sound evidence of his anti-Communist Party leanings. In burning the photo of his parents, he was choosing silence; figuratively, he cremated them, feeling that safety resided in this loss, as in the loss of his manuscripts. He saw himself on the threshold in the photo, between his father’s Western clothing—which Gao said would have been associated with capitalists or with foreign firms—and his mother’s more traditional qipao, the traditional Chinese dress. The desire to blend in, to wipe out those dangerous boundaries, became another form of being silenced.

Events such as the beating of the elderly woman actually draw out Gao’s rebellious spirit; external events, despite the insistence of silence, result in internal boundary crossings, and are followed quickly by external and more public ones. Gao writes in Le Livre d’un homme seul:
Mêlé à la foule, contemplant cette scène, lui, il choisit en lui-même de se rebeller.

. . . [U]ne fois qu’un calme absolu fut revenue, il écrivit aussi un dazibao⁵⁰ . . . Il lui fallait profiter de l’exaltation qui ne l’avait pas encore lâché à la moitié de la nuit pour aller coller ce dazibao. Les masses avaient besoin de héros comme porte-parole pour demander la réhabilitation des gens accusés d’être opposés au Parti. (172-73)

This begins Gao’s path through the Cultural Revolution, in which he is forced to weed in paddy fields, feed himself with his allotment of rice, trudge through deep mud, trying to work as quickly as the native villagers and struggling through a difficult, short marriage. In this way Gao compares the people, both the villagers and those being “re-educated,” to the rice paddies, in which people became like plants, capable and useful only for physical labor, and their brains became useless, unnatural organs, and the human cultural accomplishments in were only a wasted effort from the past (343). The semiautobiographical protagonist is already moving in that direction, bothered by the intellectual analysis in Ibsen’s play Wild Duck, not so much by the luxury of the domestic scenes and dinner parties, but by the Hegelian analysis that creeps in, and by the characters who would be unable to understand the Chinese village much as he was unable to relate to their lives.

As Kwok-kan Tam writes of Le Livre de l’homme seul, “It is in language that subjectivity flows; it is also in language that time present is connected with time past and time future. . . . Meaning becomes possible only in the continuity of the subject” (“Language” 299). The notion of borders and border crossings features prominently in Gao’s Le Livre d’un homme seul as the narrator longs for a nest, a refuge, a home to be away from people and find privacy, a room

⁵⁰ A dazibao is a Chinese poster written in large characters, often publicly posted on walls and often communicating political opinions.
where he could say whatever he wanted without being heard by others, where he could voice his individual thoughts. He wishes to leave the pain of a ten-year marriage, of state rules saying that he had to be married and have proof of housing to live with a woman, all behind him. To cross borders in flight is to obtain freedom and contemplate the meaning of the word “homeland.”

Describing the need for a residence to protect his private life, too, Gao writes:

Il n’aurait pas cru pouvoir un jour quitter ce pays, c’était seulement lorsque l’avion s’était mis à vrombir et avait décollé de la piste de l’aéroport de Pékin qu’il avait réalisé qu’il en serait peut-être ainsi, il avait alors pensé que ‘peut-être’ il ne retournerait plus sur cette terre qui s’étalait sous le hublot, cette terre jaune qu’on appelait patrie, où il était né, avait grandi, avait été éduqué, était devenu adulte, avait souffert et que jamais il n’avait pensé quitter. D’ailleurs, avait-il une patrie? Cet immense espace jaune parcouru de fleuves gelés constituait-il sa patrie? Cette question n’avait traversé son esprit que plus tard et la réponse n’avait été claire pour lui que peu à peu. (Livre 28)

The plane lifting off establishes the trialectics of the border crossing, what Karen Ikas and Gerhard Wagner describe as an antagonistic relationship in which one has left from a first space, often an indigenous one in a postcolonial context, and arrived in a second space, often a colonial space in postcolonial theory. These first and second spaces are respectively, in Gao’s narrative, an intellectual space in the context of the Cultural Revolution, and an agrarian space in the context of the re-education of the Cultural Revolution. The Third Space comes from taking flight, physically, mentally, or emotionally, from this opposition. Ikas and Wagner suggest that Bhabha, whose Third Space notions they expand upon, uses the Third Space not to reconcile the opposition, which in their view would entail a move toward Hegelian dialectical logic. Rather,
the Third Space opens up other diverse possibilities. In Gao’s *Le Livre d’un homme seul*, one is dispensing with the pure entity of China and being pulled toward an *ailleurs*. It has been said that this lifting off is not simply about difference and differentiation but tends to introduce fluidity into the construction of one’s subjectivity (Lossau 63). It introduces the complex negotiation of subjectivity, difference, and space into Gao’s narrative. As Lossau asserts, a lifting off into a Third Space, in Bhabha’s view, is often aimed at surmounting “the reductionist power of cultural and political fixations” (64). A new space is created through the suffering that serves to shift the narrator’s subjectivity—including glimpses of the narrator as creative writer, terrified conformist, rebellious leader, courageous and foolhardy poster hanger, struggling spouse, and more. The longing for a rooted life comes from the split selves that one finds in *Le Livre de l’homme seul*, as in *La Montagne de l’âme* in which the diverse pronouns the narrator uses designate the same individual from different perspectives or different points of view. “[T]he reader will find that such an experiment with split selves is elevated to a level of experience in memory, history, imagination and translation of experience, which can be discussed in relation to the Chinese diaspora in the late twentieth century,” Kwok-kan Tam writes of Gao’s *Le Livre d’un homme seul* (“Language” 298). The use of a single voice, Tam asserts, can bind the author and reader to a single subjectivity, while Gao’s work with multiple subjectivities and multiple pronouns creates a dialogic exchange and a plurality of discoveries while the author is “lost in dislocation” (Tam, “Language” 299).51

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51 Tam cites Eva Hoffman’s book *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1990), which addresses the translingual aspects of writing, such as that of Gao. Hoffman speculates, perhaps erroneously, that it is common for the individual’s experience to become lost when expressed in the language of another.
Entanglement, Constriction, and Alienation

In one of Gao’s avant-garde plays, *L’Autre rive* (first published in Chinese as 彼岸) (1986), French actors play with this sense of dislocation and movement as they toy with a thick rope, paging through the script by the Francophone-Chinese playwright Gao Xingjian. “J’ai ici une corde, nous allons faire un jeu,” one actor states, “sérieusement, comme des enfants qui s’amusent. Notre pièce commence avec un jeu” (Gao, *L’Autre 55*). The avant-garde theatrical rope game, not unlike a metaphysical tug-of-war, involves human connection, influence, and disconnection, with emphasis on the rope, which at times forms a border and at other times an entanglement, becoming a physical representation of a Third Space primed for individual experimental, expression, and creation.\(^\text{52}\) Thus this Nobel Prize-winning writer and artist bridges two continents and creates new ways of viewing history and human experience from the fissure in the East-West dichotomy—between cultures, between places, and between people. Two actors hold the ends of the rope, and one states, “Bon, je te prie de tenir le bout de cette corde, voilà, entre nous s’est établi un lien. Auparavant, moi, j’étais moi, toi, tu étais toi. Avec cette corde, toi et moi sommes reliés” (Gao, *L’Autre 55*). This point of connection of disparate individuals, cultures, and perspectives is the crux of Gao’s work. The actors in *L’Autre rive* next run in opposite directions, one pulling the other, resulting in the other holding him back, an act metaphorically and geographically significant in retrospect as this play became the last of Gao’s written in China before his 1987 immigration to France, and was never performed in China due

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\(^{52}\) Another play that plays with silence and borders in an interesting way is Lisa Loomer’s *Bocón (Big Mouth)* (1998), in which the protagonist, twelve-year-old Miguel, leaves a repressive Central American country to cross the border into California; however, after losing his parents, he loses his voice. The allegorical play contrasts Miguel’s voicelessness with the presence and tale of the Weeping Woman, present in the myths of Mexico and Central America.
to pressure from the Chinese Communist Party. Instead, it saw its first production in Taipei in 1990 and then in Paris, Avignon, Sydney, and Verona, Italy, in 1993 (Yeung). In *L’Autre rive*, one actor is dragged, exerting no influence, passive, almost inert. Subsequently, one revolves around the other, placing one actor at the center and one on the periphery as an external satellite. The game continues to evolve, showing relationships that shift from tense, lax, and distant to close and tight. “Chacun de nous est impliqué dans ce bas monde changeant et complexe. . . . Les cordes sont comme nos mains,” the actor tells the troupe. “Toutes ces cordes nous entravent tous autant que nous sommes “ (Gao, *L’Autre* 57-58). Just as the actors toy with the rope, they voice the many corresponding notions that accompany the pure physicality of the game—“Nous scrutons . . . Nous examinons . . . Il y a séduction et attirance . . . Manipulation et soumission . . . Affrontement . . . Attachement . . . Rejet . . . Enchevêtrement . . . Abandon . . . Accompagnement . . . Dénouement . . . Chasse . . . Poursuit . . . Encerclement . . . Condensation . . . Éclatement” (Gao, *L’Autre* 58-59). However, as the rope play progresses, the moments of tension in which the sense of constriction dominates the stage. Not only do possibilities and the ability to create meaning develop, but the actors are entangled. The darker side of border crossing emerges in the limitations that are confronted, the obstacles encountered.

Gao and other Francophone-Chinese writers emphasize the constrictive elements of border crossing, considered here as the restrictions that are faced, the impediments that are placed in one’s path, the narrowing of possibilities for engagement that exist, and the misunderstandings and misinterpretations that restrict meaning. In Gao’s work this occurs at times through perilous water crossings with the water serving as the physical border. Border crossings often involve binaries, in themselves reductive and yet essential, of here and there, self and other, eliminating the nuances and complexities of identity. One of Gao Xingjian’s most
often used boundaries is that between the shore and the water, an element meant to be traversed but that often creates a sense of separation and estrangement in which physical distance and removal, serving as physical impediments, create a constriction of meaning. This image is used most explicitly in his play *L’Autre rive* but also in his short story, “La crampe” (*Une Canne à pêche pour mon grand-père* [1989]). Loss of home, loss of language, and loss of identity may be more or less significant in each case. The feeling is one of removal and of a constriction of one’s world, in which disconnection, alienation, and otherness create rifts between people, impede meaning, and imply a sense of separateness that individuals often seek to overcome, a metaphysical destination that is often never reached. Gao simultaneously captures both the lure of in-betweenness, evading a thread, and its frightening qualities, the fear of loss, danger, and the unknown. In *L’Autre rive*, the pull and push, the entanglement, and the tension of the rope become symbolic of the relationships of those going to other shores, the *au-delà* (55-59). “À présent une rivière se trouve devant nous, et non plus une corde, il nous faut la traverser pour attendre l’autre rive,” the actor says, above the sighs and screams of his fellow actors (59). The reactions of the actors, excited to attempt the crossing, vary from “C’est drôle . . .” and “C’est vraiment excitant!” to “N’y va pas tout seul!” and “Nous allons nous noyer. Allons nourrir les poissons” (59-60). The unknown qualities of new experiences that result from boundary crossings merge elements of excitement and fear, hope and despair. The uncertainties in leaving the known, even the dangers of Gao’s much maligned collective, entail a loss, regardless of whether the consequences, often unknown in the early stages of venturing out from the familiar, are positive or negative. Reaching the other shore in *L’Autre rive* may bring about a journey to a better place or higher state of consciousness, but something can be lost or sacrificed in the
process, often in the case of transnational writers resulting in a sense of alienation, exile, and separation.

Much like Gao’s earlier play, *L’Arrêt de bus (The Bus Stop)* (1983), which is often depicted as a response to fellow French translingual Samuel Beckett’s play, *En attendant Godot (Waiting for Godot)* (1952), this play gives a sense of being adrift or in stasis. Interestingly, both *L’Autre rive* and *L’Arrêt de bus* display similar themes of discontentment and alienation that proved provocative to Chinese censors who perceived these works as critiques of the Chinese government and its leaders, and who labeled the plays “politically sensitive” and halted their productions (Gao, *The Other* xxvii). The disjointed journey of *L’Autre rive*’s characters leads to dissension, blame, irresponsibility, violence, retreats into memories, longing, jealousy, and loneliness. Gilbert Fong, one of Gao’s translators, has pointed out to English-speaking readers that the Chinese title *Bi’an*, which means the other shore or the opposite shore, refers to the Buddhist land of enlightenment, *paramita*. To live in the human land in which achievement of *paramita* (enlightenment) or nirvana (bliss) is impossible because of the power of human desire. This desire involves a kind of double-bind, as described by René Girard in his work on the *désir mimétique*, in which it is mediated primarily through others, but also through the self, creating a trajectory of increasing pressure and constriction (Girard 179). In Buddhist tradition, individuals may try to cross from a state of suffering and delusion to this opposite shore echoed in Gao’s work by fostering the Buddhist enlightenment values of generosity, morality, patience, vigor, concentration (or meditation), and wisdom. However, the characters inhabiting the play are stuck; they are trapped in a catch-22. A pure form of enlightenment remains elusive. The more human realm elicits power struggles and leads to manipulation; the temporary bliss of those who reach the long-sought other shore falls away when their muteness gives way to a re-acquaintance
with language. This in turn allows them to distinguish between self and other in ways that lead to paranoia and violence, which in the end appears inescapable in human society.

Gilbert Fong, who translates Gao’s work, interprets these darker periods as a critique of collectivism, and yet the conflict between the individual and the group is everywhere apparent, both in physical rope games of tug-of-war and in more violent exchanges. The inability to reach a state of peace and enlightenment, and the rage that sometimes inhabits man, constricts opportunities for growth and life itself. This is seen in the following scene in *L’Autre rive*, before which the character simply called Woman, the mother figure who helped her people to regain language, has been irrationally suffocated by the angry mob, although none will accept responsibility for this action:

**L’homme.** Avez-vous fini? C’est toi, c’est lui, c’est moi, c’est nous tous qui l’avons assassinée! Sur cette autre rive, déserte, elle nous a donné le langage, mais nous n’avons pas su l’apprécier. Elle nous a donné l’intelligence, mais nous n’avons pas su l’utiliser! Ce que nous avons fait est si horrible que nous en sommes nous-mêmes stupéfaits, mais nous sommes si lâches que nous n’osons pas le reconnaître.

**La foule.** Eh bien, dis-nous ce que nous devons faire maintenant. Nous avons besoin d’un guide. Un troupeau de moutons a besoin d’un mouton qui prend la tête. Nous te suivrons en tout.

**L’homme.** Je vous déteste, il vaut mieux que vous partiez chacun de votre côté.

**La foule.** Ah! Ne nous abandonne pas! (Gao, *L’Autre* 71)

The man continues in his abstractly contemplative manner to seek a way out of the darkness, a potential return to a society of his choosing, the collective that seems to hold attraction to this
hero of the play. He tries to incite the crowd with this plea: “Nous devons sortir de ce lieu diabolique, sortir de cette obscurité, devant il y aura de la lumière. . . . Et vous pourrez rentrer chez vous voir vos proches, femmes et maris, enfants et parents, tous ceux que vous aimez et qui vous aiment!” (73-74) The lure of origins, as described by Francophone writer Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) in *Myth and Reality* (1963), holds sway for Gao and his characters, even as they strive for and reach the alleged site of Buddhist enlightenment (34). Characters return to the middling ground of the collective, as Gao even ends the play with discussions of palm reading, kittens, cakes, yogurt, and finally feeble human togetherness with the final lines, “Qu’est-ce que tu fais demain? On mange ensemble?” (116) The line fades into the quotidian sounds of car engines, bicycle bells, and a baby crying as if the characters—and perhaps human civilization—had been thrown back into a kind of human purgatorial soup.

The image of the woman, a mother, harkens back to Buddhist notions of rebirth, with Gao putting a negative twist on the idea of connection and compassion formed at once through the Metta Sutta, a text in which loving-kindness toward others is cultivated through the vision of the mother as a “paragon,” through ideas of giving and taking as linked with in-breath and out-breath, and through the Buddhist belief in reincarnation (Bercholz and Kohn 158). One critic writes of this compassion-instilling philosophy that “one realizes then that in the course of incalculably many rebirths, everyone has been everyone’s mother in one life or another [which] enables one to extend whatever compassion one has aroused toward one’s own mother to other people” (Bercholz and Kohn 158). This type of meditation broadens compassion from the known individuals to the slightly known individual to ever-widening circles to arrive at all beings and then at one’s collective enemies. Extending compassion without demanding understanding from the collective creates a positive force; however, reaching the most difficult realms of
enlightenment by extending compassion without necessarily receiving admiration or understanding in return to those who wish or do one harm requires far greater spiritual capacities. One waits or strives to achieve this level of enlightenment without expectation of success.

The waiting motif pervades Gao’s work, particularly his early play, *L’Arrêt de bus*, a literary homage to Samuel Beckett’s *En attendant Godot*, which is explored further in Chapter Three. This motif implies a further limitation of expression and a narrowing of life, whether offshore, or between two destinations, the shore and the open water, or with someone on one shore seeking to reach a different, seen or only imagined shore, yet often unattainable. The expanse of water constitutes a boundary, different from the one between two countries that emphasizes instead the expanse between them. Mark Twain depicted the river as a place of freedom, as opposed to the tyranny and rule-bound life of the land. Twain further depicted the double-bind of the watery distance in his essay, “Two Ways of Seeing a River” in which he wrote:

> Now when I had mastered the language of this water and had come to know every trifling feature that bordered the great river as familiarly as I knew the letters of the alphabet, I had made a valuable acquisition. But I had lost something, too. I had lost something which could never be restored to me while I lived.

The writers studied here all express a sense of loss inherent in the increasing scope of cultural translingualism for which a sense of home and familiarity, however repressive, must be sacrificed. Ambivalence even in the face of the most exacting of journeys results in a kind of constriction and its ensuing pain.

The pain of loss leads to literary innovations, on a smaller scale, in Gao’s short stories, such as “La Crampe” and “Une Canne à pêche pour mon grand-père,” in his 1997 collection. The
swimmer, alone, walks to the beach after dinner, forfeiting the company of others, the convivial
dialogue, card playing, and volleyball that have attracted them. In the water, he suffers a severe
abdominal cramp, and fears he will not be able to make it back to shore, given the currents, the
distance from shore, and the jellyfish brushing against him. “Une crampe, une crampe
commençait à lui contracter le ventre,” the tale, rife with symbolism, begins. Gao thus points out
that meaning in transnational places both contracts and expands, in this case, as the character is
off shore, unable to reach one shore or another, so that both meaning and the swimmer’s universe
are narrowed and restricted, while his attention is focused on survival and the here-and-now
existence offshore. “Se laisser bercer par les flots, tantôt au sommet, tantôt au creux des vagues,
n’était pas une solution,” the third-person narrator states. “Il devait se hâter de nager vers le
rivage” (Gao, Canne 51). Soon he surrenders himself to the forces of nature while not giving up
hope of escaping alive. The narrator states, “Il comprit qu’il ne pourrait échapper à ce courant
qu’à la force de ses jambes. Il devait tout endurer, même l’intolérable, c’était le seul moyen de
s’en sortir . . . Il ne pouvait plus compter que sur lui-même. . . . Ensuite, un courant glacé
irrésistible lui traversa le corps et l’emporta insensiblement” (52-53). The Third Space here, a
kilometer off shore, away from human contact with those who know and care for him, is a place
of pain, of loneliness, and fear, that he only escapes from alive due to his focus, his precise
movements, and because he does not allow himself to be distracted by extraneous thoughts,
especially paralyzing thoughts of fear. The protagonist engages in magical thinking. He thinks of
the corpses of jellyfish, shrunk to the thinness of a sheet of paper, drying on the hostel window,
and thinks that he could meet the same fate. Being in the position of the sea creatures, he
profoundly senses his own mortality and confronts it, not wanting the jellyfish to die but not
wanting to die himself either.
Back on the shore, his perspective is irrevocably changed as a result of his experience in this Third Space. The swimmer is anxious to share his experience and deliver his warning to all, but no one wants to listen or is in a position to understand his Cassandra-like warnings. The meaning of his experience is limited by others’ inability or unwillingness to comprehend the gravity of the offshore dangers. He is warmed by the shelter he seeks but finds the sand and the beach turned cold and unfriendly. Back in human society, he is still lonely. Only the sea calls to him, but the sound is “un vacarme” and the wind howls more loudly. The people on the beach begin to disrobe and run into the water, oblivious to the near-death experience from which the swimmer so recently emerged. The only one remaining behind is the girl leaning on a bicycle supported by crutches watching her friends go into the water as she urges them, “Revenez vite!” (57). The brief tale, cast into very long, breathless paragraphs, easily serves as a metaphor for the stateless person. Gao’s permanent departure in 1979 from China to Germany and then on to France to seek political asylum, while possibly due to his privilege as an artist and significantly different from those refugees crossing the Mediterranean in 2016, resonates in those experiences, and Gao’s own story and works provide one road into the experience of displacement.

Gao’s short story, “Une Canne à pêche pour mon grand-père” initially throws the reader off because it begins in a realistic style and suggests a predictable story-line, given the title of the story and collection, but it turns to notions of profound internal dislocation mirrored in the external dislocation of its narrator. “À la devanture d’une boutique d’articles de pêche récemment ouverte, la vue des nombreux modèles de cannes à pêche exposés m’a soudain fait penser à mon grand-père,” Gao writes (Gao, Canne 75). The narrator is in fact already being silently pulled away, drawn to another time and place, both known and unbeknownst to the reader. Similarly to the swimmer in “La Crampe,” the narrator is pulled away from his location
in the present, to moments of the past and the internal geography of the tale, rife with symbolism. The comparison between two objects, two places, two times spin out into multiple dimensions in a third spot inhabited by the narrator. The fishing rod he sees is an imported fiberglass rod composed of ten segments that must be assembled. The narrator admits that his grandfather never saw a rod like this, even in the sanctuary of his mind, and would not have purchased one; nostalgia thus takes place for the lived past simultaneously for a past that never was. The grandfather’s rods were made of bamboo, which he straightened over a fire to make a rod used to catch fish along with the homemade nets. “Pour un seul petit filet, il devait nouer des dizaines de milliers de noeuds,” the narrator states, comparing the simple purchase of a rod in a shop with the painstaking work of his ancestor. “Il travaillait jour et nui, en remuant un peu les lèvres, sans que l’on sache s’il comptait les mailles ou s’il récita quelque prière” (Gao, Canne 76). For the grandfather, life included hard work and basic items were not easily purchasable. When he heard that someone was traveling to the capital of the province, he would ask them to bring back hooks, and the narrator would comment on the availability of fishing reels that allowed the fisherman to relax while waiting for the fish to bite rather than being forced to remain attentive to the line. The narrator, as a child, had not been mindful and had once broken the grandfather’s bamboo fishing rod. He wants to buy the grandfather a fishing rod, even though one learns repeatedly that the act is pointless, albeit significant “… quand mon grand-père était venu me voir, il m’avait dit que depuis, on avait construit un barrage en amont et que la rivière était asséchée, pourtant j’avais quand même envie d’acheter une canne à pêche pour mon grand-père, impossible de dire pourquoi et je n’ai pas envie de savoir pourquoi, de toute façon, c’est un souhait, comme si la canne à pêche était mon grand-père ou que mon grand-père était la canne à pêche” (Canne 83). In the geography of the narrator’s mind, the rod catches memories from the
narrator’s past in a body of water that has become dried sand, and the narrator feels out of place and misunderstood by passersby who would perceive the carrying of a fiberglass rod as a type of leisure man’s weekend sport purchase rather than an homage to a grandfather and time long gone.

The rod and stowing it above the toilet away from the narrator’s own meddlesome son provoke a kind of nostalgia or homesickness, as though his home were a mental one in the past with his grandfather and not entirely of the present with his plaintive wife or mischievous son, and they necessitate a trip to bring the rod to his former home. But the landmarks in his geography of memory no longer line up with the real world. The narrator states, “Mais ce pays natal a tellement changé que tu n’arrives même plus à le reconnaître, la route poussiéreuse a été goudronnée, les immeubles sont faits d’éléments préfabriqués tous identiques” (Gao, Canne 85).

The road, the bridge, and even the lake in which the waves looked like the backs of fish are gone. And the narrator, pronouncing the word “my” in reference to his grandfather—the word “wo”—sounds like he is saying the word for “goose,” a Chinese symbol of marital bliss related to remembering those ancestors who helped one along the way, evoking a sense of individuals and past and present merging through a shared history. People laugh at the narrator. When he finds someone who can tell him where the lake is, the individual says that the stone bridges were all demolished (87-88). All is not what it seems. He searches for the gate at his former address, 10 Nanhu Road, looking for the gate screen with its images depicting, among others, “longévité,” including the man known as “Père Longévité” who ironically had half of his head missing even at that former time and whose dragon-head staff was worn beyond recognition (Gao, Canne 89). Everything had changed. “Le pont a été démoli et reconstruit en béton armé, j’ai compris, j’ai
tout compris, je ne retrouverai rien de ce qui était là à l’origin, il est clair que cela n’a aucun
sens de demander le nom et le numéro de l’ancienne rue, tu ne peux plus te fier qu’à ta mémoire . . . j’étais vraiment désespéré, traînant mes jambes lasses, comme si elles ne faisaient plus partie
de mon corps” (89). Not only does the narrator feel distance from his present, but he feels
alienated from his history and from himself and his own body in a phrase evocative of Antoine
Roquentin’s existential nausea upon looking at his own hand, preceding his decision to distance
himself from the past and embrace the here-and-now. Perhaps, as Roquentin, after throwing off
existence through others, feels the essentialism that cannot precede existence and contemplates
the roots of the chestnut tree, the narrator lives in a paradoxically full and empty space, like
Roquentin who said, “Je compris qu’il n’y avait pas de milieu entre l’inexistence et cette
abondance pâmée” (Sartre, La Nausée 182). The memories of Gao’s narrator exist internally
although they are no longer linked to the real world in any way. A part of the narrator is
paralyzed and hollowed out by this new knowledge, and the notions of stability and longevity,
valuable and attractive attributes, are called into question and examined.

Conclusion

While there have been for a long time many works of expatriate writers and their
geographical and psychological border crossings, one detects a more pressing geopolitical shift
that impacts literature, particularly in the new territory of Francophone-Chinese writers, such as
Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa. Not only has the number of refugees and asylum seekers grown
exponentially in recent years, in response to wars, conflicts, human rights abuses, and
oppression, but one sees that these difficult population shifts affect all people and all nations,
those who live transnational, transcultural lives, and even those who are nationless. Spivak underlines the tension between the fixed borders of nation-states and the borderlessness inherent in a world shaped by globalization, transnational corporations, and borders with varying degree of physical and technical permeability. This tension affects readers’ perceptions of the works of those, like Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa, who have crossed borders themselves to settle in France and whose works situate border crossings as central to the text. These writers, who dwell in diverse cultures, languages, and subjectivities, offer meditations on borders and their influence, on the silences that are at times empty and other times filled with meaning, on the limitations these borders impose, and on the expansiveness that translingual, transcultural lives, for all their hardships, may also allow. For a better comprehension of the works of writers who are neither wholly French nor wholly Chinese, often called *écrivains chinois d’expression française*, I have suggested that Homi Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space provides a useful theoretical framework, with its polyvocality and in-betweenness grounded in his conviction that “[c]ultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other” (*Location* 52). Bhabha’s Third Space also converges with the emerging field of border poetics. The voices of these Francophone-Chinese writers have come out of a shift, written about by David Der-wei Wang and others, from a literary emphasis on the long, important history of Mainland China to works emerging from the Chinese diaspora, not just those works written in Chinese, but those written in other languages, especially English and French. These writers, many of whose works are banned in China, often situate themselves in opposition to, or at least in relation to, the Chinese oppression of the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square incident, and widespread censorship, themes that inform their writing and will be explored in my subsequent chapters.
The situation of these four writers, a group that includes expatriates and an asylum seeker, may be different from the current migrants caught in a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions; however, their literary works and their lives draw attention to border-crossing lives, narratives, and events that have taken on a new urgency in 2016. The human cost of such perilous border crossings continues to mount and cannot be overlooked. Approximately 60 million people had been displaced by war, conflict, and persecution as of the end of 2015, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Furthermore, more than 80,000 refugees arrived in Europe by boat during the first six weeks of 2016, more than those in the first four months of 2015. The majority of those individuals were fleeing conflict in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and the UNHCR estimates that 2,000 people per day are now fleeing their homes and seeking asylum elsewhere. Almost 59 percent of those are women and children, and their plight has been visualized through the tragedies that the world witnesses: the two boats carrying about 500 individuals that sank after setting out from Zuwara, Libya, in August 2015; the shipwreck off the coast of Italy in which about 800 people perished in April 2015; the bodies of Syrian refugees discovered in a truck in Austria also in August 2015; the 300 individuals who drowned while crossing the Mediterranean in February 2015; the female refugees from Syria and Iraq who came forward in 2016 with stories of physical assault, sexual harassment, and violent treatment, as they traveled from Turkey to Greece and across the Balkans, a route now being closed) (“Why Is EU?”; “Female Refugees”). Indeed, approximately 1.1 million migrants and refugees and asylum-seekers arrived in Europe by the close of 2015, a figure that far exceeds numbers from previous years (Myre). Migrants continue to become part of a growing crisis as avenues into Europe are blocked and migrants remain in dangerous situations at the Greece-Macedonia border. “Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a
refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum,” the UNHCR reported in 2015. “If this were the population of a country, it would be the world’s 24th biggest” (“Worldwide Displacement”), including 14 million newly displaced people in 2014 alone, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; Sengupta). Tragically, such displacement is the genesis of narratives of political oppression and flight.
Chapter 2 — Intertextual Counternarratives in Dai Sijie’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* and *Le Complexe de Di*

For many overseas Chinese writers who endured “re-education” during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), as Dai Sijie and other Chinese-Francophone writers did, intellectual freedom and its full expression has emerged as a *raison d’être*. This desire and dominant theme is imbricated in literary, psychological, cultural, and scientific texts penned beyond the borders of Mainland China where censorship still shapes the intellectual landscape. During the Cultural Revolution, those who held a high-school diploma were sent to the countryside, and those who were branded “intellectuals” or enemies of the people, were treated the most harshly. In the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, approximately one million people died, including approximately 239,000 executed on false charges of “counterrevolutionary crimes” (X. Lu 16). Universities were closed for more than four years so that young people could devote themselves to the destruction of “old customs, old habits, old culture, and old thinking, known as the “Four Olds” (Spence 2; Domes 68). Many were sent to the countryside to do hard labor where they were tortured, beaten, committed suicide, or died of infections or other illnesses. Dai, whose parents were both professors of medicine, admits that his own experiences of being re-educated in rural Sichuan for three years in the 1970s provided autobiographical material that he incorporated into his novel *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (2000), a bestselling novel that has been translated into over twenty-four languages and made into a film, released in 2002.53 “I wanted to show how much impact culture could have on an isolated mountain village, and especially for [the seamstress],” Dai has said. “It was a revelation of freedom, of self-

53 Dorothée Fritz-Ababneh asserts that Dai’s bestselling status as an author whose work is heavy with intertextual references to French novels, was helped along by Bernard Pivot, who declared on his long-running cultural magazine television program *Bouillon de culture* in France, on January 21, 2000, “Si ce livre ne devient pas un best-seller, alors cette émission ne sert à rien” (Fritz-Ababneh, “L’Intertextualité” 97).
consciousness” (Sen-lun Yu). While criticized for forgoing the “gritty look at that horrendous period in history” that others, including Gao Xingjian’s *Le Livre d’un homme seul*, offer, Dai is “recapturing a period of his youth that he sees through a gloss of nostalgia” (Walls). In Dai’s subsequent novel, *Le Complexe de Di* (2003), an allusion to the Oedipus complex, in French *le complexe d’Œdipe*, Dai displays the unfamiliarity of most Chinese with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, a by-product of the Cultural Revolution in which most practitioners or teachers of Western ideas were chased out of academic institutions, banned from studying or propagating Western theories, and hampered even today by a culture that values agreement over conflict resolution and filial duty over self-examination (Blowers 33-34). Dai conceptualizes a China in which many ideas that have been or remain unpopular with the government reside only in the locked offices of the fictional Department of Clandestine Anti-publications, where the protagonist Muo chances to find himself, a criminal wanted by the notorious Judge Di. There he views shelves filled with analyses of the events of Tiananmen Square in 1989, reports on the suspicious death of military leader Lin Biao, the famines of the 1960s, the assassinations of intellectuals, documented denunciations and forced self-denunciations, the “re-education” camps, and more, the side of China’s history sometimes hidden from its people. Psychological schools of thought from the West that had also long been banned, however, came back into vogue after the Cultural Revolution and a “Freud fever” settled into the post-Mao period comically explored by Dai in his novel, an “exposure to the ‘Other’ inside” by looking at the unconscious and its incomprehensibility (Larson, *From Ah 75*, 79). Wendy Larson credits such Western theories with merging the personal and the political, focusing on individual—and often female—subjectivity, and advancing notions about personal and social liberation with deep cultural implications (35). Dai’s use of multiple texts within his two novels, *Balzac et la petite*
tailleuse chinoise and Le Complexe de Di, call upon this intertextual mise-en-abyme strategy to place literature in a performative Third Space, set into action by the protagonists for whom, as Homi Bhabha states, “[M]eaning is never simply mimetic and transformative” but is multiple and polyvocal (Bhabha, Location 53). Both of Dai novels, Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise and Le Complexe de Di, use intertextuality to put forward a plethora of unstable counternarratives based on Western literature and theory, disseminating multiple narratives that resist the dominant discourses of Chinese politics and culture.

Origins of Intertextuality

Julia Kristeva is credited with coining the term “intertextuality” in 1966 and has referred to it as an “intervention of external plurality” (Kristeva, Interviews 189). Spurred on by Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on dialogism and his view of texts as inherently polyphonic and simultaneously expressing, reflecting, and creating meaning, Kristeva built upon his notion that “[t]here is no utterance without relation to other utterances” (Todorov 60). She moved beyond structuralism toward “a dynamic understanding of the literary text that considered every utterance as the result of the intersection within it of a number of voices, as he [Bakhtin] called them” (Kristeva, Interviews 189). Underscoring the differences between her “intertextuality” and Bakhtin’s dialogism, Kristeva described these intersections of voices, cultures, and meaning in the following way:

. . . there is the recognition that a textual segment, sentence utterance, or paragraph is not simply the intersection of two voices in direct or indirect discourse; rather, the segment is the result of the intersection of a number of
voices, of a number of textual interventions, which are combined in the semantic field, but also in the syntactic and phonic fields of the explicit utterance.

(Interviews 189)

On the one hand, Kristeva, like the contemporary Francophone-Chinese writer Dai Sijie, drew attention to the existence of prior texts, with which the author, characters, and reader then dialogue a posteriori. Kristeva writes that “tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, toute texte est absorption et transformation d’un autre texte. À la place de la notion d’intersubjectivité s’installe celle d’intertextualité, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme double” (Kristeva, Recherches 85). Dai focuses primarily on texts by Western thinkers and writers, including Honoré de Balzac, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Carl Jung, Romain Rolland, Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, Charles Baudelaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Leo Tolstoy, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Emily Brontë, and more. Other Francophone-Chinese writers include Buddhist gatha poems54 such as those of Zen patriarch Huineng, Japanese monogatari,55 and medieval Japanese war epics like the Tales of the Heiji among other works used to create polyphony and an asynchronous dialogue with both Eastern and Western traditions. The ways in which these works of Western authors emerge in Dai’s writings can evoke Homi Bhabha’s notion of Third Space, which views thinking, reading, and writing as acts of cultural translation and even go beyond that translation to produce new narratives, which are then disseminated so as to produce “other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present” (“In the Cave” ix; Location 53,

54 See Chapter Three for a study of Gao Xingjian’s work on Zen Buddhist gathas in his play La Neige en août (2002).
55 Monogatari, courtly works whose characters “violate the sociopolitical order and relativize the authority of the throne,” are referenced by Shan Sa in her novel La Joueuse de go (2001) (Shirane 3).
199). Through intertextuality, signs become discursive and “read anew,” abolishing any fixed status to which they may have previously adhered.

Dialogue with seminal works from Western culture provides the impetus for characters’ often difficult and unexpected transformations, changes that conform neither to those of the Chinese world in which the characters live, nor of the Western world of their imaginations and discovered narratives. Much like the well-traversed routes across Phoenix Mountain in Dai Sijie’s Chinese-Francophone novel Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise, the multiple texts and cultural signifiers serve as detours from one set of normative ideas, calling doctrinaire, establishment idées fixes into question, and leading toward another but ending up in a Third Space where new meaning is created that conforms to neither Chinese ideology nor Western intellectual ideas. Intertextual critic Sarah Alyn-Stacey writes, “Une lecture intertextuelle est le lieu de rencontre potentiel de deux codes culturels: celui de l’entour de la communication initiale, inscrit dans les textes, et celui de l’entour moderne, incarné dans le lecteur” (Canova-Green and Le Calvez 99). Often, the presence of earlier texts within the newer texts along with multiple cultural signs creates a dialogue, much like those described by Bakhtin and Kristeva. Roland Barthes also attacked the notion of stable meanings and permanent inscriptions. In Le Degré zéro de l’écriture (1953), Barthes links the writer’s individual liberty with historical memory. “[L’]écriture reste encore pleine du souvenir de ses usages antérieurs, car le langage n’est jamais innocent: les mots ont une mémoire seconde qui se prolonge mystérieusement au milieu des significations nouvelles” (Degré 32, 16 ; Allen 61). Barthes seeks his own literary space of thirdness, evading polarities to create what he calls l’écriture blanche, a neutral style located between poles of styles, a type of negative space that is ultimately freed from the constraints of social discourse, a space that at times, aligns with that in the texts studied here.
Despite the material permanence of a text, its meaning is woven from different discourses, as a kind of “stereographic plurality” within the woven fabric of the text (Barthes, Degré 55-56, 159). Dai’s texts emphasize the way in which the protagonists—and the reader—become active in the production of meaning as well as the role the intertextual plays in the meaning between texts, for instance between Dai’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* and Balzac’s *Ursule Mirouët, Le Père Goriot*, and others. Drawing Freudian interpretations into the Chinese marketplace and courthouse—culled primarily from Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899, 1913) in which he introduced both the titular subject and the Oedipus complex, the theory that a child must repress sexual desire for the opposite sex parent to avoid certain neuroses—raises cultural questions of interpretation and relevance as the characters and reader navigate the many objects and events filled with Freud’s so-called “manifest [or literal] content” and “latent [or symbolic] content” (Freud).

**Cultural Framework of Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise**

Dai Sijie captured the attention of French audiences in particular and of international ones with his novel *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, which pays homage to renowned Western writers, including the eponymous Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), author of *La Comédie humaine* with ninety-four interlinked works that typify French realism of the early nineteenth century. Dai’s novel features works that praise attributes of individual heroism, standing up against an unjust world, advocating for female education and expressions of sexual desire, and

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56 The novel remains the second bestseller on amazon.fr for French novels of the twentieth century.
57 The novel has been translated into over two dozen languages, according to book reviews. It has been banned in China since 2005 (Bruyas).
overcoming class struggles and oppression. One Taiwanese journal called the French literary establishment’s response to this work an eruption of “paroxysms of joy” (Winterton). When the young protagonists, Ma and Luo, students from intellectual families, are sent to a remote village on the fictitious Phoenix Mountain, they encounter not just the character known as Four-Eyes (“le Binoclard”), who possesses a suitcase of banned literary works from the West, over half of them French, but also an alluring young woman who initially serves as the antithesis of these works, the physically attractive peasant daughter of an old man who serves as the village tailor. Ma and Luo, the seventeen-year-olds who are still growing and require a hem on a pair of trousers to be let down, are considered “garçons de la ville” (“city youths”), 58 banished to one of the many villages along the single path on the Phoenix of the Sky mountain, a village so remote that the only Westerner ever to have reached the village was a French missionary named le père Michel. The Frenchman captured the fictitious village on his tortuous path to find Tibet in the 1940s with an extant journal entry that reeks of exoticism with its mention of distant emperors, eunuchs, favorites, opium, and bandits ready to “surgir de l’ombre et bondir sur les voyageurs” (Dai, Balzac 21). Dai captures the sense of otherness that permeates the relations not just between East and West but also between those intellectuals of the city and the laborers in the fields and in the mines of the rural mountains, between the “intellectual” classes and the Communist Party’s ideals. China’s leader Mao Zedong (1893-1976) called for a revolution that would solidify China’s status as an industrialized nation, but one free of bourgeois and Western

58 The Chinese term for the affected young people was zhishi qingnian, often shortened to zhishi in everyday use (Bonnin xix-xx). In English this term means “knowledgeable young people” and is often translated as “educated youth,” “educated young people,” “intellectual youth,” or “urban youth.” Michael Bonnin in Génération perdue acknowledges the awkwardness of the term because it was a “coded expression” or jargon that did not refer to all educated young people but only the ones who had been sent to the countryside or mountains for “re-education” or were about to be sent there.
influences and whose leaders embraced violence as an acceptable instrument of change.

Historian Rana Mitter writes that the Cultural Revolution “was strongly anti-intellectual and xenophobic, condemning those such as doctors or teachers who were accused of being ‘expert’ rather than ‘red’ [members of the Chinese Communist Party who embraced Mao’s vision of revolution] and casting suspicions on anyone who had connections with the outside world, whether the Western or the Soviet bloc” (60, 62-63). Ma, whose father worked as a pulmonary specialist and whose mother served as an expert in parasitic diseases, and Luo, the son of a class enemy who had served Mao’s dental needs, represent this group and are forced to abandon their studies at age seventeen to toil in the coal mining industry of Phoenix Mountain. They carry wooden buckets of human and animal waste on their backs to the fields at higher elevations, with the waste splashing and seeping through their clothing each day while they navigate both precarious mountain passes and the political mandates that enforce bans on intellectuals.

Dai’s novel can be considered an overseas example of what is called “educated-youth literature” in China, a genre that described the type of fiction that emerged in China in the 1980s. Written primarily by those who, like Dai, were considered “educated youth” or “sent-

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59 “Educated-youth literature” is also called “sent-down youth literature.” The term xiāxiàotiān (“going down to the countryside”—along with “go to the villages” (C. dao nèngcùn qu) and “go up to the mountains” (shāngshān)—originated in the 1940s to refer to the sending of urban or educated youth, graduates of primary or secondary school, to rural areas. The phrase “going down to the countryside/up to the mountains” (xiāxiàotiān shāngshān or shāngshān xiāxiàotiān) was used in 1956 in a political bureau report by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist party (Bonnin xviii–xix). Michael Bonnin’s Génération Perdue: Le mouvement d’envoi des jeunes instruits à la campagne en Chine, 1968-1980 (2004) takes a thorough look at the terminology and time and addresses the topic of educated-youth literature. Such writers include Kong Jiesheng, Zheng Yi, Ye Xin, Zhang Chengzhi, Zhu Lin, and others. Hong Zicheng’s Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxueshi (A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature) (1999), published with support from the Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China addresses the topic of “sent-down youth” literature and its publishing history and shows state acceptance of this genre, even though Dai’s novel is banned in China for reasons other than its treatment of the Cultural Revolution.
down youth” who were dispatched to rural areas for re-education through manual labor, the tales were usually published in China and written in Chinese. Ah Cheng’s *The King of Trees*, a collection of three novellas, was one of the first examples of educated-youth literature, a genre in which authors write of the experience of educated youth who were sent to the country or mountains, often from the young person’s perspective. Like Dai, Ah Cheng emphasizes the friendships and relationships formed in spite of the hardships endured and draws on his own experience of being sent to a rural area for “reform through labor” (McDougall 182). Bonnie McDougall alludes to some of what made this literature popular, Ah Cheng’s in particular (the “Ah Cheng fever”), citing both the partial relaxation of censorship that occurred in China in 1984, following Deng Xiaoping’s crackdown on “spiritual pollution” in 1983, and the aesthetic elements that mix traditional and vernacular terms contributing to popularity of emerging educated-youth literature. McDougall cites how Cheng presented with “unexpected good humor some of the fundamental characteristics of modern Chinese life, its minor triumphs as well as its prolonged suffering” (181). These authors often allude to feeling “stranded in a cultural desert, with little entertainment apart from playing cards or gambling” (McDougall 184). Some explore feelings of connection or disconnection from the villagers, meals shared, daringly writing at times of the political estrangement of the villagers from centers of power, and referencing occasional visits to their own urban homes or other cities. Such educated-youth literature is widely accepted and well received in China. President Xi Jinping (b. 1953), who came to power in 2013, is the first president of China who grew up during the Cultural Revolution (Yuan). The son of a revolutionary hero who was minister of propaganda and education under Mao Zedong before being purged in 1962, Xi was one of the “sent-down youth,” who went to work as an agricultural laborer from 1969 to 1975 in Liangjiahe, Shaanxi. President Xi has recounted his
journey back to the city in 1975 to attend Tsinghua University, accompanied by villagers who walked sixty li (more than eighteen miles) to see him off at the train station (Yuan). Works exploring the suffering, oppression, and “historical wounds” of the Cultural Revolution, in contrast to these more nostalgic notions, are often referred to as “scar literature,” and Zicheng Hong’s book *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxueshi (A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature)*, produced with support of the Chinese government, provides a long list of works in this category, noting that at times they are criticized for their “downcast tone” and “backward looking” approach, but Hong also notes that Li Gui’s novel *Sunset the Color of Blood*, which had difficulty finding a publisher due to the “frankness of description” of the Cultural Revolution was published in 1986 in Beijing by the Workers Publishing House and became a bestseller (Z. Hong 294). This paints a complex portrait of books about the Cultural Revolution that are widely accepted and read in China, while others, such as Dai’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* and Gao Xingjian’s *Le Livre d’un homme seul* are banned there.

From the first pages of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, Dai contrasts the symbols of the cultured or “high” culture and the uncultured or “low” culture, depicting the societal apparatus that has historically allowed those from the educated and upper classes to determine what is “best” in terms of values, taste, and culture, while the Chinese Communist Party, in advancing the Cultural Revolution, upended those distinctions (Bowman 12). Ma’s violin, brought to the village, contrasts in the early pages of the novel with the fecal matter that he and Luo must now carry, and the violin arouses suspicion until Ma’s sonata by Mozart, a banned work, is facetiously dubbed an homage to Mao, surreptitiously layering hidden high culture onto the newly esteemed low culture of the village headman. Julia Kristeva has stated that intertextuality resides not merely at the semantic level. In this case, the semantic level consists of
an unnamed sonata by Mozart being dubbed by the quick-thinking Luo *Mozart pense au président Mao* (*Interviews* 12; Dai, *Balzac* 12). Furthermore, what the village headman dubs “une chanson” is repeatedly corrected to “une sonate” by the educated young men, which Ma, the less bold of the two in this instance, allows is the same thing “plus ou moins” (Dai, *Balzac* 12). Kristeva, however, speaks of how intertextuality resides in a combined space not only of “the semantic field, but also in the syntactic and phonic fields of the explicit utterance . . . the idea of this plurality of phonic, syntactic, and semantic participation” (Kristeva, *Interviews* 189). The intertextual play of this particular word resonates because the word “sonata,” derived from the Latin word “sonare” meaning “to sound,” only came to mean a large-scale musical composition in three or four parts in mid-eighteenth-century Italian (“Sonata”). Luo insists on using the Western word, knowing that Ma will play the Western work in defiance of the ban on such compositions, and he insists on using terminology that accentuates its European origins over the more general word “song” that could apply as easily to a Chinese folk tune as to a Mozart sonata. The more cautious Ma is less enamored with the specificity that serves semantic, phonic, and syntactic roles simultaneously. The narrator Ma states, “Abasourdi, je le crus devenu fou: depuis quelques années, toutes les œuvres de Mozart, ou de n’importe quel musicien occidental, étaient interdites dans notre pays” (Dai, *Balzac* 12). Ma tries to obscure the origins on the work for his violin, which the headmaster of the village has already threatened to throw into the fire, with Ma using his “je ne sais pas” and “plus ou moins” to soften the semantic meaning, veering away from the Western culture origins as intended by those in charge of his so-called re-education. The words used to describe the music adhere to what is often seen as a

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60 This interview was conducted by Margaret Waller in 1985 in New York, reflecting back on her work on intertextuality and adding a psychoanalytic element of the reader and creator of a text being a “subject-in-process,” whose identities are called into question (Kristeva, *Interviews* 188).
poststructuralist emphasis on the “inherent instability of meaning in language,” which further reflects the notion of Third Space as described by Homi Bhabha and others, in which an ambivalence of meaning emerges and “grand narratives” become fractured and fragmented (Schulze-Engler 150-51). Bhabha and others, however, argue that acknowledging this fragmentation does not go far enough because one must further acknowledge the inherent epistemological stranglehold of adhering to one view, often the Eurocentric one. In pushing this idea forward, Frank Schulze-Engler, writing in Communicating in the Third Space, suggests that these new literatures beyond the postcolonial, both those associated with “experiences of migration, exile or diaspora” and those dealing with other cultural and social changes, are increasingly being acknowledged (153.)

Much like the hidden novels \(^{61}\) and their characters later in the novel, Mozart’s sonata, when viewed as a culturally rich text in its own right, serves not just as a piece of music preferred over the village’s more traditional style and played on a Western instrument. \(^{62}\) Dai does not glorify Mozart but allows this eighteenth-century Austrian composer’s works to serve as a similarly transformed companion in the village on Phoenix Mountain, offering Ma, Luo, the seamstress, and the villagers a kind of rebirth in acquiring cultural texts that had been banned and hidden from them. Counternarratives, such as this one concerning the sonata, advance a dialogue, here between the rich, open, resonant Western associations of Mozart and the ideology of Mao, which demanded strict adherence, left little room for disagreement, and banished works

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\(^{61}\) The trope of hidden objects and people in hiding is further explored in Chapter Four, which discusses literary works involving the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square protests, with their protagonists in hiding.  

\(^{62}\) The oft-debated origin of the violin as an instrument differentiated from earlier stringed instruments dates from 1450 in Brescia, Italy with the conversion of the viol, a six-stringed Renaissance and baroque instrument, to a violin. However, the rebec, a three-stringed type of violin that is pear-shaped, has probable origins in Asia, coming to Spain with the Moors, and entering French history in the thirteenth century (Bachmann 1-6).
such as Mozart’s to the kind of annihilation with which the violin is menaced. “Counter-narratives only make sense in relation to something else,” write Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews in their book, *Considering Counter Narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense* (x). Counternarratives like the one created here on the violin make sense only in relation to the dominant or master narrative, first, that of Mao’s Cultural Revolution, and second, that of the Western Enlightenment ideals. Furthermore, the dominant narrative is less stable than it appears, open to layering with other narratives, rewriting, contestation, and the interference of counternarratives. The narrator’s polished instrument contrasts with the suspicious air, the bristled nose with which the instrument is deeply sniffed, and the calloused hands with which the wary-yet-authoritarian village headman examines the instrument with an air that Ma compares to a customs official examining one’s baggage for evidence of drugs. However, Dai, as a writer, often stops short in identifying both musical compositions and passages of text in any kind of detail, leaving it to the reader to recall the text in its entirely or go in search of those texts that Ma, Luo, and the seamstress come to embrace, even worship. The sonata is not named, except by this fictitious title, *Mozart pense au président Mao* whose syntax skirts the lines, offering neither acceptance nor rejection of Mao and his Cultural Revolution. The title also evokes the preposterous idea that a Chinese political official who lived from 1893 to 1976 would be an object of contemplation by an Austrian composer whose lifetime (1756-1791) entirely preceded his own. The title mocks what Stefan R. Landsberger calls “the deification of Mao,” a personality cult that gained momentum in the 1960s with his image and name as the symbol of the party and state power (Chong 139-41). The intensity of Mao’s portrayal in the arts, particularly propaganda art, as the “Great Teacher,” “Great Leader,” “Great Helmsman,” and “Great Commander,” dominated the first half of the Cultural Revolution and experienced a
resurgence at the centenary of Mao’s birth in 1993. Dai, writing in France and post–Cultural Revolution, is free to show characters mocking what has become known as “the cult of Mao” in a way that was dangerous during the era in which his novel is set. Writing of the required “language of loyalty” of the time, Daniel Leese states, “The rhetorical and ritual demonstrations of loyalty to Chairman Mao that came to dominate everyday life cannot be understood without taking into account this frenzied atmosphere within which people were sentenced to death because they had unintendedly misspelled a Mao quotation or burned a newspaper carrying his image” (174). Leese describes how this dominant narrative was implemented during the Cultural Revolution by the creation of Mao Zedong Thought Study Classes that moved the cult of Mao from the domain of political circles to a strong presence in everyday existence. Dai, on the other hand, uses Ma and Luo’s experiences—and his own, he has said—to portray multiple counternarratives that inform the lives of his protagonists.

This intertextuality, using references to Mao and Mozart, is not an invention of Ma and Luo’s only to save the violin, but is demonstrative of historical traditions in which new lyrics were often merged with popular tunes, a musical technique called contrafacture, meaning metrical and musical imitation (Fenlon 218).63 Dai’s protagonist Ma plays Mozart, Brahms, and a Beethoven sonata, the strains of his tune mixing with the grunts of the sow beneath the stilted structure in which he and Luo live, mixing the sonorous elements of the high and low cultures. Furthermore, Luo hums a revolutionary tune and Ma adds a Tibetan tune, again on the surface reworded by the Chinese to turn it into veneration of Mao. Dai’s use of musical composition to

63 Contrafacture, etymologically a counternarrative meaning “made against,” is sometimes also known as “musical plagiarism.” While critics assert that it would go too far to call Mozart himself a plagiarist, University of Iowa musicologist David Buch points out ways in which Mozart’s The Magic Flute bears striking resemblances to a work called The Beneficent Dervish and common singspiels, operas that included music and spoken dialogue, that were performed in eighteenth-century Vienna (Baer).
demonstrate the intertextual nature of his protagonist’s lives sets up the expansion from song to film, a genre in which Dai Sijie has worked extensively and is well known, and then into literature. This intertextuality captures the mosaic-like subjectivity of diverse texts, which Kristeva states both absorb and transform one text into another and another into an infinite chain of signification composed of the juxtaposition of ambivalent elements (*Recherches* 85). Graham Allen writes, “Intertextuality, as a term, has not been restricted to discussions of the literary arts. It is found in discussions of cinema, painting, music, architecture, photograph, photography, and in virtually all cultural and artistic productions” (174). Musicologists, however, refer more often to the terms “imitation” and “borrowing” to describe this type of intertextual dialogue—both important notions in their own right (Allen 175). Furthermore, the various songs made possible by this borrowing and merging of text and tune serve as another tool for “deflating the obsessive binary conflicts” that dominate the early part of Dai’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Schulze-Engler 160).

This notion of intertextual reverberation via Third Space counternarratives finds further echoes in Dai’s use of both Mozart and the Thousand-and-One-Nights tales, both works originating outside of Mainland Chinese tradition. Ma, who possesses musical talent but lacks Luo’s storytelling and athletic prowess, laments the passing of the age of the Thousand-and-One-Nights tales, the great age of stories so powerful that they could rescue Scheherazade from her oppression and imminent execution at the hands of the king, determined to execute the virgin he’d selected to spend the night with each succeeding morning. Evoking this transnational work of undated origin, ranging from eighth-century Arabic translations of some of the tales to the 1717 twelve-volume compilation by Antoine Galland known as *Les Mille et Une Nuits: Contes arabes traduits en français*, with origins ranging from Persian and Iranian to Indian, Iraqi,
Egyptian, and Turkish traditions, shows that the layers of stories are multicultural, asynchronous, and in perpetual transformation. Ma and Luo’s storytelling has similar far-ranging origins and layers, as they add to them, work in translation, introduce original material, and construct further adjustments. Mozart merges with Mao and becomes a silent revolt in a tiny village, a subversion only fully understood by two individuals, Ma and Luo. Banned works, such as those by Mozart, Brahms, and Beethoven continue to exist for brief moments on the strings of Ma’s violin. While Dai Sijie penned this novel in French, the language of his adopted country where he has lived since 1984, the seamstress’ father, the tailor, shouts the word, “Way-o-lin,” his accented word for “violin” in English at Ma and Luo. It is not just Ma and Luo who cross cultures in the physically and culturally isolated village and spread Western ideas, but even the tailor, named the most widely traveled resident of the village, who encountered the word and its associations elsewhere. The texts that the violin expresses allows the young men, who do not support Mao’s Cultural Revolution, to surreptitiously hold on to the culture that Mao has thrown to the ash heap, which the village headsman threatens to do literally with the violin. The tailor’s cry of “Way-o-lin” “ressemble plus à un douloureux soupir qu’à un mot anglais” (Dai, Balzac 35). The text demonstrates that culture cannot be banished, as the strings and the sonata literally and metaphorically resonate not only with Ma and Luo but with the people of the village, just as the strings resonate with Mozart’s sonatas and Tibetan tunes. Ma fears that the strings will be broken when the violin is handled roughly by the headsman who is trying to shake potentially banned

64 Both Scheherazade’s own story of female agency and the individual stories she tells, ending with a cliff-hanger each night to encourage the king to spare her life and entice him to hear the sequel, all stories embedded within the framework of the king’s betrayal by his wife and his use of virgins to satisfy himself, have been well used in both literature and popular fiction. Such uses include Assia Djebar’s Ombre sultane (2006) and Leila Sebbar’s Scherazade (1982) to the recent publication of Salman Rushdie’s novel Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights, a work Rushdie says is “rooted in two thousand years of storytelling tradition yet rooted in the concerns of our present moment.”
and hidden items from its empty interior. “J’avais l’impression,” Ma narrates, “que les cordes allaient casser sur le coup, et les frettes s’envoler en morceaux” (Dai, Balzac 10). The banned and hidden meaning is in words and texts, often unobtainable to barely literate peasants. However, more than the threat of its loss, which does not occur, the violin represents a link with the Chinese intellectual class to which Ma’s family belongs and beyond that, to Europe and America and the cultures of the world, a rejection of strict adherence to the peasant culture to which Ma has been assigned and in which he carries waste. Holding on to the bits of culture—the violin, the sonatas, film, and books—which he lacks in the village, connects him with their transnational cultural values. Third Space notions often imply something that may precisely not exist in a real space, and that is true for Ma and Luo, who inhabit the “imagined community” that is common to migrants and exiles, one that blurs the lines of transcultural lives and, in their case, draws on forbidden elements in their “re-education” locale (Bhabha, Location 202; Schulze-Engler 160).

Luo’s storytelling talent and his retelling of a Korean film’s plot for the Phoenix Mountain villagers also show the transmission that occurs from one culture into another as a form of intertextuality and further emphasizes the mise-en-abyme elements of Dai’s novel and the reflexive nature of his plots. Luo recounts stories, for entertainment to the village headsman, which results in Ma and Luo being sent to the town of Yongjing, the county seat in the mountainous western Gansu province, to watch the renowned North Korean film La Petite marchande de fleurs, a film actually produced in 1972, the year in which Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise is set. One film critic says, “[T]here is a reverence paid to The Flower Girl that makes it more than just the ‘greatest’ film ever produced in the country” (“Review”). Dai indicates that this film was the most popular of three films that the two characters of his novel,
Ma and Luo, went to see on the basketball court in Yongjing. The choice of this film, with a female character who earns her freedom and has the potential to triumph over her oppression, parallels both the plot of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* and some of the Western novels enumerated within the text, creating a story-within-a-story effect with the briefly told story of the little flower sellers inside the story of the little seamstress, both of whose lives serve as counternarratives to the traditional discourse that impacted rural women in China at that time. That narrative “demands that a woman’s place is in the home and that her primary duties are to obey and please her husband” and, to some extent, requires that “women . . . be tied down in their traditionally belittled roles” (Hemmel and Sindbjerg vii, 128). This retelling of the North Korean film’s plot creates a third element in the incursion into differing cultures in each reflection of similar transcultural plots involving liberty, perseverance, and triumph over adversity, North Korean, French, and Chinese, respectively, in each new narrative. While the film parallels many plots of Chinese Communist films from the 1960s and 1970s, with the arrival of a long-lost brother who is a member of the Revolutionary Army and provides the acts of heroism, Dai showcases the emotional, rather than the political content, and the individual over the collective in his retelling. Luo, the better storyteller, is feverish with malaria and unable to tell the story, leaving it in Ma’s less adept hands. However, Luo steps in to deliver the lines from the film that bring audiences to tears: “Le proverbe dit: un cœur sincère pourrait même faire s’épanouir une pierre. Pourtant, le cœur de la fille aux fleurs n’était-il pas assez sincère?” (Dai, *Balzac* 49). The emphasis, in Ma and Luo’s polyvocal retelling, is on the individual character of the flower seller, highlighting the humble yet remarkable female protagonist, and the seamstress on Phoenix Mountain, the protagonist of Dai’s novel, is there to be enthralled by this tale of female triumph, even if it arrives through the actions of the flower seller’s brother and the
national army. The flower seller struggles financially to care for her ill mother in North Korea in the 1930s, then controlled by the Japanese. She is deeply in debt to an evil landlord, a stock character in many films of the time, and told to work to repay the landlord the money her mother owes. Similarly to the emphasis on the individual character in a film designed to serve as a Communist propaganda tool, the actress Hong Yong-hee rose to starlet status and her image even came to be featured on the currency of the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea, furthering both the state’s goals and the actress’ status. Ma and Luo, in this joint retelling, create what Gérard Genette, in his work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, calls a “discursive text,” highlighting the different non-contemporaneous aspects in the discourse. The delayed version, which Genette highlights through the use of so-called “later notes” in the works of such writers as Chateaubriand, Rousseau, and others shows conversion and reflects on the assessment of another work (331). Similarly such delayed versions often play a corroborative role, both documenting the original text and interpreting it in new, and often more relevant ways, for another audience in a different time or place. This new version rests in what some Third Space critics call a generative and disjunctive “[T]hird [S]pace of enunciation” (Ikas and Wagner, “Postcolonial” 101). Karen Ikas and Gerhard Wagner, writing in *Communicating in the Third Space*, describe similar transformations of texts, using as an example the work of the poet Derek Walcott, originally from the West Indies, who uses both the narrative traditions of English expression and the patois of the Caribbean to create something that Ikas and Wagner refer to as “something else besides” (101). “It is not something truly new but rather only an additional Other,” they state (101). While the tale that honors the military and the family makes the film’s plot permissible, the story of female agency becomes the thread that stands out for the title character of Dai’s novel.
Counternarratives as Textual Interrupters

The establishment of counternarratives relies on what Marion May Campbell calls “textual interrupters,” interrupters that may appear coherently configured and appropriate within the context but “[…] overall become a counterstrategy, challenging the discourses of truth and representation” (160). The reader of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* realizes that both words and clothing serve as such textual disrupters of meaning in the novel. The peasants of the rural region are not able to “read” the counternarratives of the protagonists Ma and Luo, but they take them in auditorily. They are then sent to the Thousand Meter Cliff to gather traditional folks songs from a lice-infested miller, known for singing the traditional songs. They are sent by their fellow intellectual in the village, known as Four-Eyes (*Binoclard*) for his spectacles, and this son of a poet, has promised to loan them a copy of a novel by Balzac in exchange for the songs, which he will in turn deliver to his mother, the poet, to secure him a spot through a friend at a journal for revolutionary poetry. The narrator Ma captures this miscomprehension by the miller, which serves as one of several textual interrupters, crucial to the establishment of counternarrative discourses:

Jean dis bonjour, non pas en sichuanais, le dialecte de notre province, mais en mandarin, exactement comme dans un film.

— Il parle en quelle langue? demanda-t-il à Luo d’un air perplexe.

— Dans la langue officielle, lui répondit Luo, la langue de Pékin. Vous ne connaissez pas?

— C’est où, Pékin?
Cette question nous donna un choc mais, quand nous comprimes qu’il ne connaissait vraiment pas Pékin, nous rimes comme des bossus. Un instant, j’enviai presque son ignorance totale du monde extérieur. (Dai, Balzac 85)

The miller, confined to his remote part of the woods, in which Ma and Luo nearly lose themselves, engulfed in the tall, dense bamboo growth, believes they are speaking of a northern city called Peiping or Bai Ping. Ma speaks in Mandarin, and Luo serves as his impromptu interpreter to give an officious air of high culture dominating Luo, which they hope will further their endeavor to gain access to additional high culture, i.e., the novel by Balzac promised by Four-Eyes. In addition, Luo and Ma, trying to capture the folk songs by playing the part of the revolutionary cadre, appear covered in political and cultural signifiers—a Mao-style jacket on Ma and a red badge with Mao’s head in gold on Luo’s army field uniform—but these mean nothing to the miller. In the miller’s hut, ordinary pebbles to suck on and spit out are “dumplings.” “Servez-vous, dit le vieux. C’est mon plat de tous les jours: des boulettes de jade à la sauce au sel” (Dai, Balzac 91). The miller who represents hope for Four-Eyes is this laborer who lives so far from the influences of bourgeois society and intellectualism that he doesn’t even recognize the dialect of his country’s capital. However, Dai’s protagonists have “no respect for him and his folk erudition” (Chevaillier 61). And the eighteen songs with which Ma and Luo return, folk songs intended to spare Four-Eyes from the dehumanizing routines of the rural village—songs of which the reader receives only snippets that speak of lice fearing boiling water and nuns fearing monks—are deemed “cochonneries” or foolish, smutty verses by Four-Eyes. Clearly all is not as it looks when Ma describes his appearance on that day:

Si vous m’aviez vu en ce jour d’été 1973, en route pour la falaise des Mille Mètres, vous m’auriez cru tout droit sorti d’une photo officielle d’un congrès du
Parti communiste, ou d’une photo de mariage de “cadres révolutionnaires.” Je portais une veste bleu marine à col gris foncé, fabriquée par notre Petite Tailleuse. C’était, dans les moindres détails, une copie conforme des vestes du président Mao, depuis le col jusqu’à la forme des poches, en passant par les manches, ornées chacune de trois mignons petits boutons jaune d’or, qui semblaient refléter la lumière quand je bougeais les bras. (Dai, *Balzac* 83)

Meaning is not reflected in the words of Ma and Luo but deflected, leading to what Flore Chevaillier has called “cultural misreading” both within the different spheres of influence within China, its regions and dialects, but also, with respect to to the novel and the film adaptation, between East and West. Ma is from what Mao perceived as high culture, the culture of intellectuals, and while he is now merely doing hard labor, impersonates a high-level Maoist interpreter to gain respect and influence. The novel thus multiplies the counternarratives, further dislocating the subjectivities at play and creating the “unstable positionalities” that are inherent to Bhabha’s Third Space (Lossau 65). Borders are crossed, boundaries are blurred, and cultural and national notions are questioned and at times subverted. This type of impersonation, while potentially dangerous, becomes a method of getting one’s own way in a culture that uses violence to put down difference. “Violent struggle to deal with class enemies and counterrevolutionary forces, both in political rhetoric and actual practice, was a recurring theme during the Maoist period in China,” writes Barend J. ter Haar, explaining that violence and its threat was an inherent part of “post-1949 elite and nonelite culture” and violent political campaigns (27-29).

Although Dai clearly focuses on the impact of Western literature on the lives of Ma, Luo, and the unnamed seamstress, the young men initially do not suspect that such works could be in
the leather suitcase hidden by their friend Four-Eyes (Binoclard) when they first discover its presence. They view the potential for banned works through the single space of China, and neither a second nor Third Space has yet been communicated; nor can they even envision its possible communication within the village where they are being re-educated. They imagine other counternarratives with which they were familiar prior to the start of the Cultural Revolution and their period of “re-education,” including Tang dynasty works from what was known as the “Golden Age” of Chinese literature. The narrator of Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise states:

Nous établissons une longue liste de livres possibles: les romans classiques chinois, depuis Les Trois Royaumes combattants jusqu’au Rêve dans le Pavillon Rouge, en passant par le Jin Ping Mei, réputé d’être un livre érotique. Il y avait aussi la poésie des dynasties des Tang, des Song, des Ming, ou des Qin. Ou encore les peintures traditionnelles de Zu Da, de Shi Tao, de Tong Qicheng . . . On évoqua même la Bible, Les Paroles des Cinq Vieillards, un livre prétendument interdit depuis des siècles dans lequel cinq immenses prophètes de la dynastie des Han révélaient, au sommet d’une montagne sacrée, ce qui allait arriver dans les deux mille ans à venir (Dai 64-65).

Ma states that at the time they were in the camp in 1972, all books were banned except those by Chairman Mao and his “cronies” and some scientific works (Dai, Balzac 64). Historical accounts show the extent of the anti-intellectual fervor, and the fire which is so symbolic of both destruction and rebirth on Phoenix Mountain was real in the China of the Cultural Revolution. Not only were Western books banned, but vast libraries full of Chinese books that did not overtly support Mao’s plans were banned and/or burned as well. One historical witness, Liu Yan, states,
in Lui Hui and Gao Lilin’s volume *Bloodstained Innocence—The Cultural Revolution in the Hearts of the Young* (Dixue de tongxin—Haizi xinzhong de wenge):

Except for those books whose covers featured Chairman Mao’s portrait, almost all of the books in the library were removed and carried out to the center of the sports ground . . . The Red Guards insisted that these books had spread feudalist, capitalist, and revisionist ideas and that therefore they had to be burned . . . Finally the books—by now a small mountain—were set on fire by the Red Guards. The books that they had only recently fought over, borrowed, and read were consumed by the raging fire of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. (Schoenhals 327-28)

Witnesses and critics describe how writers and scholars were persecuted (Tollebeek 225).

Writing about the Cultural Revolution in *Ravaged: Art and Culture in Times of Conflict*, critic Rebecca Knuth states, “Books and libraries, as persistent witnesses to the past and alternate realities and as in service to the bourgeoisie, were purged and burned. While some . . . were lost because of personal looting and chaotic civil war, most were destroyed as a result of government-condoned Red Guard actions” (Tollebeek 225-26). 65 Dai is alluding to some of the most classic and well-known Chinese and global works in highlighting the extent of censorship. Tang dynasty poetry is considered the pinnacle of achievement of Chinese literature, during this Golden Age in which Chinese literature and the arts flourished. Francophone-Chinese writer François Cheng, who has translated Tang poetry into French, writes that the Tang dynasty poetry

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65 Knuth, a scholar specializing in intellectual freedom, censorship, the history of the written word, nationalism, genocide, and the relationship between extremism and cultural destruction, mentions that the years 1966 to 1968 saw some of the worst destruction of book collections, as the Red Guard attacked not just individuals but what came to be known as the “Four Olds,” ideas, culture, customs, and habits/habits of mind deemed unacceptable (Tollebeek 225). All libraries were closed for some period of time, some for a decade.
of the seventh through ninth centuries “constitue, aussi bien par sa fécondité et sa variété que par ses recherches formelles, le sommet de la poésie classique” (F. Cheng, *L’Écriture* 31, 34-35).

Cheng further points out in this work the dialectic system of thought, based on the use of alternation, or opposition, between parallel lines of verse and lines that oppose this parallel structure, creating an internal spatial order that exudes autonomy. Dai Sijie, François Cheng, and Shan Sa all allude to this Golden Age of poetry and its renowned rulers, such as Tang Tai Tsung (627-649 CE), Tang Kao Tsung (649-683 CE), and the Empress Wu (683-705 CE), the first female emperor, who became the basis for Sa’s book *L’Impératrice*. Entire eras of prestigious Chinese cultural production became invisible during the Cultural Revolution.

**Countering Censorship**

China’s history of ideological censorship, particularly of works in translation, was most virulent during the Cultural Revolution and included the importation of foreign literature, a mandate so severe that translation of any foreign work was prohibited (Tan 313). However, censorship in China goes back as far as the time of Qin the first Emperor of China (259 BCE-210 BCE) who ordered scholars to be buried alive for possessing banned books and the books themselves burned. Scholars describe China’s virtually “unbroken line of censorship” from that time, one that differed only in the particular texts that were banned and the scale of censorship and in today’s world includes the Internet (Tan 314). Dai was himself “re-educated” from 1971 to 1974, and left China in 1984. In interviews promoting the book and film, Dai calls *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* “a love story” perhaps with a sense of double-entendre suggesting both
the protagonists Ma and Luo’s love of the seamstress but also the shared love the three of them
develop for the banned Western novels they discover during that time. Dai said:

There was a real love story, but not as romantic. The stealing books part is true
and the experience of reading stories to farmers is also true. [From the 1960s to
1970s] all the books were banned, even science books . . . so at that time almost
everybody stole books and hid them. . . . The little seamstress had seen more in
Balzac . . . This is what she had never learned during her days of being
indoctrinated . . . that life could be filled with many nice things. (Sen-lun Yu)

Attempts to ban literature, hide or read banned works, and preserve the violin, despite its
jeopardy for being as a “bourgeois toy,” like much of the book, are grounded in autobiographical
experiences of Dai and his friends, the author states. The enclosed space of Four-Eyes’ suitcase,
even prior to its unveiling, opens an intellectual space in which Ma and Luo, outsiders in this
uneredite locale, are intellectually free to discuss and imagine what they know they no longer
can obtain.

The range of works banned, imagined and enumerated in Dai’s short, 229-page novel
includes titles of canonical works circumscribing over two thousand years of Chinese history and
literary and cultural development, and leaves the reader to surmise or investigate how these key
works might have challenged Maoist thought and politics. The protagonists of Balzac et la petite
tailleuse chinoise mention Les Trois Royaumes combattants (commonly known as Romance of
the Three Kingdoms),66 considered a masterpiece of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), as a work

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66 The word “romance” here is translated from the Chinese yangyi, which literally means
“elaboration of meaning” (Knight 85). The work that Dai mentions began as a fourteenth-century
manuscript, and despite its ban during the Cultural Revolution, reemerged as a series on China
Central Television (CCTV), with the 1994 series of eighty-four episodes, considered to be
China’s most costly series with a cast of 400,000 and 1.2 billion viewers worldwide (Knight 85).
that Ma and Luo suspect could have been hidden in Four-Eyes’ suitcase. Pointing out this classic, Ma chooses an epic that recounts the rise of three warring kingdoms during the third century, following the collapse of the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE). Thematic elements include the recruitment of a Daoist sage named Zhuge Liang to assist in the unification of the empire, the assumption of Liu Bei, king of Shu-Han, as the proper heir, despite his emphasis on personal revenge, Zhuge’s use of mystical forces, and the emphasis on far-sighted, lofty plans beyond the human sphere. The renowned and oft-quoted line from the work states that “[t]he pursuit of goals lies in humans, but the accomplishment lies with heaven” (Knight 86-87). The emphasis on heaven, religious influences, the individual, and dynastic monarchies runs contrary to the purposes of the Cultural Revolution and its self-appointed leader, Mao Zedong. Rebecca Knuth points out that “[i]n a repudiation of religion, Red Guards destroyed every reminder of Confucianism, including images and sacred texts” and public spaces were also scoured for what was called “poison of the past,” leaving churches, temples, monuments, sculptures, historical artifacts, many museum collections, relics, and cemeteries in ruins (226).

*Jin Ping Mei*⁶⁷ (meaning *Gold, Plum, Vase*, or *The Plum in the Golden Vase*) (1618), another work of the late Ming dynasty, is evoked for its sexual content; however, its choice by Dai is perhaps more linked to that of female sexuality and liberation, a theme present both in *Jin Ping Mei* and in the seamstress’ emerging tale in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*. *Jin Ping Mei* is considered to be a novel of manners, presenting not merely the adulterous and sadomasochistic side of its characters but situating them in the context of a twelfth-century society that is focused on socioeconomic status and fulfillment of sensual desires. As a novel of

⁶⁷ *Jin Ping Mei* is sometimes written in pinyin as *Chin P’ing Mei*, such as in the English translation by David Tod Roy, a professor of Chinese literature at the University of Chicago, in the edition published in 2011 by Princeton University Press.
manners, it is not unlike the novels from Balzac’s *La Comédie humaine* and other Western works that are actually hidden within Four-Eyes’ valise. Dai uses the intertextual tool to create a parallel between banned Chinese literature, hidden Western literature, and the lived lives of the three protagonists of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, Ma, Luo, and the unnamed seamstress. The counternarratives of the banned Chinese works, involving female sexual liberation, and that of Dai’s novel, intersect thematically in what is often perceived as dangerous, uncontrolled territory. The three eponymous female characters of *Jin Ping Mai*, are Pan Jinlian, whose name means “golden lotus,” Li or Ping’er, a concubine whose name means “little vase,” and Pang Chunmei, whose name means “spring plum blossoms.” Its anonymous author is credited with taking “a much closer look at the psychology of women than any earlier Chinese novelist,” in an atmosphere of competition and tension in an unusual novel that combines themes of desire and sexuality, oppression, comedy, Buddhist reincarnation, Confucian messages, moral retribution, gender roles, jealousy, insecurity, and the collapse of the state. Dai’s selection of this work is interesting in that it also worked as a complex intertextual work at the time in which it was written. The characters are borrowed from an earlier work, *The Water Margin* (c. 1550), a key work from the Ming dynasty that was written by numerous authors, but with significant differences in both the particulars of the plot, and the tone, making *Jin Ping Mei* an erotic work and at times almost a parody of the heroes portrayed in *The Water Margin* (Ropp 116).

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68 *The Water Margin* is also known as *Outlaws of the Marsh* in some translations (Knight 87).
69 Paul S. Ropp, writing in *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature*, states that “[t]he plot of *Jin Ping Mei* is more unified and focused than any of China’s earlier novels, even though the anonymous author seems deliberately to quote popular songs and to make references to other stories, dramas, and novels at every conceivable opportunity. As a result of such borrowing, the novel is a kind of encyclopedia of literary and dramatic quotation, an unprecedented eclectic creation that weaves disparate materials into a coherent story” (116).
It might surprise contemporary readers, in the West and in China both, that another text on a list of banned books is the *Rêve dans le Pavillon Rouge* because the text ranks as one of the world’s top five bestselling novels of all time (Knight 93). Again, the work mirrors the themes of Dai’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* with its theme of love lost and the fate that befalls the character Baoyu when he fails to marry Daiyu, who is so in love with him that she withers away and her despondency results in her own death. Some critics point to the fact that the Daoist-Buddhist concept of liberation ultimately wins out when Baoyu becomes a monk, and the tension between freeing oneself from suffering and pursuing attachment could be seen as at odds with the mandate from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to abolish all traditional religions (Zuo). Dai systematically highlights the extent to which the vast majority of texts were at odds with the revolutionary stance of the Cultural Revolution, locking more and more worthy, classical tales and traditions out of reach in favor of a bookless society focused on manual labor, working in mines, on farms, and in logging camps. Historians point to the centrality of the Tenth Plenum of the Chinese Communist Party’s Eighth Central Committee in 1962 in which the Socialist Education Movement rose to the fore. The word “education” signifies here the Mao-sanctioned movement, which sought to make agricultural production the primary goal for China moving into the future (Hemmel and Sindbjerg 3).

Through intertextuality, Dai also illustrates the types of “literature” to which Ma and Luo were exposed in this single intellectual and cultural sphere they inhabited, primarily political tracts of other leaders who supported Mao’s policies. One such leader was Enver Hoxha, prime minister of Albania from 1944 to 1956 and first secretary of the Albanian Communist Party’s Central Committee, who was known for his brutal Stalinist tactics (Fevziu 1-3). Hoxha and Mao maintained close ties until Mao’s death, after which Hoxha turned away from diplomatic
relations with China in response to what he perceived as an opening to Western ideas as anti-Western notions had indeed united the two leaders. In *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, Ma states:

Cette histoire de littérature me déprimait à mort: nous n’avions pas de chance. À l’âge où nous avions enfin su lire couramment, il n’y avait déjà plus rien à lire. Pendant plusieurs années, au rayon “littérature occidentale” de toutes les librairies, il n’y eut que les Œuvres complètes du dirigeant communiste albanais Enver Hoxha, sur les couvertures dorées desquelles on voyait le portrait d’un vieil homme à cravate de couleurs criardes, avec des cheveux gris impeccablement peignés, qui rivait sur vous, sous ses paupières plissées, un œil gauche marron et un œil droit plus petit que le gauche, moins marron et doté d’un iris rose pâle.

(Dai 66)

Dai’s choice of Hoxha is particularly apropos to this transnational novel because Hoxha studied at a French school in Korçë, Albania, and then in France at the Université de Montpellier when he was twenty-two, writing for the French Communist newspaper, *L’Humanité* (Saxon). He became a French teacher back home in Korçë, going underground, being imprisoned for his protests against his country’s government, founding and leading the Albanian Communist Party in 1941 and editing that party’s newspaper, *Zeri i Popullit*. However, despite this international background, Hoxha is known as a dictator who used his absolute powers to keep “his isolated mountain country rigidly cordoned off for four decades” (Saxon). His speeches and writings were collected in more than forty volumes, all of which were published. “Let everyone understand clearly, the walls of our fortress are of unshakeable granite rock,” Hoxha wrote. Criticizing the West, he complained in 1982 that “imperialists and their lackeys say that we have
isolated ourselves from the ‘civilized world,’” adding that “[b]oth the bitter history of our country in the past and the reality of the ‘world’ that they advertise have convinced us that it is by no means a ‘civilized world’” (Saxon). Nonetheless, Hoxha managed to create a series of alliances with larger communist states, such as with the former Soviet Union from 1948 to 1960, which allowed Albania’s development, and its subsequent alliance with China during the sixties and seventies until the end of that alliance in 1978. Albania’s astute alliance with China allowed the influx of military and economic aid to flow into the Eastern European nation at a time when Hoxha was seeking to modernize Albania\(^70\) and likely prevented Moscow from implementing an economic and political blockade. The Western literature available comes from Albania’s Communist regime, and the counternarrative offered is a false one, one seeking to enforce similitude and not opening up to polyvocality and difference. A false depiction of Western literature is offered on two levels, that of calling Hoxha’s works “literature” and that of calling them “Western.” Rather than providing what Christine Stanley calls “alternatives to the dominant discourse” or “multiple and conflicting models of understanding social and cultural identities,” Mao’s offering of Hoxha as Western literature further supports the master narrative of Communist China and the Cultural Revolution with normative and authoritative discourses (14)

Many critics, however, attribute the popularity of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* in part to the ways in which the novel shows “l’importance que la littérature peut avoir dans la vie et pour la vie, importance qui ressort d’autant plus clairement que pendant la révolution

\(^{70}\) Despite restrictions on expression in Albania, Hoxha allowed arts and culture to flourish within limits, establishing a large number of cultural institutions; he also advocated for equal rights for women and helped women gain social and economic independence (Prifti). The Albanian writer Ismail Kadare published during that time, seeking political asylum in France in 1990. His novel *Pasardhësi* (*Successor* [2003]) looks at the end of Hoxha’s regime.
culturelle pratiquement tous les livres étaient interdits,” (Fritz-Ababneh, “L’intertextualité” 97), and more specifically, by allowing one to view the world through different cultural lenses. Four-Eyes, who possesses the cache of books due to his poet mother’s influence, earned his name because he has glasses and can see. Ma says, “Alors c’est lui le premier libéré” (Dai, *Balzac* 107). He is both the first liberated from ignorance by the valise filled with literary works and the first to leave the mining village to be freed from his so-called re-education. When he loses his glasses in the mud, is forced to grope blindly for something he can’t see and is menaced by the hooves of a buffalo thrashing about or the plough’s blades, Ma comes to his rescue, finds the glasses, and restores Four-Eyes’ clear vision. His spectacles and myopia\(^{71}\) become a metaphor for the sight imbued in Four-Eyes and then Ma, Luo, and the seamstress by the works that will be supplied, albeit reluctantly, by Four-Eyes.

The differing views of the value of the books is expressed, albeit superficially, even in promotional materials for the books that allude, in the United States, to “Mao’s infamous Cultural Revolution” and the discovery of “a hidden stash of Western classics in Chinese translation” which shows the “resilience of the human spirit” from within “the hopelessness and terror of one of the darkest passages in human history.” In France, on Gallimard’s cover, the same strategy is evident in the ways in which the contents of the valise are described by Dai’s narrator Ma himself:

À l’intérieur, des piles de livres s’illuminèrent sous notre torche électrique; les grands écrivains occidentaux nous accueillirent à bras ouverts: à leur tête, se tenait notre vieil ami Balzac, avec cinq ou six romans, suivi de Victor Hugo,

\(^{71}\) As one will see later in this study, Dai also crafts a protagonist who is profoundly myopic, Monsieur Muo in *Le Complexe de Di*. Defining one by his near-sightedness is a means of creating a counternarrative to the typical 20/20 way of seeing the world and society.
Stendhal, Dumas, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Romain Rolland, Rousseau, Tolstoï, Gogol, Dostoïevski, et quelques Anglais: Dickens, Kipling, Emily Brontë . . .

Quel éblouissement! (Dai, Balzac 125)

The American edition, seeing that no American authors are mentioned in the valise, focuses on the negative depiction of China’s Cultural Revolution—the publisher’s sales pitch aligning with the rocky relations, at times, between the United States and China over human rights, censorship, work in the South China Sea, China’s pending limitations on nongovernmental organizations, economic issues, and cybersecurity. European editions, by contrast, focus on the transformative abilities of European literature, referencing that the seamstress is no longer “une simple montagnarde” after her encounter with these literary works without delving into the more complex issues of her pregnancy and illegal abortion, as she leaves the village for the city without a clear explanation for her choice other than the lessons gleaned from Balzac (Chevaillier 62).

Openness of the Third Space in Dai’s Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise

Early in the novel, the only Western work the protagonists have encountered is Cervantes’ Don Quixote (1605), which Luo’s aunt read to him, and which he describes as being about an errant knight. Luo’s limited recollection of the work magnifies the depiction of myopia throughout the novel—a theme in both of Dai’s novels discussed in this chapter. Both Don Quixote’s myopia and the myopia of the owner of the suitcase full of Western works underscore the narrowness or near-sightedness of the acceptable behavior, thought, and opinions allowed at the time. However, Ma and Luo return to their Third Space, in which they are creating their own
open and imagined intellectual community, carved out by the notion of banned Eastern and Western works, pondering their previous experience with Cervantes’ important and enduring work, *Don Quixote*. This quixotic realm is what Edward W. Soja envisions in writing “Increasing the Openness of Thirdspace,” when he states:

> At its best, such critical spatial thinking seeks to undermine its own authority by a form of textual and political practice that privileges uncertainties, rejects authoritative and paradigmatic structures that suggest permanence or inviolability, invites contestation, and thereby keeps open the spatial debate to new and different possibilities. (*Thirdspace* 107)

For Ma and Luo, their text resides only in their minds and memories. However, Dai’s choice of Cervantes’ text remains significant, as it has become a powerful cultural signifier though the word “quixotic,” said to have entered the lexicon in 1718, denoting a “foolishly impractical” pursuit, especially one “marked by rash, lofty, romantic ideas or extravagantly chivalrous action” (“Quixotic”). The quixotic narrative is often one at odds with the dominant discourse, which is often labeled reasonable, practical, or realistic. Dai’s novel could be considered a quixotic narrative as Ma and Luo’s quest to inculcate the seamstress with culture leads to unanticipated consequences for all three protagonists. Aaron R. Hanlon writes in his article, “Toward a Counter-Poetics of Quixotism.”

> [S]tudies of the quixotic tend to conclude with the very premise with which they begin: the quixotic is thoroughly polyvalent, self-contradictory, and protean, and

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72 Hanlon places Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955), Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851) in the category of quixotic novels and urges readers to not conflate quixotic, as described here with the picaresque, a comic or satirical novel of misadventures by a likeable rogue who often travels from place to place, and the Cervantine, an overly broad term that refers to not just the life, literature, and outlook of Cervantes, but “the vast array of things that . . . also appear in the literary worlds of Cervantes” characters (146).
the ideological thrust of quixotes and quixotic narratives is open-ended, depending on the historical circumstances in which the narrative is deployed.

(143-45)

Hanlon states that the problematic of interpretation created by the capacious meaning of the term “quixotic” is compounded by the numerous imitations, interpretations, and reconfigurations, but also rich and complicated as descriptors of style, narration, and character. Much like Ma and Luo seek to enhance the enculturation of the seamstress. Hanlon points out that quixotic literature often highlights, and often seeks to produce, both “exceptions” and “exceptionalisms.” Quixotes, like Ma and Luo, often find their own morality, which leads them to those they see as “wayward or “in need of salvation,” like the seamstress. At times, the quixote, the one engaged in this fantastical quixotism, may battle “norms and strictures of systemic oppression,” which Ma and Luo do in Dai’s novel on several levels. First, Luo seeks an illegal abortion for the seamstress, who is pregnant with the absent Ma’s child, freeing her from the societal repercussions of illegal maternity. Furthermore, they are freeing themselves and the seamstress from the dogmatic strictures of the Cultural Revolution through their overt experiences with Western literature from Balzac to Romain Rolland. They are covertly freeing the villages from that same bind in their disguised presentation of works by Western authors and/or composers, such as Mozart. At the end of the novel, when the seamstress leaves the village, Ma, and Luo, behind to pursue her luck in a larger city, inspired by Western literature and images of Western women, she becomes the image that Hanlon introduces in his essay, “an idealism of the transcendent feminine” (152). They all reject dominant social codes in favor of creating their own, individualistic, counternarrative, influenced by the works of Western literature into which they have come in contact.
The intertextuality of the Western works contained in the suitcase proceeds more slowly with Four-Eyes initially handing over a copy of Balzac’s *Ursule Mirouët*, which makes so great an impact on Ma that he copies a passage into the interior of his sheepskin jacket, which he later passes on to a secondary character. Yet, Balzac’s *Ursule Mirouët* has even greater significance for the unnamed female protagonist, the Chinese seamstress, in terms of her relationship with her own agency. Dorothée Fritz-Ababneh alludes to the similarities that Dai’s novel bears as an “exercice intertextuel” to Ovid’s rendering of the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, the notion of falling in love with one’s beautiful creation, and George Bernard Shaw’s 1916 play *Pygmalion*, in which Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering undertake the culturalization of the flower-seller Eliza Doolittle with unexpected results and an uncertain future of her own choosing ahead (“L’Intertextualité” 97). With few exceptions, Dai leaves the reader ignorant as to the passages in Balzac’s novel, published in 1841 as one of ninety-four novels that comprise *La Comédie humaine*, that made such a profound effect on the seamstress. The reader only learns in the final chapter of the book which novels by Balzac the protagonists read other than *Ursule Mirouët, La Cousine Bette* (1846), and *Le Père Goriot* (1835). Readers learn that they are *Cousin Pons* (1847), *Colonel Chabert* (1832), and *Eugénie Grandet* (1833) only when a match is being set to burn them because of the danger they present. The tales seem bound by the sense of passion, Ursule’s passion for Savinien de Portenduère and a desire to overcome her near-penniless state to marry him, Old Goriot’s Christ-like passion for his daughters in the face of their self-centered parvenuism, and Sylvain Pons passion for beauty, art, music, and food. The shortcomings of such passions, a recurring theme in *La Comédie humaine*, are lost on the Chinese seamstress, whose knowledge of life outside of the village is extremely limited. However, some critics have suggested that the seamstress is able to relate to the passions, struggles, and desires of Balzac’s
characters in a way that, as Michelle Bloom asserts, a peasant would not have been able to
through classical Chinese literature, with its complex written characters, its abstract ideas, its
protagonists who were often emperors, mandarins, and queens beyond her frame of reference.
The temporal distance between Balzac’s tales set in the early nineteenth century and Dai’s
characters set in the 1970s is thus less difficult to traverse. “Ironically, for Dai,” Bloom writes,
“geographic distance creates less of a gap than temporal distance” (Bloom, “Contemporary
Franco-Chinese” 314). Ma, Luo, and the seamstress admit to feeling at home in the Nemours of
*Ursule Mirouët*. All three characters are able to insert themselves into a counternarrative which
is more akin to the novels of manners and private French country life via their struggles with
provincial minds, to acquire books and to surmount the romantic triangle in which they find
themselves, more than in the strictly agricultural life under the communist regime. Few themes
are more Balzadian than the idea of a young person fighting in a world marked by severe
divisions and consciousness of socioeconomic class to advance in the sphere of his or her
passion, be that in Paris or the provinces, in legal matters or in love. The seamstress admits her
limited literacy as the only book on hand has been a technical sewing manual. She tells Luo, in a
letter, “Ne te moque pas mon écriture. Je n’ai jamais étudié au collège, comme toi. Tu sais bien
que le seul collège proche de notre montagne, c’est celui de la ville de Yong Jing, et qu’il faut
deux jours pour y aller. C’est mon père qui m’a appris à lire et à écrire. Tu peux me ranger dans
la catégorie des ‘fin d’études primaires’” (Dai, *Balzac* 48). Nonetheless, because of Balzac,
pronounced “Ba-er-zar-ke” in four Chinese ideograms, and his emphasis on human emotion,
passion, and motivation, the Chinese seamstress situates herself there in the Balzadian world,
too.
While Dai offers few passages from Balzac to point to the protagonists’ love of the writer, he alludes to one passage in *Ursule Mirouët* twice in his novel and the text takes on an existence of its own, becoming a series of narratives with an impact on Dai’s protagonists and secondary characters. First, Ma declares that he will copy his favorite passages onto the lining of his sheepskin jacket. Furthermore, the book *Ursule Mirouët* becomes payment, with the copy of Romain Rolland’s *Jean-Christophe* added with gratitude, for performing the seamstress’ illegal abortion. Ma recounts his choice of texts:

> Je décidai de copier mot à mot mes passages préférés d’*Ursule Mirouët*. C’était la première fois de ma vie que j’avais envie de recopier un livre. Je cherchais du papier partout dans la chambre, mais ne pus trouver que quelques feuilles de papier à lettres, destinées à écrire à nos parents. Je choisis alors de copier le texte directement sur la peau de mouton de ma veste. . . . Je recopiai le chapitre où Ursule voyage en somnambule. J’aurais voulu être comme elle: pouvoir, endormi sur mon lit, voir ce que ma mère faisait dans notre appartement, à cinq cents kilomètres de distance, assister au dîner de mes parents, observer leurs attitudes, les détails de leur repas, la couleur de leurs assiettes, sentir l’odeur de leurs plats, les entendre converser . . . Mieux encore, comme Ursule, j’aurais vu, en rêvant, des endroits où je n’avais jamais mis les pieds . . . (Dai, *Balzac* 74-75).

In the final chapter of the novel, Dai again invokes the image of Ursule: “la pauvre fille française fut réveillée de son rêve de somnambule par cet incendie, elle voulut se sauver, mais il était trop tard” (*Balzac* 219). The copy of *Ursule Mirouët* has already been given to the doctor, but Ursule is metaphorically on the ash heap of the Cultural Revolution. The reader could say that it is still too late; she has had her influence on the seamstress and others. In Balzac’s novel Ursule is
tormented by dreams, sleepwalking, and apparitions after the death of her beloved godfather, Dr. Minoret, but Ma admits that, in his isolation in the coal mines of Phoenix Mountain, he would welcome such visions. Balzac writes of Ursule:

Dix jours après la visite de Mme de Portenduère, Ursule subit un rêve qui présenta les caractères d’une vision surnaturelle autant par les faits moraux que par les circonstances pour ainsi dire physiques. Feu Minoret, son parrain, lui apparut et lui fit signe de venir avec lui; elle s’habilla, le suivit au milieu des ténèbres jusque dans la maison de la rue des Bourgeois où elle retrouva les moindres choses comme elles étaient le jour de la mort de son parrain... Elle s’était réveillée debout, au milieu de sa chambre, la face devant le portrait de son parrain qu’elle y avait mis depuis sa maladie. (*Ursule* 277-79)

His visit is disturbing to her on many levels. The apparition smiles with discolored lips, speaks with a feeble voice, evokes the missing letter concerning her inheritance that he had sent her to fetch and that she could not find, while he was on his deathbed, pointing out “l’auteur des torments qui t’ont mise à la porte du tombeau” (*Balzac, Ursule* 278). Nonetheless, there are pleasant aspects to the vision, too, in that her beloved godfather is returned to life, helping to solve her desperate situation, and assures her that she will be happy, will marry Savinien, whom she loves and who will accept her relative poverty, and will seek to reclaim his fortune from his nephew. Dai relies on the image of the sleepwalker to create his counternarrative novel and to contrast the sleeping state with its antithesis, literally and metaphorically, depicting one’s ability to be roused by literature as from sleep, to awake to class consciousness and seek an escape from one’s stifling milieu, and describing the flames and smoke that sputter and then rise from the burning pages of the banned books in the closing chapter of the novel. Balzac also creates a
counternarrative to the standard inheritance laws, which question and perhaps disallow Ursule from being a rightful heir as the legitimate daughter of an illegitimate father. The sleepwalking scenes allow the dominant narrative to be contested and to be reconstructed in opposition to society’s governing discourse, be it that of French society and inheritance laws or of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. James Phelan writes in “Narratives in Contest: Or, Another Twist in the Narrative Turn”:

To say that every narrative is contestable is not, however, to say that the contest among alternatives will always be carried out on a level playing field,” . . . “Some narratives acquire a sacred status in a given culture or subculture . . . and some narratives, while clearly not sacred, have the strong endorsement of culturally powerful groups. Contesting such narratives is not only very difficult but, in many cases, also extremely dangerous, as the history of religious and political persecution teaches us. (168)

Balzac and Dai are each known for challenging the norms of their cultures and their times, be they the bourgeois values of nineteenth-century France much later to be aspired to by the Chinese seamstress, the revolutionary values in the dominant discourse permitted by Mao that Dai’s protagonists Ma and Luo challenge, or the dissidence portrayed by Balzac in La Comédie humaine through such characters as Vautrin, Henri de Marsay, and Savinien de Portenduère.

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73 Gao Xingjian creates a similar counternarrative using the trope of the sleepwalker in his avant-garde play, Le Somnambule (1995), alternating between scenes in a train and scenes in a nightmare involving the sleepwalking character who speaks of prey and traps, memories and the present, dreams and reality. “Tu sais que tu es somnambule, que tu erres entre le rêve et l’univers réel,” Gao’s sleepwalker states. “Mais ta réalité provient-elle également de ton imagination? Où est le contraire? Tu ne parviens pas à savoir et tu n’oses t’écarter de ton rêve. Tu ignores si cet écart te mènerait à la mort de ton soi-disant moi ou à celle de ton corps. Alors, tu ne te sentirais plus ni réel, ni illusoire” (43).
Honoré de Balzac: Class Conflict on Two Continents

Dai’s choice of Balzac (1799-1850) as the eponymous character, an author who is not native to China and whose books were banned there during the Cultural Revolution, represents an act of cultural translation significant for its historical implications related to class consciousness. The Irish playwright Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) wrote, “The nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac” (Brooks). To insert Balzac’s literature into rural China in the twentieth century and show the ways in which it resonates in the lives of Dai’s rural and urban-born youth requires a nuanced look at Balzac’s life, politics, and his reading by Marxist and Marxian critics. In one interview Dai himself ponders why the seamstress loved Balzac and gravitated to his novels. “C’est un mystère,” Dai says, suggesting it may have been the ambiance and society depicted in those novels in ways that wrestled with the notion of female pleasure and status (“Balzac” INA). Dai’s novel contains social critiques and portrayals of class struggle that mirror those of Balzac. Balzac’s works, set primarily during the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830), portray the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the peasantry at a time when the class dynamic was being rewritten in France, as it also was in China during the Cultural Revolution. In contrast to the seamstress’ revolutionary times, Balzac was born at the end of the French Revolution (1787-1799). He lived during a time marked by Napoleon’s coup d’état, effectively shutting the door on the French Revolution and ushering in the Napoleonic Age, and then he witnessed the Bourbon Restoration, which had a profound impact on his thinking. He wrote many of his novels during the reign of Louis-Philippe and set most of his works during the Restoration, a reactionary return to rule by the Bourbon monarchs after the ossified class structure had been smashed by the French Revolution. Balzac’s novels have been used to
construct a Marxist narrative “whereby the bourgeoisie had been rising to prominence in the
eighteenth century, seized political power in 1789, and ruled supreme for most of the nineteenth
century, all because of the unstoppable tide of capitalist development” (Maza 3). Sarah Maza,
writing in *Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary*, states:

The standard view of Honoré de Balzac’s social and political stance identifies him
as a reactionary monarchist who loathed the bourgeoisie out of nostalgia for some
version of the Old Regime. This assumption has been popular with left-wing
scholars ranging from Georg Lukács to Fredric Jameson: it is assumed that from a
position of right-wing marginality Balzac did the ideological work of the left,
exposing the ugliness of a society driven by the predatory values and spiritual
emptiness of the bourgeoisie. (190)

Controversially, Maza challenges both the notion of a true class that identified itself as the
bourgeoisie, along with labeling as “inaccurate and misleading” the Left’s reasons for embracing
Balzac, who prior to advocating for conservative monarchism had espoused republicanism, the
ideologies of Napoleon Bonaparte, and Enlightenment liberalism. Indeed, the Marxist
philosopher Georg Lukács (1885-1971), writing in *Balzac et le réalisme français* (1967), cites
Balzac and other writers as “des images adéquates de grandes étapes particulières de l’évolution
humaine, et des guides dans la lutte idéologique pour atteindre la totalité de l’homme” (8). By
situating humans in their society, Lukács credits Balzac with creating an objective reality and
sees the “opposition de classes de la société capitaliste en France avec beaucoup de clarté”
(*Balzac et le réalisme* 9, 21). Lukács writes:

Il voit et porte plus loin. . . . Dans presque tous ses romans Balzac décrit cet essor
capitaliste, la transformation de l’artisanat primitif en capitalisme moderne, la
conquête de la ville et de la campagne par le capital dans sa croissance impétueuse, le recul de toutes les formes de société et les idéologies traditionnelles devant la marche en avant triomphante du capitalisme. (*Balzac et le réalisme* 50)

Whether Lukács is right concerning the rise of the bourgeoisie or Maza correctly surmises that the bourgeoisie did not truly exist because it failed to see itself as such is, in fact, immaterial. The significance of Dai’s choice of Balzac rests in the conflict between and painful restructuring of the class structure in China and the contact zone between classes that emerged through “re-education” that affected not just Ma and Luo, the educated youth, but also the seamstress, which is to say the peasantry.

While Balzac’s novels—and perhaps even Dai’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*—may have been banned in China during different epochs because of their ties to Western thought, Balzac and Dai both capture the profound political and social changes of their times. Frederich Engels (1820-1895), who with Karl Max founded modern communism and socialism, also expressed great admiration for the work of Balzac, for chronicling the social changes, the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, and for his ability to portray diverse classes, even those who were his “bitterest political antagonists” with “undisguised admiration.” Engels writes:

[I]n *La Comédie Humaine* [Balzac] gives us a most wonderfully realistic history of French “Society,” especially of *le monde parisien*, describing, chronicle-fashion, almost year by year from 1816 to 1848 the progressive inroads of the rising bourgeoisie upon the society of nobles, that reconstituted itself after 1815 and that set up again, as far as it could, the standard of *la vieille politesse française*. . . . I have learned more than from all the professed historians,
economists, and statisticians of the period together . . . [although] his sympathies are all with the class doomed to extinction.

Similarly, Dai captures the class struggle during the Cultural Revolution by portraying the urban youth Ma and Luo both falling in love with the rural seamstress, saving the violin from the village headman, crafting songs and interpreting films in a way that allows them to cross the boundaries and borders of class consciousness without being punished more than they already have been in their hard-labor sentence, carrying buckets of human feces on their backs as they traverse the mountain. In discovering the novels of Balzac and other Western writers, which will further allow the three of them to bridge cultures and classes, Dai opens up a multi-layered critique of class in China and in the West. He valorizes the novels that explore these themes and the critique they enable. “Ces livres sont presque comme l’argent,” Dai said in a televised interview (Troisième sujet). Balzac permits this valorization—the monetary influences affecting the subjectivity and abstract considerations of class existence—in the open space created for transcultural interpretation by the reader.

Gynocriticism and the Chinese Seamstress

Because of the dearth of details about the individual texts in Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise, at times one must exit Dai’s text to explore the full intertextuality of his work through exploration of La Comédie humaine and commentary on Balzac’s female characters, in particular. A novel that Dai emphasized in Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise, with a vivid portrayal of class and gender differences is Balzac’s Le Père Goriot. Dai initially focuses on Luo’s crawling on his belly, surveyed by a red-beaked raven, the book, known as Old Go in
Chinese secreted in his work hod. He plans to read the book to the seamstress, whom he views at
that time as “belle mais inculte” (135). Dai alludes to gaping chasms opened on either side of
Luo, and the reader imagines Luo perched on the precarious line at which the long history of
Western literature meets the long history of Eastern literature, marred by the ban on Western
works at the moment of the Cultural Revolution. One can only imagine how the tale of Goriot
and his two daughters, Anastasie and Delphine, affects the seamstress. Delphine’s trek from
Madame Michonneau’s poor boarding house, a squalid setting not unlike the seamstress’ rural
abode, to an elite world full of both passion and riches perhaps mirrors the unlikely journey the
seamstress hopes to make in the closing pages of the novel in setting off from the village toward
the city. The parallel reveals the class consciousness and divisions that affected not just Goriot
and his daughters’ lives in 1819 Restoration France, but those that affected China during the
Cultural Revolution. Eugène de Rastignac’s repulsion at the daughters’ selfishness, putting balls
and gowns before their father in his final hours, still comes across as passion for Delphine—and
perhaps for the seamstress who has worked her way out of illiteracy—as “[h]e was filled with
love by this artless expression of true feeling. Parisian women may be false, blind with vanity,
selfish, flirtatious, cold; but when they are really in love they sacrifice more than other women to
the object of their love” (Balzac, *Le Père Goriot* 237). Dorothée Fritz-Ababneh writes of
Balzac’s questioning of paternal authority in *Le Père Goriot* in which patriarchy is supplanted by
daughters’ demands. Fritz-Ababneh says that the fundamental social structure at play is that in
which the father abdicates his rights in favor of his daughters’ without receiving gratitude in
return (“La Remise” 168). He misses the times when they took meals with him, sat on his knee,
and loved him.
The seamstress escapes her nameless position, described initially as the seamstress laboring for her father, and then eying a difficult fate either as a single mother, if Ma had been unable to procure the abortion for her, or as the lover of a young man who was longing to return to his former life in the city, by learning from the lessons in Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*. Jessica Hutchins writes of the paternalism evident in Balzac’s novel:

> While lying on his death bed, his fortune and status depleted by his sons-in-law, Jean-Joachim Goriot desires nothing more than the presence of his daughters, Anastasie de Restaud and Delphine de Nucingen. ... Goriot desperately requests to see his daughters, but also reasserts his fatherly claim over them, saying, ‘Je veux mes filles! je les ai faites! elles sont à moi!’ ... As he characterizes these women, they are the valuable products of his own labors. In short, he claims them as his possessions. (98)

While female characters assert their agency in the works of Balzac, Lawrence Schehr points out that a more common motif in nineteenth-century realism is that of the son asserting his independence, often through a simultaneous distancing from, or hatred of, his father. “This characteristic will come to be an essential part of the realist narrative as it enacts distance between father and son, rejection of a son by a father, becoming an orphan, and similar motifs: in realist narratives, the male protagonist has to prove himself through independence” (*Rendering* 55). Dai creates a counternarrative in which the female protagonist embarks on this journey for freedom and independence. Edward W. Soja invokes this feminist position as being an integral part of Third Space theory and a “long heritage of critical feminist analysis of the social production of space,” which at times “reveal[s] its oppressive gendering and [allows one] to
imagine new sites and spaces of resistance,” particularly with regard to redesigning real and imagined spaces for female agency (*Thirdspace* 107-108).

Furthermore, the unnamed seamstress effects a transformation in Dai’s novel from unnamed girl through the loss of her virginity and pregnancy to the accomplishment of an illegal abortion and her freeing action of assuming agency by leaving the mountain village. The novel thus offers a Third Space counternarrative that subverts both the trope of the dutiful Chinese daughter as well as the narrative, impossible for her to achieve due to its geographical and historical distance, of the self-absorbed provincial French woman of the nineteenth-century. The novel ends with the seamstress heading off alone to her own future. Earlier in the novel, Luo had taken a square of white cloth from his pocket and showed his friend Ma the colorful leaves—leaves Dai designates as those of the gingko tree and shaped like a butterfly, a common symbol of transformation—stained with dark, dried blood, which Luo explains came from the virgin seamstress during their sexual act under the tree in a nearby valley. In another of Balzac’s novels mentioned by Dai as finding a spot in Four Eye’s doe-soft leather suitcase, *Cousine Bette*, images of virginity also are connected to images of transformation. Balzac writes:

La virginité, comme toutes les monstruosités, a des richesses spéciales, des grandeurs absorbantes. La vie, dont les forces sont économisées, a pris chez l’individu vierge une qualité de résistance et de durée incalculable. Le cerveau s’est enrichi dans l’ensemble de ses facultés réservées. Lorsque les gens chastes ont besoin de leur corps ou de leur âme, qu’ils recourent à l’action ou à la pensée, ils trouvent alors de l’acier dans leurs muscles ou de la science infuse dans leur intelligence, une force diabolique ou la magie noire de la volonté.
The seamstress is transformed by the reading of Western literature, but not in the way that Luo and Ma anticipate. In fact, to borrow a word from Balzac’s adulation of virginity, her transformation is indeed “incalculable.” Earlier signs had included her sewing a bra like the one she had read of in Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, a request for white tennis shoes that would only be soiled on the muddy mountain paths, her adoption of Ma and Luo’s urban Chinese accent, and a desire to “citify” herself. The physical transformation of the seamstress is treated at length, while her emotional transformation remains more mysterious. The narrator Ma states of the seamstress’ appearance on that New Year’s Day, “Je faillis ne pas la reconnaître. En entrant chez elle, je crus voir une jeune lycéenne de la ville” (Dai, *Balzac* 222). Echoing another Western form of female rebellion from the 1920s, the seamstress has bobbed her hair, formerly hanging in a long pigtail and tied with a colorful, girlish ribbon. Ma describes the new look as both very becoming and modern. She wore a new, stylish Mao jacket, which serves as a counternarrative itself. She is indeed wearing a style favored by the Chinese leader Mao because it harkened back to one worn by the Mandarin people in Imperial China, particularly during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and which came to popularity, “(albeit a somewhat forced popularity) with the introduction of the Mao suit in the mid-twentieth century when all the citizens of the People’s Republic of China wore the suit to rid the country of the class system” (“Mandarin Collar”). Wearing a sign of Mao’s Cultural Revolution to separate oneself and try to appear more Western, like Emma Bovary, provides another non-normative element to the seamstress’ agency, a form of cultural appropriation that she intentionally or mistakenly sees fit to use in her move to

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74 Dai specifies that it is “le nouvel an occidental . . . pas vraiment une fête, mais un jour de repos national” in that rural part of China (Dai, *Balzac* 222).

75 Hair had been a symbol of social class dating back to the Tang dynasty, and in the 1950s Chinese women began to bob their hair in what became the “‘liberation do’ as it signified women being liberated and becoming their own master” and during the Cultural Revolution, cutting off one’s braids was seen as a tie to capitalist ideas (Stearns 152; “A History”).
becoming a cultured, urban woman. Ma states, “[L]a veste austère et masculine, sa nouvelle coiffure, ses tennis immaculées remplaçant ses modestes chaussons lui conféraient une étrange sensualité, une allure élégante, annonçant la mort de la jolie paysanne un peu gauche” (Dai, Balzac 223). The transformation now seems complete.

Her individual transformation can be viewed furthermore in the rejection of marriage and maternity in what Edward W. Soja would call a Third Space narrative of “unbinding” (Thirdspace 111). “Postmodern spatial feminism brings us into a more encompassing theorization and politics of difference and identity built on the opening of new spaces for critical exchange and creative radical responses ‘to the precise circumstances of our present moment,’” Soja writes (Thirdspace 111).76 Ma takes the seamstress to procure an abortion as she rejects her impending maternal role. The seamstress’ decision has deep roots in China’s ever-changing and strict regulation of reproductive health care for women. Chinese policy on population growth continues to dominate news of China internationally now in the twenty-first century with a change to the one-child policy to allow two children as of October 2015. Similarly, Chinese policy and laws on abortion have come out of national policies on population growth (Folsom and Minan). Dai’s novel can be viewed specifically in light of two time periods leading up to the seamstress’ story, from 1954 until the “Great Leap Forward” in 1958, when the previous allowance of birth control became inconsistent with state concerns about an anticipated labor shortage, limiting female agency in the area of reproduction, as well as the period from 1962

76 In this instance, Soja is referring predominantly to geographical spaces, but his notion is applied to metaphorical spaces too in his text, Thirdspace where he discusses Christine de Pizan’s (c. 1364-1430) Le Livre de la cité des dames (c. 1405). These Third Space notions incorporate both geographical and allegorical elements. Third Space theories have been applied by Soja and others to individuals, including women, “who experience multiple sources of oppression and marginalization and explicitly accept the possibility, if not the necessity, of a radical post-modern politics . . .” (Soja, Thirdspace 108).
until the Cultural Revolution began in 1966 when all family planning efforts in China were abandoned, and perhaps as late as 1971 when new policies to limit population, known as the *Wan Xi Shao* (“later, longer, fewer”) Policy was enacted. Researchers state that abortion was illegal from 1949 until 1953; however, from 1953 until 1965, abortion was legal only if one met limited, specific conditions. Part of these restrictions involved requiring the consent of both husband and wife, particularly prior to 1963, and at times other conditions required the woman to be married, to have the permission of her husband or the local Communist Party officials, be within the first two months of pregnancy, and not have had an abortion within the past year. Following 1965, China’s state policies led to adoption of the One-Child Policy in the late 1970s, widespread use of abortion, and gender imbalance in China. Further complicating matters, rural women like Dai’s seamstress often experienced more uncertainty in terms of reproductive health care, much of which was only available in cities that were difficult to access. According to one researcher, “In rural areas in 1963, apparently few restrictions applied in practice” and “research sources do not describe the development of the law of abortion between 1965 and 1972” (Folsom and Minan 415). In Shanghai in 1972, however, officials promoted family planning, particularly contraception, and a woman could obtain an abortion under specified conditions, such as if contraception failed, if she were “unfit to give birth” because she’d recently given birth or had a large number of children, because of economic hardship, or because giving birth would pose problems for her career or job. The rate of abortions had risen from 3.9 million (12.8 per 100 births) in 1971, the time in which Dai’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is set, to 6.6 million (32.2 per 100 births) in 1976 to more than 13 million abortions (approximately 77 per 100 births) in 2013, showing the massive transformation that was underway in China (Folsom and Minan 417; C. Jiang). However, the story is more complex with respect to female independence and
agency, as state desire for labor undermined family planning efforts and began to cause rapid population growth in the years that followed the Cultural Revolution, a demand that the seamstress and Ma and Luo seem disinclined to fill. One individual, Yu Wang, who spoke at the Seventeenth Session of the United Nations Population Commission and discussed Chinese policies, suggested that the matters of the state were balanced with those of the people. “In carrying out the policy of birth planning,” Yu said before the commission, “we combine state guidance with the initiative on the part of the masses themselves . . . As a result of publicity and education by governments and social organizations at all levels, more and more people have come to realize the importance of birth planning, and they are now practicing it of their own free will . . . This policy is in the interests of the broad masses of the people.” The seamstress was caught seeking agency in a nation in which control of her reproductive life rested, primarily, in the hands of the state, as did the state of education and literature, as well.

The transformation of the seamstress is not unlike that of Balzac’s female characters, who go unmentioned or are afforded only the scantest of details in much of Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise, although the emphasis in Balzac is on marriage, rather than one’s reproductive rights, and Dai provides a counternarrative to this path, which the seamstress would be expected to follow. While Ma admits that he would like to marry the seamstress, who is Luo’s lover at the time, marriage is not the seamstress’ desire, an understandable conclusion on her part after reading for instance of Emma Bovary’s suicide in Flaubert’s novel, a story the seamstress found particularly compelling after its discovery in Four-Eyes’ valise. In addition to Flaubert’s depiction of a woman’s unhappiness within marriage and her unfulfilled romantic and societal aspirations, it is well known that Balzac, the central Western writer in Dai’s novel, often depicts marriage as a less than desirable institution. In the novels by Balzac that Ma and Luo read to her,
the seamstress can see that Old Goriot loses his daughters and his possessiveness over them to marriage. Eugénie Grandet’s marriage attempts are thwarted for much the novel of the same name due to her low social status, which the seamstress in Dai’s novel shares. Lawrence Schehr, writing in *Subversions of Versimilitude*, states that in Balzac’s work “marriage is often depicted as an unfortunate institution in which the participants are obliged to suffer in silence or find their pleasure elsewhere . . . That marriage is translated into a set of negative affects in no way changes the social bond or even the agreed-upon contract that is its legal translation” (14). Nonetheless, this depiction of marriage in Balzac’s *La Comédie humaine* remains at odds with the passion that the seamstress seeks. Balzac further suggests that one who marries becomes an idiot or a fool, one who focuses on monetary issues, such as the dowries he often describes, and he depicts morality and social mores as leading to an attitude that young people and their passions are dangerous (Schehr, *Subversions* 21).

The transformation of the seamstress by Dai—and by the rich cannon of Western works such as those by Balzac, Flaubert, and others—is illuminated by Elaine Showalter’s theory of gynocriticism, a theory often closely allied with intertextual theory, which provides a Third Space alternative to what Edward W. Soja calls “the entrenchment of masculinist authority” (*Thirdspace* 119). Gynocritics dedicate themselves to the development of female characters, as in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, or to female authors developing theories and methodologies based on female experience (Eagleton 9). “The gynocritic discovers in her authors and characters an understanding of female identity—not that she expects her authors and heroines to be superwomen, but the essential struggle will be towards a coherent identity, a realization of selfhood and autonomy,” writes Mary Eagleton (9). Gynocriticism serves as a counternarrative in Dai’s novel, one that Eagleton points out often concludes “that the master narratives are
bankrupt” (10). Dai focuses on the counternarrative of the West inserted into the East during China’s Cultural Revolution, but this cultural tale of intellectual independence, sends intertextual ripples into the seamstress’ gendered story and her own search for agency. While not going as far as Showalter’s text *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Dai dips his toe into the pool of gynocriticism with his nameless female protagonist’s journey from girlhood to the path out of the remote village. Showalter’s gynocriticism, while much more focused on women’s writing, embraces a historical and sociological grounding that seeks to free itself, much as the seamstress does, from male values, male theories, and male frameworks (Touaf and Boutkhil 79). Many of the women in Pygmalion-myth-based texts, who are manipulated and molded by men, break out of the sphere of control of their would-be masters, like Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*. These add to the counternarratives that proffer alternatives to male-female binaries by exploring the trialectics of space, power, and knowledge and other ways of entering a Third Space in which new meaning and ways of being are enacted.

Despite the male narrator and ostensible emphasis on the re-educated youth, it is the seamstress as the eponymous protagonist of the novel who is at its center and whose flight and desire for liberation at the end frames the novel.

While the seamstress, the unnamed female protagonist, is most interested in standing up for herself—declaring mysteriously that “Balzac lui a fait comprendre une chose: la beauté d’une femme est un trésor qui n’a pas de prix,” and less mysteriously, that she is heading for the city and was influenced by Balzac (Dai, *Balzac* 229)—the named male protagonists, especially Ma, are most interested in standing up against the Chinese Communist Party and the Cultural Revolution that punished them in sending them for “re-education” on Phoenix Mountain. Ma sets aside Balzac because it is preferred by Luo and, at the age of eighteen, says he fell in love with
one author after another, listing Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852), Herman Melville (1819-1891), and Romain Rolland (1866-1944) among those who spoke to him. However, he could not put down the one volume of Romain Rolland’s *Jean-Christophe*, a ten-volume work published between 1904 and 1912, which earned its author the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915. It is unclear which of the ten volumes Ma held in his hands: *L’Aube, Le Matin, L’Adolescent, La Révolte, La Foire sur la place, Antoinette, Dans la maison, Les Amies, Le Buisson ardent*, or *La Nouvelle Journée*. The protagonist, Jean-Christophe Krafft, is a composer whose passion for art is portrayed, along with all its accompanying struggles against injustices, his moral crises of conscience, and his final triumph in this long work. In awarding Rolland the Nobel Prize, the Swiss committee said:

> This powerful work describes the development of a character in whom we can recognize ourselves. It shows how an artistic temperament, by raising itself step by step, emerges like a genius above the level of humanity; how a powerful nature which has the noblest and most urgent desire for truth, moral health, and artistic purity, with an exuberant love of life, is forced to overcome obstacles that rise up ceaselessly before it; how it attains victory and independence; and how this

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77 Dai mentions that the translator of several of the volumes in the suitcase was Fu Lei, who is considered “the only freelance translator in the 1950s and 1960s” in China (Tian 177). This historical figure translated many of Romain Rolland’s works with great passion, including Rolland’s writings on Beethoven, Tolstoy, and Michelangelo, along with works by Balzac, Voltaire, and Prosper Merimée. Fu had left Shanghai Chizhi University for four years of study at the Université de Paris and the Louvre Academy of Fine Arts History from 1928 to 1932. Fu fell in love with art, music, and literature during that time. Upon returning to China, he pursued his career in translation. His translation of Balzac’s *Eugénie Grandet* was published in 1949, *Le Père Goriot* in 1950, and Romain Rolland’s *Jean-Christophe* in 1953. He was labeled an enemy of the Chinese state in 1957. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, he and his wife, Zhu Meifu, committed suicide, which critics have called an act of “martyred suicide” (Tian 182). His son Fu Cong (also spelled Fou Ts’ong) published the family letters. Fu Lei’s inclusion in the novel appears not insignificant.

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character and this intelligence are significant enough to concentrate in themselves a complete image of the world. This book does not aim solely at describing the life of the principal hero and his environment. It seeks also to describe the causes of the tragedy of a whole generation; it gives a sweeping picture of the secret labour that goes on in the hidden depths and by which nations, little by little, are enlightened . . . (“The Nobel Prize 1915”)

Similarly, Ma states that he initially intended to skim Jean-Christophe but found he could not put down the volume, shifting his attention from the lure of shorter stories to the full length novels. The “individualisme acharné, sans aucune mesquinerie” speaks to Ma in this remote mountain collective (Dai, Balzac 137). Ma states, “Sans lui, je ne serais jamais parvenu à comprendre la splendeur et l’ampleur de l’individualisme” (137). Ma discovers what he calls a notion that he had not previously been able to consider: that of one person standing up against the whole world. It is this idea, rather than the writing itself, that sweeps Ma under its spell. “C’était pour moi le livre rêve,” Ma states, “une fois que vous l’aviez fini, ni votre sacrée vie ni votre sacré monde n’étaient plus les mêmes qu’avant” (137). The reader, while traversing Dai’s Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise, feels that Dai is searching for the transcendent counternarrative that ties Ma and Luo and the seamstress together, and he seems to find it here, in one of the most ardent passages in the novel, with this antithesis of Chinese censorship, torture, and oppression so present during the Cultural Revolution: it expresses the sense of each individual human’s just and free place in the universe in which he is able to achieve full acceptance and potential, even if he or she must demand it. It is this transcultural revelation that places Dai’s popular novel among the ranks of world literature. As Homi Bhabha states, “Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that
transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrain of world literature” (Bhabha, Location 17). Bhabha adds that this is not a move toward essentialism, an exploration of universal human culture, but rather an exploration of “unhomely fictions” that captures what is beyond human agency and “in-between origins” (Location 17-19).

What grows out of this encounter with the physical text is a desire for ownership of the text of Jean-Christophe, raising the issues of property law, which differ substantially between China and France. Ma states:

Mon adoration pour Jean-Christophe fut telle que, pour la première fois dans ma vie, je voulus le posséder seul, et non plus comme un patrimoine commun à Luo et à moi. Sur la plage blanche, derrière la couverture, je rédigeai donc une dédicace disant que c’était un cadeau pour le futur anniversaire de mes vingt ans, et je demandai à Luo de signer. Il me dit qu’il se sentait flatté, l’occasion étant si rare qu’elle en devenait historique. Il calligraphia son nom d’un unique trait de pinceau, débridé, généreux, fougueux, liant ensemble les trois caractères en une belle courbe, qui occupait presque la moitié de la page. (Dai, Balzac 137-38)

Ma then dedicates three novels by Balzac—Père Goriot, Ursule Mirouët, and Eugénie Grandet—to Luo. In the end after the unexpected departure of the seamstress for the city, in what Ma describes as a self-imposed auto-da-fé, suggesting penitence and further punishment for their illegal act of reading banned literature, in addition to the loss of the beloved seamstress, whose mind had been filled with the same powerful Western notions of individuality and the importance of passion that had filled their own, Ma and Luo burn the books, including Père Goriot, Cousin Pons, Colonel Chabert, Eugénie Grandet, Notre Dame de Paris, Madame
Bovary, Le Comte de Monte-Cristo. It is not clear if Jean-Christophe is among the books. This desire to possess a book, to truly own it and have it inscribed to oneself, highlights the emphasis on collectivity. Because the means of production are under public ownership in Communist China, public ownership is the dominant form of ownership (Folsom and Minan 443). An enterprise may have the right to manage a property, but it does not own the property. The state can reassign such rights with impunity. Collectively owned properties, however, may be owned by a group of people, often peasants or workers, rather than the state. Prior to Mao, peasants often paid rent to landlords, which Mao in 1927 urged peasants no longer to do and to join his revolutionary uprising. Land reform, in the form of collectivization, began in 1953, keeping people on the same land but under a different structure of “peasant land ownership,” which actually meant that the peasants had the right to the produce from the land that exceeded their production quota, but no rights to the land itself. This is the system under which Ma and Luo labored in Dai’s novel during the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, in 1978, it brought about new policies that abolished collective agriculture. Dai repeatedly points to divergences from China’s official policies during the Cultural Revolution, including the procurement of an illegal abortion, or the possession and inscription of banned books, in what some critics call a double discourse and trans-contextualization. Dai allows the twenty-first century Western reader, the key audience for a book written in French and published in French and other Western languages, to view these events at once through the official discourse of the time, through Ma and Luo’s unorthodox discourse, and through contemporary Western laws that allow abortion and ownership of a Balzac novel, although the first right has become a source of much political contention in the West, especially the United States, in the twenty-first century (Campbell 291). These
divergences provide the background for Dai to explore physical and intellectual freedoms, which are still contested and subverted in many parts of the world.

**An Intertextual Look at Freud and Lacan in the Twenty-first Century**

When Dai Sijie turned his attention away from the Cultural Revolution and wrote *Le Complexe de Di* in 2003, he continued to look at the intertextual dialogue that emerges when Western works penetrate Chinese society through the impact of the great Western psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). He did this through a fictionalized lens with a story set not during the Cultural Revolution but during the twenty-first century. The novel, while following characters less rooted in their social and historical realities, bears some striking resemblances to Dai’s earlier novel, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*. Both deal with the impact of texts and banned books, which are or become essential not only to the character’s life in a Communist society replete with censorship, but also integral to the way the characters construct their own subjectivity. The characters inhabit two worlds, East and West, through the books they imbibe, and Dai’s intertextual use of the books within his own text becomes critical to the production of those counternarratives, at odds with China’s doctrinaire policies. Like Ma and Luo in Dai’s earlier novel, the protagonist Monsieur Muo is on a quest—at times a series of quests—and the character’s growing transnational subjectivity is made of stumbling, halting, bumbling, and at times, coping with unintended consequences and miscommunication. “What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial,” Homi Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture*, “is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference” (2).
Dai’s novel, which met with a quieter reception than the first both in France and in the United States, tackles these intertextual areas of difference and dislocation. One critic wrote, “The eighth-century poet Li Po could well have been describing the plot of Dai Sijie’s latest novel . . . when he wrote, ‘Hard is the journey / So many turnings / And now where am I?’” (Tierney). The “seriocomic” novel has been said to draw on elements of Don Quixote, Sisyphus, Kafka, and most significantly, Herman Hesse, carrying both elements of self-discovery and exploration of subjectivity and psychoanalysis, using Freud and Lacan, where Hesse used Carl Jung’s (1875-1961) work.

Compared to Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise, Dai’s Le Complexe de Di is a smaller novel—one often overlooked in scholarly journals, but one that is no less significant in the use of intertextuality—focusing on Western psychoanalysis, with fewer intertextual works, and a less historicized period. Like Dai himself, Monsieur Muo, the protagonist of this novel penned in French and published by Gallimard, has lived in modern-day France, where the novel is set and with which readers are familiar. The blundering Monsieur Muo, like the owner of the valise of books in Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise, is known for his myopia and early in the novel is called “Monsieur le binoclard” by a passenger on the train curious about a Chinese man in China found writing in English and French. Muo does discuss writers, including Voltaire, with the passenger, but despite the similarities—even his surname appears to be a mixture of Ma and Luo’s names from the earlier novel—he does not appear to be intentionally cast for Dai’s readers as a more mature version of any of the characters from the earlier novel. Furthermore, both books begin with a sense of what is lost; Ma and Luo have lost their physical and intellectual freedom and their lives as students by being forced into labor in a copper mining village, while on the train Monsieur Muo has had his shoes stolen, and spends much of the novel searching for
a young woman who has not lost her virginity to present to the cantankerous Judge Di in order to free Muo’s love, a political prisoner known only as H.C. Volcano of the Old Moon, a woman who, like Muo, had studied so-called classic texts in college. Even the corrupt Judge Di’s name embodies multiple layers of intertextuality. Judge Di bears the same name, the narrator tells the reader, of a fictional judge from the Tang dynasty, who was a real character named Judge Dee. This fictional Judge Dee was actually the invention of a Western writer, Robert van Gulik, who translated an eighteenth-century mystery, Di Gong An (Cases of Judge Di) into English and then wrote a number of novels and short stories using this character. All of these factors lend an air of intertextuality, a continuation of the discourse on banned books during the Cultural Revolution to this discussion of disallowed books and their unfamiliar theories in twenty-first century China. When a train passenger understands that Muo is writing in French, the passengers repeat the words, “Oh, en français!” several times with the echo resonating through the train car. At its heart, the novel concerns the way messages resound intertextually across time, space, and cultures—as well as the miscommunications and unintended consequences that result.

The protagonist, Muo, who had been known by his college friends as “Freudmuo,” an intertextual name signaling hybridity, has read Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams, a life-changing encounter for Muo, which took place with a flashlight under the covers (Dai, Complexe 21). Muo’s tale easily fits in a theory of narratives where they provide differing frames often in

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78 This Tang dynasty judge was named Di Renjie.
79 Gulik’s tales of Judge Dee were adapted for television in the 1960s. However, Dai and van Dulik are not the only authors to have borrowed the character of Judge Di (sometimes spelled Dee or Ti). Two French authors, Frédéric Lenormand and Sven Roussel, have also incorporated the character into their works. Lenormand has published approximately twenty Juge Ti mysteries from 2004 to the most recent, Thé vert et arsenic, in which the judge, with help from his third wife, Tsao, must distinguish tea from poison and hand down judgment on an ape charged with a sordid crime. In Rousset’s La Dernière Enquête du Juge Ti, the judge risks his life and career. Other writers who include the character of Judge Dee include the Chinese-American writer Zhu Xiao Di and writers Eleanor Cooney and Daniel Alteri.
conflict with one another, and in which “it is an adaptable object that enables us to accomplish the necessary tasks of interpreting and evaluating our experiences,” writes James Phelan in “Narratives in Contest; or, Another Twist in the Narrative Turn” (167). Even then, Muo’s writing had transcultural significance, as he preferred to write neither in modern nor in classical Chinese characters, but used a far more primitive form of Chinese, 3,600 years old and found inscribed on tortoise shells, to write the character for the word “dream,” a character that looked like half of a bed, a sleeping eye, and a downward-pointing thumb, in Muo’s terms. Muo had received Freud’s text from an elderly Canadian historian for whom he’d translated ancient inscriptions from stone tablets and pillars called “steles” during college breaks. Dai writes:

Tout à coup, un commentaire de Freud sur un escalier qui avait visité ses rêves percuta, comme une brique jetée sur une vitre, le cerveau de Muo. . . . Oh, il n’y a pas de limite à la grâce qu’un jeune homme peut recevoir d’un livre. Cette nuit-là, Freud alluma littéralement une flambée de bonheur dans l’esprit de son futur disciple qui jeta par terre sa pauvre couverture, alluma une lampe au-dessus de sa tête en dépit des protestations de ses condisciples et, dans la béatitude produite par son contact avec un dieu vivant, lut à voix haute, lut et relut, se laissa emporter jusqu’à ce que le gardien du dortoir . . . finit par confisquer le livre. (Complexe 22)

Dai is referring to Chapter Five of Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams, which states that “[s]taircases, ladders, and flights of stairs, or climbing on these, either upwards or downwards, are symbolic representations of the sexual act.” Freud extends the interpretation to a patient, who in his dream is scolded by his piano instructor for not practicing the Études of Moscheles and Clementi’s Gradus ad Parnassum, commenting that the Gradus is also “a stairway, and the piano itself is a stairway, as it has a scale.” Freud adds, “It may be said that there is no class of
ideas which cannot be enlisted in the representation of sexual facts and wishes.” It is Freud’s interpretation of dreams to explore sexuality and romantic relationships that appeals to Muo and informs his own subsequent interpretations based on Freud’s, providing his own frame for culturally disconnected environments. Following his undergraduate studies, Muo subsequently moved to Paris in 1989, carrying his Larousse dictionary, an indispensable guide, to record his own dreams and those of others. For eleven years he lived in a damp, decrepit apartment, a former maid’s room and a seventh-floor garret, attaining the age of forty there before returning to China to seek to free H.C. Volcano of the Moon. He had won a stiff competition for three years of doctoral dissertation work on an extinct language spoken along the Silk Road, a theme which Dai treats quite differently with a French female protagonist in his novel *Par une nuit où la lune ne s’est pas levée* (2007); the character seeks to unite two halves of a scroll in the extinct language embodied in the name of her missing lover Tumchooq whose father had studied the language. Language, for Muo in *Le Complexe de Di*, promises to serve as the link between Asia and Europe, and while in France, he’d been accorded thrice weekly sessions with the androgynous and ageless Michael Nivat, a fictional Lacanian psychoanalyst, during which he would study Nivat’s physical staircase. Muo would speak the Sichuan dialect, which can also be viewed as an unfamiliar frame, which the psychoanalyst did not comprehend, while Muo, at times, thinking back to the Cultural Revolution, removed his glasses to allow the tears that fell from laughter and sadness to flow.

Recording these dreams, Muo finds that he is transformed by this Western “master narrative” or “grand narrative,” (in Lyotard’s words “un grand récit” or “un récit de légitimation”) terms first coined by French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in *La Condition postmoderne* (1979), and which Muo uses in ways that are entirely unfamiliar to those on whom
he inflicts his Freudian interpretations. By being the heroic analyst, he becomes an antihero, confounding his clients, running into trouble with the law, and still struggling in his quest to free his love at the end of the novel. Lyotard questioned the master narrative that one progresses toward freedom and a totality of knowledge, and Muo’s lack of success in freeing his love, the threat of incarceration he faces, and his confusion support Lyotard’s contestation. The récit de légitimation may be philosophical, political, or scientific, Lyotard states, but is usually linked to the great schools or human knowledge and their powerful institutions, such as those depicted in Le Complexe de Di (Condition 54). The twentieth century has approached delegitimization of these overarching narratives, Lyotard contends. “Le grand récit a perdu sa crédibilité, quel que soit le mode d’unification qui lui est assigné: récit spéculatif, récit de l’émancipation” (63). In lieu of grand narratives, one is left with a myopic perspective, a partial and unclear image on both literal and figurative terms such as that seem in Muo’s own notebooks. Muo states, regarding his psychoanalytic epiphany concerning the interpretation of his own dreams:

[C]es notes rédigées dans un français arraché mot à mot au Larousse l’ont transformé, de même que ses lunettes rondes en verre blanc, cerclées d’une fine monture à la manière de celles du dernier empereur dans le film de Bertolucci, se sont abîmées avec le temps, noircies de sueur, tachetées de graisse jaune, avec des branches si déformées qu’elles ne rentrent plus dans aucun étui. ‘La forme de mon crâne aurait-elle tant changé?’ avait-il noté dans son cahier, après la fête du nouvel an chinois 2000. (16)

The same day, he drops his glasses into the soapy water of his kitchen sink, filled with the dishes and detritus of previous meals that his bachelor lifestyle has allowed to linger longer than advisable. Muo is losing his way, and it is this experience that Kristeva, who coined the term
“intertextuality” calls “ambivalence” (*Recherches* 88). Kristeva explains that the term “ambivalence” implies the insertion of history and of society into the text and of the text into history (88). For the writer these two ways may be one and the same, but for others there is a joining of the two directions in the text, a type of dialogue, Kristeva posits in her expansion on Bakhtine’s earlier ideas on dialogue. “Le dialogue et l’ambivalence,” Kristeva writes, “mènent à une conclusion importante. Le langage poétique dans l’espace intérieur du texte aussi bien que dans l’espace des *textes* est un ‘double’” (*Recherches* 99). Dai plays with this duality and the expansion into a polyvalence of meaning that can be produced in this form of Third Space, a space that Kristeva defines as *polyphonique*, characterized by a multiplicity of voices, interpretations, and meanings (*Recherches* 91).

**Textual Treasures from Western Psychoanalysis**

Dai gives the reader a glimpse into the seminal textual treasures that Muo values most, kept on his bedside table, which Muo calls “ses vrais compagnons de route, des ouvrages inséparables de lui (les nourritures de mes repas mentaux quotidiens, dont je ne peux me passer plus de vingt-quatre heures sans tomber malade)” (Dai, *Complexe* 172). Unable to make himself understood in psychoanalysis in France and struggling to transmit the serious, scholarly nature of Freud’s notions, Monsieur Muo can only provide “multiple and conflicting models of understanding social and cultural identities,” counternarratives that challenge China’s dominant and normative discourses (Stanley 14). Muo’s bedside texts, which inform this discourse, include the following:

- un épais Larousse relié, avec des lettres dorées sur la couverture cartonnée;
• deux tomes du Dictionnaire de la psychanalyse, en coffret de cinq kilos;

• *Ma vie et la psychanalyse* de Freud, traduction de Marie Bonaparte, révisée par Freud lui-même, une des premières publications de ce textes en France, datant de 1928, éditée par Gallimard;

• un ouvrage de la collection “Connaissance de l’Inconscient,” dirigée par J.-B. Pontalis;

• *Journal psychanalytique d’une petite fille*, traduit par la femme de Malraux (il décrit “comment le secret de la vie sexuelle émerge, d’abord brouillé, pour ensuite prendre entièrement possession de l’âme enfantine,” Freud);

• *Subversion du sujet et Dialectique du désir*, de Lacan, le meilleur texte, selon Muo, sur la jouissance féminine;

• *Le secret de la fleur d’or*, un ancien traité chinois d’alchimie, que Jung a passé sa vie à étudier[:]

• . . . *Un cas de névrose obsessionnelle avec éjaculations précoces* d’Andreas Embirikos, poète et premier psychanalyste grec, et

• *Tristes Tropiques* de Claude Lévi-Strauss;

• *La Vie sexuelle dans la Chine ancienne* de Robert Van Gulik (Dai, *Complexe* 172-73)

Muo muses that these texts may constitute his only fortune and perhaps the only wealth he will ever possess. In contrast to his doctoral work in France, in China Muo uses these texts as Chinese society sees fit, not as an esteemed psychoanalyst, but as an interpreter of dreams, a sort of fortune teller in the public market. The dichotomy between the high level of the texts and low work of the poverty-stricken, robbed Muo contrast and provide fertile ground for the
(mis)interpretation of dreams. At times, Muo’s counternarratives invite the laughter of readers and at other times show the seriousness of the contest between master narratives and counternarratives under repressive political regimes, moving the issue of censorship from the 1970s in Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise to 2000 in Le Complexe de Di.

Significantly, Muo’s beloved collection of Western books represents danger in the criminal possession of illicit texts, which fall from his plastic bags as he enters the judicial building where Judge Di works to discuss his imprisoned lover’s case. Dai writes of Muo’s menacing encounter with the stork-like Judge Huan:

— Tu connais ces livres? demanda-t-il [le juge Huan] à Muo.

Celui-ci se contenta de hocher la tête. . . .


— Mais je viens de les acheter à la librairie.

— Justement. C’est le cas de le dire, je veux voir qui les édite, qui les imprime et sous quel faux numéro d’autorisation. (Complexe 277-78)

Neither possession nor purchase on Mainland China imply compliance with the law, and Monsieur Muo is in danger of being jailed himself as many Chinese writers and artists have been for specious reasons. Evan Osnos writes of China’s redoubling of “history’s largest effort to censor human expression” in a country that is “more pluralistic, urban, and prosperous, yet it is the only country in the world with a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize [Liu Xiaobo] in prison” (6). Although online search engines have created new levels of censorship, and Richard Curt Kraus
writes that the notion of censorship, supporting the master narrative even in the twenty-first century, is embedded in China’s way of life. “There may well be some other organizations that employ professional censors, but the striking fact about China’s censorship is that there are few whose job is merely to censor,” Kraus writes. “Lacking a centralized censorship office in Beijing, the Party early dispersed responsibilities for censorship among cultural and propaganda institutions throughout the nation. This administrative heritage of the 1950s has never been changed” (110). Kraus writes that no handbook on how to censor is known to exist—as did such handbooks in Poland and other Eastern European countries in the 1970s—and that individuals are expected to inherently understand what is not permissible.

Not only is Freudian psychoanalysis not widely studied and understood in China, even in the West, scholars find that some researchers treat it as “desiccated and dead,” a historical footnote rather than “an ongoing movement and a living, evolving process,” according to a 2008 report from the American Psychoanalytic Association (Cohen). China’s unique history with Freudian psychoanalysis and the various ways in which it made its way from the West contribute to Muo’s difficulties and others’ misinterpretations. Currently, Western psychology is accepted and enjoys some popularity in China, serving in the domains of teacher training and as a means for improving society, even though many of the underlying assumptions of such schools of thought seem foreign and not applicable in China (Blowers 33). “Freud’s ideas have had a limited and variable reception in China,” writes Geoffrey Blowers (33). However, some enjoyed Freud’s theories on development, and his notions gained a foothold in intellectual circles as early as 1919 during the May Fourth Movement, an individual-oriented movement in the wake of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which featured student protests not unlike those at Tiananmen Square seventy years later, seeking cultural and governmental reform. Interest
perhaps originated from the shared crisis of World War I that left humanity, both in the East and in the West, struggling to understand human nature, its ability to engage in large-scale destruction, and a lack of confidence about the future and progress. In the late twenties, Freud’s writings began to be translated into Chinese. It is useful to note that over the next fifty to sixty years, translation of Freud stalled and stagnated. By the 1980s only fourteen translations of Freud’s works, some of them quite obscure, had been completed, and some of those were translations of translations and of questionable quality for that reason. Some of the interest in Freud was derived from further second-hand means, by their mention by other Westerners, particularly Bertrand Russell and John Dewey in 1919 and 1921. Interest also emanated from students, who were disappointed by the slow rate of change in China and hoped that studying modern Western ideas might bring energy and change to the country. A limited knowledge of Freud’s theories was further relayed through secondary sources, such as a thin, one-hundred page volume published in 1929 called *Psychoanalysis ABC* (*Zhang Dongsun*). Nonetheless, while some Chinese felt that the emphasis on individual psychology and character could provide benefits, others were deeply critical. Freud’s use of symbolism and emphasis on censorship, aspects central to the dream theories which Dai plays with in *Le Complexe de Di*, were too mysterious and incomprehensible at the time, subjects of criticism in Chinese intellectual circles. Following this criticism, Chinese scholars such as Ye Qing came to defend Freud’s work on dreams, while discounting his theories on the Oedipal complex, two aspects of Freud that rest at the heart of Dai’s comic novel, *Le Complexe de Di*. Nonetheless, the conversation about Freud—

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80 One writer on Freud, Zhang Dongsun, found parallels between Eastern and Western/Freudian thought, such as between The Chinese Buddhist saying that “the greatest wickedness is licentiousness” (wan e yin wei shou) and Freud’s theory for the “elimination of human desires” (jue ren yu), not entirely accurately (Blowers 35).
and to a far lesser extent Lacan—continued and still continues. While journalist Evan Osnos remarks that “[l]ife under Chairman Mao was even less congenial to soul-searching,” the Communist Party had at that time banned any studies of the psychological impacts of serious problems, including a famine that killed between thirty and forty-five million people (Osnos).

While statistics currently remain unavailable, the struggle to provide psychological care for the Chinese people is starkly portrayed both in the fact that in 1949 there were just about sixty psychiatrists for China’s population of nearly five-hundred million, and in fictional Muo’s relegation to interpreting dreams in the marketplace in Dai’s novel. However, the International Psychoanalytical Association’s international conference was held in Beijing in the fall of 2010. Osnos writes about the particular stresses of Chinese life, some of which may be helped by psychoanalysis:

To capture contemporary China’s specific combination of stresses, the analyst Huo Datong separates problems into two categories: *jiating xiaoshi*, or household issues—the private dynamics of couples and families—and *guojia dashi*, national issues, the things, as Huo puts it, that “are handled by the ruling Party on a national level and which people are never supposed to express doubts about: politics, freedom of speech, the right to demonstrate, and religion.” (Osnos)

Both of these areas are shown through Dai’s use of intertextuality in *Le Complexe de Di.*

Systems and people act through the intermediary of the text. “Once more,” Jay Clayton and Eric

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81 *The New Yorker* magazine profiled the American psychoanalyst Elise Snyder in 2011, focusing on her work in the Chengdu province of China, where a group of students, professors, and others were studying psychoanalysis, not as part of a clinical practice, but as pure theory (Osnos). Snyder’s work has focused on therapy, including via Skype as web-based psychoanalysis in a dozen Chinese cities, where she found a group of people eager to engage in psychoanalysis and seeing its need in the wake of numerous suicides and murders by many who held deep grievances against employers, landlords, neighbors, and others.
Rothstein write, “some of the heuristic and historical functions of influence, removed to the level of system, can be displaced into a practice of intertextuality” (15). In particular, Freud’s dream theories, translated into sexual pulsions and desires, operate at the textual level and in Muo’s encounters with the female embalmer and his interpretations of dreams in the female-dominated marketplace. The texts serve as a reference point for the reader and the characters in Dai’s novel.

A Growing Distrust of Freud’s “The Taboo of Virginity”

Muo himself, while searching for a virgin to please Judge Di who will then free Muo’s love Volcano of the Old Moon, also questions the validity of his European psychoanalytic training. Upon offering his services as a psychoanalyst trained in Paris to Judge Di, Muo is blinded by a punch to the face from Judge Di, his glasses first twisted and bent, putting everything out of focus. Then “il ôta ses lunettes, accessoire essentiel dans la vie d’un intellectuel myope, puis perdit connaissance . . .” (Dai, Complexe 97). He is unable to see either through his traditional Chinese perspective alone, having been indoctrinated to the highest level of a doctorate in Western psychoanalysis, nor by putting his Western notions to use in any meaningful way with the Chinese figures he encounters. Even physically, Muo becomes unrecognizable because of the bruises to his face from the beating inflicted on him by Judge Di. With Muo left pondering Freud’s “The Taboo of Virginity” and Judge Di’s demands, the narrator states:

Freud et Juge Di ne sont pas du même monde. À vrai dire, depuis que Muo a remis les pieds en Chine, certains doutes sur la psychanalyse l’assaillent. Volcan de la Vieille Lune souffre-t-elle, comme tout le monde, du fameux complexe
d’Œdipe? Les hommes qu’elle a aimés, qu’elle aime ou aimera, même moi, ne sont-ils pour elle qu’un simple substitut de son père? Pourquoi le Juge Di cherche-t-il à savourer un melon rouge fendu, sans crainte d’y perdre son pénis? Ne souffre-t-il pas du complexe de castration? Muo a le sentiment que le destin le manipule, se moque de lui comme un monarque capricieux. (Dai, *Complexe* 123)

Both the cultural differences and the growing distrust of Freud’s ideas on sexuality creep into Muo during his quest. Freud had published his work “The Taboo of Virginity” in 1918 as the third essay in a collection entitled *The Psychology of Love*. Freud had been exploring themes of sexuality, formulating the Oedipus complex and other theories to do with rivalry, conquest, impotence, and separating amorous feelings from sexual longings. *Le Complexe de Di* echoes the emancipation of the seamstress in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* with its emphasis on both virginity and the loss thereof and female agency. In “The Taboo of Virginity,” Freud writes:

> The demand that a girl shall not bring to her marriage with a particular man any memory of sexual relations with another is, indeed, nothing other than a logical continuation of the right to exclusive possession of a woman, which forms the essence of monogamy, the extension of this monopoly to cover the past . . .

> Whoever is the first to satisfy a virgin’s desire for love, long and laboriously held in check, and who in doing so overcomes the resistances which have been built up in her through the influences of her milieu and education, that is the man she will take into a lasting relationship, the possibility of which will never again be open to any other man. (“The Taboo”)

Dai depicts Luo keeping the evidence of the seamstress’ virginity, the butterfly-shaped gingko leaves preserved in a cloth, while in *Le Complexe de Di*, the psychoanalytically-trained Muo
finds himself engaged in a nearly four-hundred page quest to find a virgin to satisfy Juge Di and therefore his own romantic, more than sexual, longings—a quest that is still unfinished at the end of the novel. Freud claims that this insistence on female monogamy and virginity at the time of marriage introduced the concept of bondage, the opposite of the agency and freedom that both Monsieur Muo and the little seamstress seek, both with a great degree of naïveté, in their respective novels. Female agency is threatened by bondage, social, familial, and sexual, in the case of the seamstress, and Muo is hoping to find another young virgin to “sacrifice” to the ruthless Judge Di. Freud saw this bondage as carrying beyond the sexual realm, described by others. He wrote:

The expression “sexual bondage” was chosen by von Krafft Ebing (1892) to describe the phenomenon of a person’s acquiring an unusually high degree of dependence and lack of self-reliance in relation to another person with whom one has a sexual relationship. This bondage can on occasion extend very far, as far as the loss of independence will and as far as causing a person to suffer the greatest sacrifices of his own interests . . . (“The Taboo”)

Dai mocks this emphasis on virginity by having Muo ponder the dream he had in which a revenant, someone he once knew, discusses with him the fact that Judge Di does not want cash, something he already has in abundance, but the payment in kind of “une fille qui n’a pas encore perdu sa virginité, dont le melon rouge n’a pas encore été fendu” (Dai, Complex 119). Muo recalls the first time, at age ten, that he heard this fruit-oriented expression concerning the “défloration d’une vierge” (119). His uncle, a former math teacher working as a butcher for political reasons, took refuge with many others from a sudden storm in a cave near the swimming hole where they’d been swimming. An old crab fisherman told an offensive, anti-
Japanese story, set in the Tang dynasty (618-906 CE), that the boy, Muo, did not understand at the time. In the story the Japanese are seeking a national flag, seeking to copy the Chinese with their years of wisdom and greater level of civilization and development; however, the Japanese spy stumbles upon a village in which he sees a rowdy crowd, dancing, singing, and drinking, gathered around a white sheet with a circular stain on it, red in the center and darkening on the edges. The spy waits and steals the “flag,” which is revealed in the crab fisherman’s story as only “un drap taché du jus du melon rouge d’une jeune mariée, fendu au cours de sa nuit de noces” (Dai, Complexe 121). Muo is humiliated for his lack of knowledge, and furthermore, tries to reconcile Judge Di’s desire to have intercourse with a virgin with Freud’s castration complex, which highlights a fear of sexual intercourse and even of women that, at times, led to the tradition of having an “elder, priest or holy man” to perform this task or for a wooden lingam\textsuperscript{82} in India, and an indirect or inverse correlation to the notion of droit du seigneur.\textsuperscript{83}

Muo then questions Freud’s so-called castration complex, the primal fear of loss of the penis in discovering the differences of the sexes, linked by Freud to fear of the father’s punishment with genital injury because of the son’s love of the mother described in the Oedipal complex, often further amplified by the blood of the hymen’s rupture. Freud’s work on the social value of virginity and the castration complex linked to male fear of being castrated by women, who are perceived as a source of danger, has been hotly debated. Catherine Bates, in her essay “Castrating the Castration Complex,” contends that “[t]he castration complex has the most far-

\textsuperscript{82} A lingam in Hinduism is an object that symbolizes regenerative power and the god Shiva, appearing in temples throughout India (“Lingam”). Some ancient Sanskrit texts identify the long, cylindrical object as the “phallus of Shiva.” Lingams have been found dating back to the third century BCE.

\textsuperscript{83} What is often referred to as the medieval droit du seigneur (also called the jus primae noctis in Latin and the droit de cuissage), signifies the “[r]ight of the lord to spend the first night of the wedding with the bride” (Boureau 2).
reaching of psychical consequences in the Freudian scheme for, in the first place, it introduces the child irrevocably to that ‘great enigma’ of human existence, namely sexual difference” (101). The male child acknowledges what he had and what the female lacks, introducing the possibility of loss and the fear of such a void. Furthermore, the reader knows that Muo is well-schooled in Lacanian psychoanalysis, using the term “phallic signifier” in lieu of penis and adopting a metaphorical stance toward castration in addition to the physical one introduced by Freud and the notion that no one of either gender can console him- or herself with “an imaginary wholeness by attributing lack to a sexually differentiated other” (Bates 110). In essence, Lacan is “[e]xploding the myth of phallic wholeness” (Bates 110). One could posit that Muo is exploring that cultural Third Space in which he is neither wholly Chinese, nor wholly French, in which he has faith neither in Confucian wisdom, nor in Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis. He is thrown into an uncertain abyss, and at the end of the novel, he still finds himself waiting, at his parents’ flat to go to prison, while still matter-of-factly asking the woman who knocks at the door whether she is a virgin. Muo is still mired in this quest, unable to reconcile either Judge Di’s extreme pulsions and punishments or many of his experiences with his fellow Chinese in light of Freud and Lacan’s theories.

In fact, Muo’s work back in China is not to psychoanalyze individuals but to interpret their dreams, primarily in the marketplaces, where he arrives on bicycle with a dream logo fluttering on its flag. He is, in some ways, a well-educated fortune teller in the initial scene. The night watchman, a man he meets at a teahouse, tells of a dream by a neighbor of the watchman’s late wife in their apartment building in Chengdu in which the wife was on her knees in front of a shop, gathering her severed head, putting it back on her neck, and running past, holding her head on without seeing the neighbor. In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud connects severed head
dreams with fear of castration dreams of children and adults. “The dream-work represents castration by baldness, hair-cutting, the loss of teeth, and beheading,” Freud writes. He invokes the dreams of a three-year old boy whose father will be returning from military service: he sees his father carrying his head on a plate. Furthermore, a student dreams of going to a barber for a haircut and of his mother cutting off his head. Monsieur Muo, however, knowing that the watchman is widowed, merely speculates that the wife was going to die soon, most likely of an ailment related to her throat or possibly of a cancer. The wife did in fact die some time later, and he thanks Muo and leads him to the marketplace, where he can interpret dreams, as did Freud, while searching in the female-dominated realm for a virgin to present to Judge Di. Women who dream of ironing, the most frequent image, and one that Muo equates with conflict and servitude, recurrent themes in Dai’s writings, are told that their dreams symbolize that they wish to alter their situation. One woman whose dream Muo interprets, crucial to his economic survival and own situation of servitude, is that of the market’s manager, Madame Wang, known less-than-affectionately as Madame Thatcher, a fifty-year-old policewoman. “Me pardonnerez-vous jamais cette profanation, monsieur Freud?” Muo asks himself. “Mais sa vérole me rendait fou” (Dai, Complexe 153). Muo interprets her remark on a stuffed dog being present in her dream as a premonition that she would soon be invited to a lavish banquet. When she is invited to a dinner, she bestows Muo with the permit he needs to earn his livelihood as a psychoanalytic interpreter of dreams in the market near the Yangtze River on “la rue du Grand Bond”—Great Leap Forward Street, itself an important intertextual reference. Indeed, Mao’s Great Leap Forward campaign (1958-1961) tackled both social and economic issues in an attempt to shift China’s emphasis from a strictly agrarian economic base to a full-scale socialist economy, complete with industrialization and collectivization. “The economy under Mao suffered grievously in many
ways, of which the Great Leap Forward is the most notorious,” historian Rana Mitter writes (108). Many blame this policy for the tremendous suffering endured during the Great Famine, which banned writers such as Ma Jian, author of *Beijing Coma* (2009) and *The Dark Road* (2013), say was responsible for millions of deaths. Some estimate that 20 to 43 million people died during this famine (Peng). “The Cultural Revolution was not the only calamity to convulse the China of my youth,” Ma Jian stated in an interview. “There was also the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Great Famine. All these events affected me deeply” (“Ma Jian”). The irony of Monsieur Muo’s location on Great Leap Forward Street is not lost on readers as he uses his doctorate to scrape by a meager living interpreting dreams for three yuan (less than fifty cents), begging for a permit, trying to stay out of prison, and eventually being accepted in the marketplace not as a scholar or healer but rather as an entertainer. “Malgré le modeste tarif de mes consultations, je prenais très au sérieux mon activité d’analyste,” Muo states. “Quand ma mémoire me le permettait, je n’oubliais jamais de rendre un hommage quasi rituel aux maîtres de mon cœur, en récitant un passage de Freud, de Lacan, ou de Jung, à propos des rêves qu’elles me racontaient” (Dai, *Complexe* 156). Muo, admitting the limitations of his field and his own intercultural prowess, acknowledges the difficulty of rendering the psychoanalytic content into something comprehensible for the Sichuan people not even in Mandarin, but in the Sichuan dialect.

Muo’s narrative interpretations of dreams become increasingly outlandish, multiplying exponentially, and producing cultural mystification, as his clients can’t accustom themselves even to lying back on his intercultural couch, a bamboo chair, preferring instead to remain upright. These strange narratives “subvert homogenous notions” of nation, culture, and individual experience to become a “testing ground” for new ways of thinking (Schulze-Engler).
Muo’s first client, another fifty-year-old woman, had a dream about catching fish. Freud lists fish as one of the “less comprehensible male sex-symbols,” along with reptiles and snakes, while pits, caves, hollows, pitchers, bottles, pockets, rooms, armoires, and stoves symbolize the female sexual organ. Muo tells the middle-aged woman that small fish represent sperm, larger fish, children, and the fishing rod, the phallus. When the market manager presents another dream of a stuffed dog, this one smelling of mildew, like old books and like Muo himself, she states, Muo admits that perhaps his “id” and “subconscious” led him to tell her that it signified that she would become “crippled.” The following exchange with one client exemplifies the incomprehensibility of his interpretations, albeit met with applause, laughter, and sadness at different moments:

—Qui c’est celui-là, Freud?
—Je vous l’ai déjà dit la dernière fois, le rénovateur de l’interprétation des rêves.
—Je ne comprends pas un mot de ce qu’il raconte.
—Il nous enseigne tout simplement à chercher dans notre enfance l’origine de ce à quoi on rêve. . . . Une des grandes découvertes de Freud est le rôle destructeur de cette répétition. Il ne s’agit plus de déchiffrer un rêve, de résoudre une énigme, mais de chercher comment enrayer une répétition systématique à laquelle vous êtes assujettie, en ouvrant la voie à des dérivations. (Dai, Complexes 159)

Muo’s interpretations and derivations only muddy the waters and cause further trouble for himself and his clients. The way the narratives he crafts from his own Kafka-esque dreams and from the diverse dreams of others lead him on his quixotic journey at the behest of the ever-
demanding Judge Di shows that opening China, covertly or overtly, to Western works, only leads to further multiple counternarratives, that each individual must discern for his- or herself.

Conclusion: Intertextual Counternarratives

In Dai’s novels, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* and *Le Complexe de Di*, the interplay of East and West in the character of Muo, Ma, Luo, and the unnamed seamstress shows how two narratives, a dominant one and a counternarrative, function in an intertextual space, filled with rich texts from Western literature and thought, not as binaries, but as a dialogue and alternatives to areas of Chinese history in which oppression and authoritarianism dominated society and even the nation’s psyche. Such intertextuality is not merely a “jeu verbal,” as some label this intertextual dialogue, nor an “analyse complémentaire,” but a transgressive act with a wide readership in the West that subverts a dominant discourse with the power to imprison individuals and through fictional narratives, confronts the “unreality of power” that exists for outsiders (Canova-Green and Le Calvez, 51, 49; Campbell 23). In China, as in other intertextual and intercultural spaces, the intersection of voices results in a polyphony that allows a series of dialogues, some comprehensible and filled with meaning and others incomprehensible and misleading. Of such Third Space counternarratives Homi Bhabha writes:

The borderline of engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress.

*(Location 3)*
Third-Space theorists, some of whom have become advocates and activists for oppressed groups and border-crossing individuals, see these texts as going beyond a purely narrative discourse of conflicted and/or consensual tales to an exploration of “interventions [that] can modify the existing power relations,” as Edward W. Soja explains Bhabha’s ultimate idea. Soja posits that this allows new positions and understandings of “otherness” to emerge in the Third Space (“Thirdspace” 60). Dai’s novels Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise and Le Complexe de Dí both produce such counternarratives that shine a light on oppression and on the urgency of escaping censorship, intellectual imprisonment, and silencing—a dangerous domain in which “[s]ome narratives acquire a sacred status in a given culture or subculture . . . [and] have the strong endorsement of culturally powerful groups” (Phelan 168)—to establish freer, creative spaces in which the subject’s agency can be reclaimed.
Chinese novelist and playwright Gao Xingjian pushed theater in his homeland beyond the critical realism that emerged following the Cultural Revolution, moving into a territory rife with political tensions and deep divisions over the role and format Chinese literary texts were to take in the 1980s and beyond. Some envisioned a social and moral role for Chinese playwrights and novelists, while others like Gao adopted avant-garde and experimental forms that were often attacked for bringing “bourgeois humanist individualism” to China (Yan, *Theater* xvii). Gao was at the forefront of a movement to liberate China from the orthodoxy that had been imposed on the country’s artists, often employing the tools of Western modernists, such as Marcel Proust (1871-1922) and James Joyce (1882-1941), and of avant-garde playwrights, such as Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994), and others. Gao’s works often came under the scrutiny of the censors of the Chinese Communist Party. His play *L’Arrêt de bus* (trans. from the Chinese *Chezhan*) (1983), which is often described as an homage to Beckett, was halted after just ten performances, both for its style, which violated regulations requiring realism, and for its content, which implied that Chinese citizens lacked agency and faced corruption at the hands of state-sanctioned stagnating bureaucrats. Gao learned that he would be sent to Qinghai, one of the poorest and most sparsely populated parts of China, as the result of writing and publishing such “pernicious” works, but quietly left Beijing instead and returned five months later after attention and pressure had eased (M. Lee, “Gao” 28-29). Ultimately, Gao left China in 1987 and sought political asylum in France, the home of Beckett and Ionesco, where he was free to push boundaries further with his translingual theater and the completion of his experimental novel, written in both Beijing and Paris, which won him a Nobel Prize in 2000 “for an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the
Chinese novel and drama” (“Nobel Prize”). Gao does not engage in mimesis, however, but had moved from his previous position of reshaping China’s theater and novel by the introduction of Western modernism and avant-garde influences to reshaping the face of transnational literary output in the Francophone and Sinophone worlds. Gao’s work indeed focuses on stylistic and contextual experimentation, and his literary works bridge not only continents but major literary movements, Chinese mythology and avant-garde theater, modernism and postmodernism, post-Cultural Revolution historicity and twenty-first-century forays into the cinema of the imagination, Zen Buddhist practices and a self-avowed atheism, politics and a strong insistence on the rejection of “so-called political pluralism” (Gao, Aesthetics 4).

Born in 1940 in Ganzhou, in the Jiangxi province in eastern China, Gao anchors his work in millennia of Chinese thought, traditions, and cultures; however, the influences of the European avant-garde, specifically the Theater of the Absurd, of modernism and postmodernism, notions forged in the fires of both Asia and Europe allow his formal diversity to exceed the boundaries of his native Chinese and subsequent French cultural citizenship and to expand into a transcultural Third Space that is not limited by binaries or dichotomies. Gao’s work, written in Chinese and French and translated and performed around the world, brings forth a diversity of cultural and historical referents, narrational shifts, and a sense of unanchoring itself from the limitations of the page as it explores the Third Space. For Gao, the “Third Space” is a novel place of creation that has been said to embrace a kind of “polymorphism” and “multivocality,” a place where autobiographical subjectivities emerge in works of fiction, where new internal and external geographies emerge on the stage, and in which he pays tribute to renowned writers and historical figures from the Buddhist patriarch Huineng to avant-garde dramatist Samuel Beckett, developing their own ideas past the ideological limits they inhabited during their eras. Speaking
at the Modern Languages Association meeting in January 2013, Gao explained how he was “trying to push the boundaries of linguistic expression,” referring to his Nobel Prize winning novel, *La Montagne de l’âme* (1990), his operatic play *La Neige en août* (2002), and his filmmaking endeavors, including the film *Silhouette/sinon l’ombre* (2003). “The most important thing is not the result; it’s the process,” Gao stated. “It’s a very complicated issue: expression and naming and the process of language coming into being.” He discussed how he approaches these issues experimentally rather than as a theorist, seeing himself first as a creative writer, filmmaker, and visual artist, despite publishing works of criticism and theory that address his own works and the works of others. Gao inhabits what Homi Bhabha, the primary theoretician of the Third Space, who coined the term in his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, calls “the cave of making,” described as a place of darkness but with voices calling from beyond, a kind of chorus of voices in which “the grain of the idea or the concept comes to be revealed through the side-by-side synchrony of different voices” (ix). Bhabha depicts the ways in which this space evokes “the emergence of a dialogical site—a moment of enunciation, identification, negotiation—that was suddenly divested of its mastery or sovereignty in the midst of a markedly asymmetrical and unequal engagement of forces” (x). Gao manipulates these forces to create new works, drawing heavily on past traditions and narratives from Eastern Buddhism and Taoism to the European avant-garde theater.

84 *La Montagne de l’âme* was published in Chinese as *Lingshan* in 1990 and in French as *La Montagne de l’âme* in 1995.

85 The film is in French with English subtitles and focuses on the emergent space where imagination and memory combine in the artist, exploring the quest for both indefinite spaces and for emptiness (Sze-Lorrain; “After”). The word often used to describe the progression of scenes in the film is an “unraveling” of these themes and relationships.

86 Gao was translated from Chinese to English during most of the MLA sessions; at times he answered questions in French.
To fully consider Gao’s experimentalism and the transnational Third Space his work moves toward, it is necessary to look at his notion of the self and the ways he goes beyond the limits of binaries, be they East or West, modern or postmodern, fiction or nonfiction. The subject—in this case, an author, playwright, filmmaker, and artist—negotiates two or more terms to create what critics have called a new Third Space. Claire Conceison calls his a “fraught and fractured” Chinese identity and one rooted in many years in the West, a subjectivity and “an aesthetic as an individual artist unbound by his Chinese past . . . continuing to cultivate an experimental artistic style and engaging with universal human themes” (Conceison, “The French Gao” 304). Gao cultivates a sense of in-betweenness in his novels, short stories, and plays, but also in his films and renowned ink paintings. In a way, as suggested by Todd Coulter, one of the first critics to explore Gao’s works within the context of France, his home country since 1987 and the land where he has held citizenship since 1998, one sees in his work a “shift in cultural awareness and perspective” (Coulter 90). With this shift, Gao slides into a cultural space that is neither French nor Chinese but draws on elements of the millennia of literary and historical traditions of both nations, as well as the pronounced individuality of the author, while insisting that, as an artist, he must inhabit his individual subjectivity. In situating the self within the Third Space, Bhabha writes, “The third space is a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience, and in the cultural representation, of other peoples, times, languages, texts” (“In the Cave” xiii). Conceison sees this self, particularly in Gao’s play Ballade nocturne (2012),87 in which Gao’s “trilingual” processes, “polymorphic form,” and synthesis of cultures and forms rise to the fore.

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87 Ballade Nocturne is Gao’s second “dance-drama” (舞剧 wuju), a hybrid artistic form, much like La Neige en août, which will be explored further in this chapter (Conceison, “The French Gao” 303).
Gao’s Posture of Subverting Ideologies

Gao’s strong presence in a transnational Third Space has emerged for a number of reasons, perhaps the greatest of which is his desire to shun, and perhaps surpass, many of the ideologies, the so-called -isms, that mark history and literature of the twentieth and twenty-first century, including a few he specifically notes in his most recent book, *Gao Xingjian: Aesthetics and Creation* (2012): Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, state socialism, communism, fascism, and nationalism. In effect, this in itself becomes an ideology—albeit a controversial one, which will be explored further in relation to the 1989 pro-democracy events in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square and Gao’s play *La Fuite* (1992), presenting multiple perspectives on the protests and the violent crackdown that followed. “The premise for freedom of thought,” Gao writes, “I believe, is not to choose any ism but instead to cast aside the restraints of ideology” (229). Gao then calls into question, albeit lightly, even the humanism of the Enlightenment that flew the banner of freedom and appealed to reason, applying a certain detached logic to all -isms without exception. Gao thus writes:

This freedom of choice is not simply a matter of choosing between the political views of different political parties. Can there be choices apart from black cat or white cat and neither black cat nor white cat? And furthermore, can one totally disregard the colour of the cat and take a separate path, thinking independently?

(Gao, *Aesthetics* 229)
Gao altered the original Sichuan proverb, “It doesn’t matter if it is a yellow cat or a black cat, as long as it catches mice” in this passage from his latest book (Pantsov 223).\(^8\) The maxim is most famous for its use by Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), China’s Communist leader from 1978 to 1992, who famously altered and quoted that proverb himself—“It doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white so long as it catches mice”—attributing it to the Sichuan Chinese Communist military commander Liu Bocheng (Goodman 126; Pantsov 222-223). The aphorism, arguably Deng’s most famous, was considered seditious at the time—he was attacked for its use both during the Cultural Revolution when he was purged from leadership ranks and again in 1975-1976—because in the context it implied that he valued whatever form of production paid off, and that infuriated CCP Chairman Mao Zedong (Pantsov 223). Gao’s use of the aphorism echoes those of schools of thought, such as the nineteenth-century Transcendentalists whose movement grew out of European Romanticism, in the ways in which Gao promotes the pursuit of a self-reliant transcendence beyond ideologies and the limitations of schools of thought—not just for himself but for all writers, so that they can rise above their particular, contingent, environment, rather than being controlled by the milieux in which they work. “. . . [T]o a writer, as to a person, what matters is not his political label or his nationality, but whether he is a person, and whether his work is worth looking at,” Gao said in a 2001 interview. “Homogenization poses an inherent

\(^8\) Deng adapted the maxim over time. Initially, in the Sichuan proverb, the cats were yellow and black and later became black and white, perhaps to highlight the contrast. At times, it was cited as a Sichuan proverb borrowed from Liu Bocheng, and at other times Sichuan-native Deng attributed it to the Anhui province, an agricultural and industrial area in Eastern China, when promoting change in agricultural policies (Pantsov 222-23). Because Gao expands on this metaphor to advocate for individual expression, it is perhaps noteworthy that Deng advocated for free expression as part of his “Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend” campaign (1956-1957) as a means of discovering ideological dissenters. In 1955, Deng said, “[A]lthough Marxism-Leninism is our guiding ideology, in matters of science let ‘a hundred schools contend.’ Our line is one of free discussion. The truth will out if we are not afraid of controversy” (Pantsov 183). However, as part of an Anti-Rightist campaign, many of those who spoke out were called “counterrevolutionary” and harshly punished (Goodman 58).
threat to individuality” (“Gao Xingjian: Life”). Gao credits writers “from ancient Greek plays down to the modern novels pioneered by Kafka” with success in this realm and pursues this “awakening of the self” that has the potential to lead to free will (Gao, *Aesthetics* 231). This is not to say that Gao avoids the political—quite the contrary. His semiautobiographical novel, *Le Livre d’un homme seul* (2000), depicts the brutality of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the killings, tortured confessions, disappearances, and censorship that forced Gao to burn his own manuscripts, while his play *La Fuite* (1992) concerns itself with the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy student protesters and focuses on the literal deaths as well as the death of dreams resulting from that uprising. In one interview with David Der-wei Wang, Gao said, “The Tiananmen Square events of 1989 made me feel that the time had come for me to stop endlessly revising the manuscript” of *La Montagne de l’âme*, and he submitted it to a publisher at that point (“A Conversation”). As a writer in exile from China, Gao had already broken from the pack in many regards and sought to further that creative independence in his work—which is indicative of rethinking and resituating oneself in a Third Space in which “[c]ultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other” (Bhabha, *Location* 52). While Gao acknowledges the important literary movements of the twentieth century that

89 Gao does not believe that the world of the twenty-first century is the post-ideological world referenced by Slavoj Žižek; however, Gao does come closer to assuming the persona criticized in Žižek’s essay “Self-Deceptions: On Being Tolerant and Smug” (2001) who is g part of the “cynical era [in which] nobody believes any more in the proclaimed ideals” in which one often requires a fetish—Žižek cites Westerners who attach themselves to “corporate Zen” ideals and practices as one example—in order to accept the world as it is and soften the impact of the troubling realities of life. Gao has spoken of the ways in which the sexual experiences described in his work—which are not studied in this thesis—allowed him to cope with the brutality of life in China and also allowed him to portray himself as a sort of anti-hero, an imperfect everyman, while discussing the times in which he lived.

90 *Le Livre d’un homme seul*, a “fictionalized account of Gao Xingjian’s life under the Communist regime,” was published in French translation in 2000. It was previously published in Chinese as *Yingeren de Shengjing* in Taipei, Taiwan, in 1999.
shaped a spirit of oppositionalism and of questioning ideologies and movements, he discusses the ways in which he seeks to push beyond their boundaries and limitations.

Gao’s Third Space attaches itself not primarily to the tension of the border but to that of ideology. When he speaks of politics, he prefers to let his book *Le Livre d’un homme seul* speak for the brutality he endured during the Cultural Revolution. “What I want to say here is that literature can only be the voice of the individual and this has always been so,” Gao said in his speech before the Swedish Academy upon receiving he Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000.91 “. . . In order that literature safeguard the reason for its own existence and not become the tool of politics it must return to the voice of the individual, for literature is primarily derived from the feelings of the individual and is the result of feelings. This is not to say that literature must therefore be divorced from politics or that it must necessarily be involved in politics” (“The Case”). In the same speech, Gao describes the conditions under which he and other Chinese writers struggled, presenting the choice of the dissident writer as to either flee or to “fall silent,” which he calls a form of suicide for a writer, and he illustrates the history of this tension in both the East and the West from Qu Yuan (c. 339 BCE-278 BCE), an exiled poet from ancient China,92 to Dante Alighieri (c. 1265-1321), James Joyce (1882-1941), Thomas Mann (1875-1955), and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008). Citing many of the great Chinese writers, of whom one knows little and whose works only came to prominence after their deaths, Gao said, “Their turning to language was not in order to reform the world and while profoundly aware of

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91 Gao’s speech was translated from the Chinese by Noël and Liliane Dutrait and published in Gao’s critical work, *La Raison d’être de la littérature*.  
92 The poet Qu Yuan (also written as Ch’ü Yüan), a governmental minister, was banished to south of the Yangtze River when the ruler Qingxiangwang came to power (Qu). Much like Gao’s tale in *La Montagne de l’âme*, Qu Yuan began a period of wandering, writing, and became interested in folk tales, legends, and rituals that informed his writing. The well-known Chinese dragon boat festival honors Qu Yuan, who drowned himself in the Miluo River near the Yangtze River.
the helplessness of the individual they still spoke out, for such is the magic of language.” The Third Space that Gao inhabits and which he described in other words during his Nobel acceptance speech is one of transcendence. “Literature transcends ideologies, national boundaries and racial consciousness in the same way as the individual’s existence basically transcends this or that -ism,” Gao said. Gao has tried to push back the boundaries, which he said are always imposed by external forces, such as customs, society, and politics. Gao has described the literature that he and others write in this Third Space as “cold literature,” “literature that will flee in order to survive [and] ... refuses to be strangled by society in its quest for spiritual salvation,” a literature that is not written to serve utilitarian or political ends but may be affected by such forces as the writer is in the course of his life, as Gao was during historically important times in modern Chinese history.93

Gao and his works reside in an arena of “cultural flux” that makes works accessible across boundaries in their multiple interpretations, performances, and translations, according to Eugene Eoyang, a specialist in Chinese-Western literary relations and cross-cultural studies

93 Certainly, Gao’s receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first awarded to a Chinese writer, albeit one with French citizenship, and his decision not to speak on the political situation in China often come under criticism. The Nobel Prize committee has been criticized for its Euro-centric bias, and recently began seeking out writers in non-European languages (Robinson). In 2012, Mo Yan became the first Chinese recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature who still resides in China. Mo Yan, which translates to “don’t speak,” is a pseudonym of Guan Moye, and the writer says he adopted this pseudonym to remind himself, a member of a Chinese Communist Party and state-sponsored Chinese Writers’ Association, not to speak too much. The jailed dissident Liu Xiaobo, a literary critic, writer, and activist, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 in absentia and dedicated it to “the martyrs of Tiananmen,” which angered Chinese officials, as Gao’s prize had, too (“Liu Xiaobo”). He has been jailed on subversion charges since 2010, and his wife Liu Xia is under house arrest since the award. Some critics accuse Gao of distancing himself from China and China’s political situation. Gao said, “This sort of criticism is really more or less the same as the cultural policy of China in those days; that’s to say it puts the writer into a ... if not a political quagmire, then at least a situation that has no way out. In other words, whatever the angle, literature must be subordinate to politics. This is precisely what I have been working hard to break away from. My view is the very opposite. Literature is higher than politics, if not actually above politics” (C. Li).
Gao’s work, to use a phrase from Edward Said, stands in opposition to the “falsely unifying rubrics that invent collective identities” and one in which “neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability” (Said, *Orientalism* x-xvii). Gao’s place is among the avant-garde dramatists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, those who continue to push past boundaries and invent new spaces. As stated by playwright Eugène Ionesco, a fellow avant-garde dramatist from the Francophone Second World—those Communist and post-Communist regimes that frequently oppressed writers and artists and subsequently found them seeking exile in France—an author “can only speak it [truth] for himself. It is by speaking it for himself that he speaks it for others. Not the other way around” (46-47). Furthermore, Ionesco frames the oppositionalism of the avant-garde dramatists, such as himself, Samuel Beckett, Luigi Pirandello, Gao, and others in saying that “an avant-garde man is like an enemy inside a city which he is bent on destroying, against which he rebels; for like any system of government, an established form of expression is also a form of oppression. The avant-garde man is the opponent of an existing system” (45) Writing in 1960, Ionesco, a forerunner to Gao, said he preferred to define the avant-garde in terms of its “opposition and rupture,” adding that “a thing once spoken is already dead, reality lies somewhere beyond it and the thought has become petrified, so to speak” (45). Finding newness in creation, in the cultural flux in relation to his position in France and that of the regime that he had fled, proved to be Gao’s primary task after immigrating to France. Speaking at the Asia Society in New York in February 2001, Gao said, “I feel that my best works have actually been the works that I’ve published since *Soul Mountain* [*La Montagne de l’âme*], because that’s when I finally got rid of the constraints that I’d put around myself so as to not encounter problems with
the Chinese government” (Asia Society). Gao’s banned experimental works in China and his newer works created in France will be explored in this study.

Buddhist Threads in Gao’s Zen or Omnipotent Theater

To set the concept of Third Space in more material terms, one of Gao’s works uses the image of dust on a mirror, an allusion that Gao borrowed from the Buddhist figure Huineng (trad. 638-713), a central figure in his 2002 play La Neige en août. It becomes but one metaphor for the Third Space as a fragmented domain that is neither the totality of the real world, nor its reflection, but the bits and pieces of matter resting between the two, as ephemeral and yet real as the eponymous flakes of snow in August that surprise and then melt away in the same play. Gao wrote La Neige en août as an avant-garde operatic production that explores the history and legends of Huineng (638-713 CE), the Sixth Patriarch of Chan/Zen Buddhism, in an experimental fashion with interesting musical elements that combine Eastern and Western operatic performance, creating a play that clearly demonstrates Gao’s ability to cross

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94 Huineng is most often written as one word in English and French, for example, by Gao himself in La Neige en août, as well as by his French translators, Noël and Liliane Dutrait, and his English translator Gilbert Fong. In other scholarly works, such as John Jorgensen’s work, Inventing Hui-neng: The Sixth Patriarch, Hagiography and Biography in Early Ch’an, the same historical figure is referred to as Hui-neng. In other Asian works, such as those in Japanese, Huineng is referred to as Eno.
95 The term “Patriarch” is commonly used in English to refer to the six principal teachers in Zen Buddhism; however, the Chinese term is gender neutral, so other gender-neutral terms, such as “master” or “founder” could be used. I’ve chosen to use the term “Patriarch,” which most religious and academic scholars use, despite the gender specificity, as the six Patriarchs were indeed men, and there is no agreement upon the Patriarch that follows Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch discussed here.
96 Specifically, to synthesize this uniqueness, Gao undertook for Chinese trained opera singers to step outside of their training to perform in unaccustomed styles, drawing on both Mozart’s opera and the Wagnerian arioso (Dutrait).
boundaries and move into new areas, the hallmark of avant-garde literary and theatrical creation. Gao plays with what is and what is not to emphasize the space of marginal existence and the dialogue that emerges in the space between the two. In the play Gao quotes Huineng’s famous gatha, a type of short metered poem derived from Indian literature and Sanskrit but also found to a large extent in Zen Buddhist practices: “Il n’y a pas d’arbre de l’Éveil [bodhi], / ni de clair miroir, / la nature de Bouddha est éternellement pure, / où la poussière pourrait-elle se poser?”

(Gao, Neige 146) This gatha was offered by Huineng in response to the Buddhist disciple Shenxiu’s poem that stated: “Le corps est l’arbre de l’Éveil, / l’esprit est aussi clair qu’un miroir. . .” Huineng’s verses earned him the Dharma of Sudden Enlightenment, an attainment of spontaneous insight into the nature of things, and the title of Sixth Patriarch, places of honor in Zen Buddhism (Dumoulin; Faure). Although Huineng is depicted in Gao’s play La Neige en août as capricious and, at times, impatient, scholars have often spoken of Gao’s identification, despite his own self-avowed atheism, with this religious and historical figure, as one who seeks enlightenment in self-knowledge and situates himself apart from many aspects of the establishment, including in the political realm. Gao is not interested in the clear mirror, perhaps one that mimics realism and claims an essentialized truth and a clear, unified, representation. Gao is interested instead in the fractured image, the ever-changing one, thus with the image of

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97 La Neige en août was performed in Taipei, Taiwan, in December of 2002, and then in Marseille, France, in November 2003, demonstrating the transcultural aspects of Gao’s work (Jorgensen xii). The text was first published in Chinese as Bayue xue in Chinese in Taipei in 2000; then in English in 2003 and in French in 2004.

98 The Buddhist concept of bodhi is alternatively translated as “wisdom” (Fong, “Introduction: Marginality” viii) and at other times with the word “enlightenment” or the sense of having been awakened, all terms loaded with meaning in Buddhism.

99 English translation: “The bodhi is not a tree, / Nor the mind a mirror bright; / Buddha’s nature is always pure, / Where can any dust alight?” (Fong, “Marginality” viii).

100 Gao leaves the final two lines of Shenxiu’s gatha unfinished. They are “De tout temps je m’efforce de les essuyer / Pour qu’ils ne soient pas couverts de poussière.”
wind, prevalent in Gao’s writing, wind that disperses the dust in different ways and multiple directions to create diverse images and ever-changing truths that bridge eighth-century thought with twentieth-century postmodern notions. Gao never specifically addresses this process in his critical works, but it provides a contemporary lens through which Gao’s work can be viewed as expanding beyond its modernist and avant-garde origins. Such shifting notions often lead to conflicts with ideologies. Buddhist scholar John Jorgensen points out that the Buddhist master Huineng has long been a controversial figure, especially in China, one who was seen in a negative light as “reactionary” by the Communist Party, because of his advocacy of a subjective rather than objective reality, his foundational ideas of Zen (Chan or Ch’an) Buddhism, and his work to bring it to “everyman,” including those who were illiterate like himself. A further temporal bridge, the government’s dislike for Huineng, extended to the desecration by Red Guards of the relic of Huineng at a Nan-hua monastery during the Cultural Revolution (Jorgensen xi). Gao’s similar emphasis on the self, on subjective realities, and on persecution perhaps demonstrates perhaps why he selected this historical figure and founder of a religious sect as one of importance, despite Gao’s own atheism. Thus a strong strain of oppositionalism runs throughout Gao’s works, a sense of challenging the status quo, both in context and form, especially that of contemporary Chinese history.

In this play, Gao, often credited with creating a so-called Zen Theater, succeeds in bridging his personal atheism with Huineng’s sense of personal illumination and enlightenment (H. Zhao 212; Fong, “Marginality” x). Just as Gao is able to navigate the pull of East and West, albeit feeling the tug of West more strongly since seeking asylum in France, Gao has explicitly

101 The theme of the “everyman” appears throughout Gao’s works as a notion Gao appears to value, which will be discussed in Chapter Four in the study of Gao’s Tiananmen Square play, La Fuite, in reference to Gao’s loathing for Nietzsche’s notion of the übermenschen, translated into English alternately as Superman or Overman, the antithesis of the “everyman.”
stated that he does not embrace Buddhism as a religion—and thus one must qualify critic Henry Y. H. Zhao’s use of the term Zen Theater—although Buddhism’s influences are prevalent in Gao’s works, and at the Modern Language Association meeting in Boston in 2013 Gao has discussed the many powerful influences, including both Taoism and Buddhism, in his œuvre.\(^{102}\) However, Gao distances himself from Buddhism as a religious practice while finding himself often credited by others with creating this “Zen theater”\(^ {103}\) that shows the ways in which Gao grounds his search for meaning and for the self in traditions that he greatly respects and has studied. This personally created space appears to be one of both tension and comfort, simultaneously. Pointedly, he stated, in the second sentence of his speech to the Swedish Academy on accepting his Nobel Prize, on the series of happy coincidences that led him to that moment: “Je ne parlerai pas de l’existence de Dieu; face à cette énigme, j’ai toujours éprouvé le plus grand respect, bien que je me sois toujours considéré comme athée” (Gao, Raison 7).

Nonetheless, he discussed in a 2013 panel discussion how his own brand of atheism did not mesh well with that of the Chinese Communist Party, which, according to Gao, tried to control and suppress religious beliefs as much as possible. “Communism is atheistic and materialistic,” Gao stated, speaking in Chinese, expressing his opposition to that suppression and ideology. Gao added that, despite his own beliefs, he became interested in Buddhism and Taoism to such an extent that he relied on the connections of friends to find ancient versions of sutras and obtain

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\(^{102}\) Speaking at the Asia Society in New York in 1991, Gao also stated that he does not feel the need to belong to an expatriate community of Chinese writers within France, does not feel that particular tug or influence, and he reiterated that again Boston 2013. Gao has told scholar Claire Conceison that he does not “desire or need Chinese friendships; he does not want to talk about China, which he considers irrelevant to his life and work.” He said he enjoys traveling to Hong Kong and Taiwan but feels more “at home” in the cosmopolitan, Western Hong Kong (Conceison, “The French Gao” 304).

\(^{103}\) Gao himself has not used this term of Zhao’s, instead using the undefined term “omnipotent theater,” which is discussed later in this chapter (Huang; Fong, “Marginality” xi).
access to original manuscripts in libraries not open to the public during his research shortly before the Cultural Revolution in his post-university period. He defines himself as an individual who is well-read in both the works of Western literature and those of traditional Chinese philosophy and religion, specifically the Buddhist sutras, which inspired his interest in Huineng and led him to write the play *La Neige en août*.

As form and content connect, *La Neige en août* moves from a biographical, dialogic, plot-based series of acts involving religious figures of the seventh century to a more chaotic, free-form third act in which meaning emerges and just as quickly dissolves and is further questioned, although the themes of Gao’s and Huineng’s lives continue to percolate through the language that bridges thirteen centuries of history. The interplay between existence and destruction becomes apparent in the vaudeville-style, slapstick pandemonium that has taken over the Buddhist monastery’s hall of worship, a chaos exemplified in the play and its more than thirty characters. One of the many Buddhist masters hits the character of the writer, who is searching for a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being, saying, “Espèce d’écervelé! Vous ne savez pas que les disciples du Chan ne font pas d’offrandes au Bouddha, les bodhisattva ont tous été tués, que venez-vous faire ici?” And the writer responds, “Tous les êtres vivants ne sont-ils pas le Bouddha? Moi-même je le suis!” The master responds humorously in acknowledging the artistic egotism, “Ah, ah, c’est un écrivain!” (Gao, *Neige* 203). In this scene and elsewhere, an established form of dialogue as a two-sided exchange, explodes into a confusing Third Space,

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104 The writer is indifferent to the external chaos, a writer who wants to hear a woman sing a song, “La Neige en août,” a woman who is herself a double of one of the Buddhist nuns, the nun who initiated Huineng into Buddhism. With the two female doubles, one, the nun, seeks to withdraw from the world (an act known in Chinese as *chushi*) while her double, the singer, seeks to enter the world (an act known in Chinese as *rushi*), and the Third Space (Dutrait). The Third Space, as interpreted by Bhabha, is neither one of withdrawing or rushing toward but in the continuous production that is existence.
which is both creative and destructive in its chaos, heightened here through the emphasis on multiplicity, like the funhouse mirror-maze, reminiscent of John Barthes’ 1968 tale *Lost in the Funhouse*, in which distortion and deception, especially self-deception, emerge from the many avenues of choice in the familiar fair attraction.

For Gao, despite the frequent sense of alienation, of separation, and of being lost, creation is the central act of gaining wisdom over time. It is similar to what Bhabha refers to as “acts of making and mapping . . . voices that light the way to another darkness, a new cave of making” in his essay “In the Cave of Making: Thoughts on Third Space” (xiv). The writer undertakes such work, which Gao in *La Neige en août* strives to separate from the religious hierarchy and situates amidst the *charivari* that reigns in the later episodes of the play. This use of a Third Space emerges in a work that epically spans 250 years of Chinese history from the middle of the seventh century during the High Tang dynasty to the end of the ninth century during the Late Tang dynasty, a time when much is thrown into question and surfaces in what Gilbert Fong calls “a number of short episodic sketches . . . a kaleidoscope of human activities” (Fong, “Marginality” xv). The singers in *La Neige en août* sing of this steady routine: “Parmi nous, les porteurs de briques portent les briques, les balayeurs balaient chacun de son côté? . . . Ceux qui prennent le pinceau préparent l’encre, les bouchers manient le couteau, les oisifs savourent le thé, les malades prennent des remèdes” (217). And the routine expands and contracts repeatedly with lines such as “Les morts dorment sagement . . . Les vivants devraient vivre agréablement! . . . Celui qui achète une maison achète une maison . . . Celle qui vend ses sourires vend ses sourires . . . Le vieux pont a pourri, on construit un neuf. . . . Ainsi va le monde . . .” (218-19).
Many subjectivities capture the plurality of human experience with a dialogue between experiences and a sense of the newness of existence emerging from the historical subjectivity at work in the lives of both Huineng in the seventh century and Gao in the twentieth and twenty-first. The old passes away, and the new must take its place, in art and literature as in the world of bricks and mortar and bridges. Perhaps Gao’s reference to old and new bridges can be read as a tip of the hat to the Pont Neuf in Gao’s adopted Paris, a “new” bridge by name that is now the oldest bridge spanning the Seine River in Paris, a bridge begun in 1578 under the reign of Henry III and completed under Henry IV in 1607, demonstrating the importance of time and perspective. In Gao’s work, bridges, both literal and figurative ones, are constantly being rebuilt, turning the binary of opposite banks into places of expansion and creation.

Claire Conceison, translator of some of Gao’s plays, has written of Gao’s “polymorphism,” his creation of a “split subjectivity” in plays and novels, and the ways in which his works transcend genre boundaries, placing him within an artistic category she calls “total art,” using this multigenre platform primarily to explore the theme of the liberty of the individual. “Total art” is linked closely to Gao’s conception of his plays as “omnipotent theater,” a term Gao uses to describe a theater of complete intellectual and artistic freedom, which is his goal (Huang; Fong, “Marginality”). Gao’s discussion of both omnipotent theater and omnipotent actors grew out of his earlier exploration of what he called “total theater,” a central

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105 When the chanteuse (the singer called “the singsong girl” in Gilbert Fong’s English translation) in La Neige en août looks to the sky at the beginning of Act III and comments “quelle surprise,” introducing the series of vignettes of human experience that stretch to the end of the play.
106 Claire Conceison is a professor of theater studies and Asian and Middle Eastern studies at Duke University and served on a Modern Language Association panel discussion at the 2013 MLA convention in Boston during which these ideas were discussed. The information presented here is from her panel discussion. Conceison sat on the panel along with Jian Mei Liu of the University of Maryland, Thomas Moran of Middlebury College, and Xiaoping Song of Norwich University.
part of his experimentation. Gao’s “total theater” forsook the notion of genre, bringing elements of traditional Chinese opera and theater into the world of modern drama, including singing, martial art forms, and gesture as central elements, in addition to speech and dialogue (Fong, “Marginality” xi). Gao took this concept, which critic and translator Gilbert Fong said created a theatrical concept not unlike Mikhail Bakhtin’s notions of carnival, subversion, and anarchy, and implemented them in his early plays *L’Homme sauvage* (1985), *La Cité des morts* (1987), and *Chronique du Classique des mers et des monts* (1989). In pushing past formal boundaries, creating theater that does not fall into the genre of a traditional musical, is not classic Chinese opera, and is not Western Theater of the Absurd, Gao creates a new space drawing on traditional tools and the notion of reviving theater’s original purpose, which he perceives as a type of spiritual ritual in which people find a sense of fulfillment or happiness or of ease to their suffering (Gao, “Ling yizong xiju” [Another Kind of Drama] 191; Gao, “Yao shenmeyang de xiji” [What Kind of Drama Do I Want] ctd. in Fong, “Marginality” xi). Gao elaborates that it is this juxtaposition and hybridization of genres that marks his work, and Fong states that “[c]ontemporary theatre is characterized by the blurring of lines between different genres of performing art” (Fong, “Marginality” xii). Gao thus elaborates on this form of drama in a 1988 essay titled “In Pursuit of a Modern Drama”:

Drama of the future is a kind of total drama. It is a kind of living drama with interactions between actors, actors and characters, characters, actors and audience being enhanced. . . It will collaborate with the artists of spoken language and avoid degenerating into mime or musical. It will be symphonized with multi-visuality. It will push the expressivity of language to its fullest capacity. (Gao, qtd. and trans. by Quah)
Conceison’s term “polymorphism” is aptly applied to Gao’s stage—for his theater is not limited to just the script due to his work with actors, musicians, dancers, and the improvisational elements—which is another example of a Third Space that is perpetually in transition, transforming genres, hybridizing them, challenging engrained techniques, and embracing the ability of their difference to coexist in the space he creates.

Both visually and linguistically in his plays, as well as in his well-known ink paintings, Gao relies on a number of metaphors and imagery that join interior and exterior spaces. In La Neige en août, the image moves from the famous gatha poem’s emphasis on the dust on a mirror, or lack thereof, to the importance of passageways, transgressions and progressions through the simple physical and psychological mechanism of the door. The latter provides a shift and a possibility of the new captured through the image of the newborn child and the singularity of voice expressed by his or her cry spreading in the night and through the opening of the door. Hongren, a Tang dynasty (618-906) Zen master and Fifth Patriarch, engages in the following dialogue, with his disciple, Huineng, who would become the Sixth Patriarch, the central character in the play, and who explores what is beyond the closed doors, once they are opened:

**Hongren.** Toi qui viens du dehors, qu’y a-t-il au-delà de la porte?

**Huineng.** Dans l’univers immense se trouvent le soleil et la lune, les montagnes et les rivières, les nuages et les cours d’eau, ainsi que le vent et la pluie.

Et sur terre vont et viennent chiens et chevaux, voitures et palanquins, hauts fonctionnaires et petits valets.

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107 Gao’s ink painting, “Devant et derrière la porte” from 1996 captures this similar theme of conjoined spaces. Gao also displays his ink paintings, many of which explore similar themes as his plays and novels and has published a collection of them in 2002.
Il y a aussi des marchands et des boutiquiers qui se disputent pour vendre leurs marchandises, des muets qui mangent la gentiane, des amoureux fous et des femmes inassouvis qui se livrent chacun et chacune à leurs activités abracadabrantes.

Mais à cet instant précis, au plus profond de la nuit, les hommes sont paisibles, seul retentit le cri du nouveau-né.

**Hongren.** Et deçà de la porte, qu’y a-t-il?

**Huineng.** Le maître et moi.

**Hongren** (*il rit*). Et quelle chose est ce moi?

**Huineng.** Une pensée intérieure.

**Hongren.** Où se trouve-t-elle?

**Huineng.** La pensée n’est jamais interrompue, elle est partout.

**Hongren** (*il s’exclame*). Si elle n’a aucun endroit où s’arrêter, pourquoi t’y accroches-tu encore?

**Huineng** (*silencieux, il baisse la tête. Un instant plus tard, il relève la tête*). Pour rien. (Gao, *Neige* 148-49)

Huineng, the younger disciple, arrives from the exterior and is pushed to confront the duality of the master-disciple relationship, realizing that interiority spills over into a quotidian everywhere-ness, an idea that the patriarch Hongren urges Huineng to challenge, and which both Huineng and Gao, throughout his œuvre, seem to value. Furthermore, a false, or perhaps merely forced dichotomy, is enacted here. Theoreticians who use the notion of the Third Space look at the literal and figurative space as a “contact zone,” a space of negotiation, transformation, enunciation, and translation (Ikas and Wagner 2). A border is crossed and an idea is challenged
in theorizing this Third Space of the threshold between interior and exterior spaces.\textsuperscript{108} This crossing of a threshold frees the individual to think in new ways through a spacial dislocation and what the cultural geographer Julia Lossau calls a “territorial trap” and reductionism (Lossau 62-73). Gao further plays on the idea of emptying oneself of idées reçues to arrive at a state of nothingness,\textsuperscript{109} a notion that generally interests Gao in his work. Emptiness in Buddhist thought is not Western nihilism, in which an absence of truth or essentialist meaning leads to alienation and existential angst; rather, it is a place of interdependency, a place of what one practitioner, Zen Buddhist monk and author Thich Nhat Hahn, calls “interbeing,” and which Seth Robert Segall calls “a more felicitous and creative translation” (Segall 174). “Nothing exists except in interrelationship with everything else,” Segall states. “. . . Phenomena do not exist by themselves, but only as part of a field, and the arrow of causality within a field is always multidirectional” (174). One element of Buddhism’s emptiness allows for an antiessentialist discourse because this empty space is devoid of limiting essences, while the process of emptying allows for transitions to positive qualities like compassion and wisdom. Even the silence between Hongren and Huineng evolves into the Third Space needed for emptiness and new wisdom to exist.

\textsuperscript{108} In theorizing the Third Space, Homi Bhabha uses the writing of the French philosopher and activist Claude Lefort to expand on this notion of movement beyond binary divisions, of language as “internal and external to the speaking subject” that leads to an articulation of the self (Location 210).

\textsuperscript{109} Beginning in 1996, Gao spoke of wanting to be a “nothingist,” saying that he did not want to be swept up or embrace any type of ideology (C. Li). For him, this “nothingism” of which he speaks is not derogatory. Although Gao is not a Buddhist, it resonates with the story that Buddha is said to have told, that to “receive the teachings you should be like an empty cup,” one so full that no new contents can be added, that is one should possess a “beginner’s mind” (Jun 41). That tale is well known, especially in the West, but Zen/Chan Buddhist also encourages one to “not only be empty, [but] we should also avoid being like a cup that is contaminated with poison and dirt or a cup that is inverted or cracked” (Jun 41-42).
New Spaces: Dialogue, Thresholds, and Doorways

The doors and shadows with which Gao experiments in his plays, as well as his ink paintings, connect spaces, link individuals, and provide distorted reflections, as in his play *Dialoguer-interloquer* (1994),¹¹⁰ in which a man and woman banter in an increasingly bizarre conversation that both joins and separates them, at times simultaneously and at other times in an alternating rhythm. The play captures the notion that meaning is created in a Third Space through language (Greek etymology of *dialoguer* is *dia*, meaning “through,” and *logos*, meaning “word”) and *interloquer* (Latin etymology is derived from *loquor*, meaning “to speak,” and *inter*, meaning “between”). The type of dialogue referenced is that of the Zen/Chan Buddhist tradition in which a man and woman, essentially prisoners of their philosophies on life, their own motivations, gender, and mores, begin to exist in a space between their perceptions. “The practice of dialogue expresses a central tenet of Buddhism—faith in human beings, in their limitless dignity and potential as possessors and embodiments of universal truth,” according to one Buddhist group, Soka Gakkai International, involved in international peace work. “Thus [the Buddha] engaged in a fluid and organically unfolding style of dialogue through which he sought to awaken people to the dharma—the enduring and universal truth within” (“Dialogue in Buddhism”).¹¹¹ Meanwhile, a monk in vaudeville-esque fashion balances a series of eggs on a

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¹¹⁰ This play was first performed in Vienna, Austria, in 1992. However, the version referred to here is the French one created and performed in 1999 at the Molière-Scène Aquitaine in Bordeaux. The edition of the play published by the Belgian publisher Lansman Éditeur-Diffuseur coincided with a reprise of the play in July 2001 at the Théâtre des Halles in Avignon under the direction of Gao Xingjian. Furthermore, in staging the play, Gao relied on the translation from Chinese to French of Annie Currien, a writer-in-residence at the Maison des Écrivains Étrangers et des Traducteurs (M.E.E.T.) in Saint-Herblain, France.

¹¹¹ Another Buddhist reformer, who has inspired Buddhist groups interested in peace and conflict resolution, is Nichiren (1222-1282), a Japanese Buddhist monk whose writings have contributed
stick, only succeeding once he has pierced the shell, effectively creating a kind of juncture or intersection of differing matters, advancing the dialogue with visual antics—perhaps connected to the other meaning of the French “interloquer,” to surprise, to astound. These connecting devices, doors and shadows, in Gao’s work, link not only individuals with each other but also the individuals with the beyond, with memories, time, and dreams, in a kind of surreal space—or simply with the nothingness that encircles individuals traveling through space. At times, the search for a harmonious Third Space and the positive aspects of nothingness fail, and characters dip into the nihilistic emptiness more common in Western philosophy. This kind of dialogue is a type of mise-en-abyme that emphasizes emptiness rather than illusionary and multiplied elements, and obstacles prevent mergers and emergence of the Third Space:

**L’homme** (monologuant): Derrière cette porte, peut-être, il n’y a rien.

**La femme** (s’interrogeant): Même pas de souvenir.

**L’homme** (raffinant): Derrière cette porte, derrière elle, il n’y a vraiment rien, le crois-tu?

**La femme**: Même pas d’illusion?

**L’homme**: Exactement! Derrière cette porte, derrière elle, il n’y a rien. Tu as d’abord cru qu’il y avait quelque chose, mais il n’y a rien. (Gao, *Dialoguer-interloquer* 60-61)

In fact, here Gao is showing the absence of real dialogue, as each speaker seems to be trapped within his or her own monologue, only connected by a kind of nothingness in the final couplet’s to the idea of “Buddhist humanism,” who wrote in his treatise, “On Establishing the Correct Teching for the Peace of the Land” (*Rissho ankoku ron*), a dialogue between host and guest, in the words of the host, “I have been brooding alone upon this matter, indignant in my heart, but now that you have come, we can lament together. Let us discuss the question at length” (“Dialogue in Buddhism”).
repetition of the word “rien.” At times, a slightly greater connection is found in hearing albeit not reconciling oneself with the ideas of another; we see this in the way the woman provides rebuttal to the man’s ideas on women, while the man emphasizes their common fantasies. Their voices remain divided, as though on two sides of a door, and at times they are even accusatory, as when the male character lashes out at the woman, calling her “crazy” and “sick” and “diabolical” (Yip and Tam 228).

In *Dialoguer-interloquer*, the border is merely crossed and cracked open into a kind of desolate existentialist agreement, in which the binary characters, male and female, express the absurdity of human existence and the reasons why it is unbearable for each of them, joining their voices in a chorus:

- **L’homme:** C’est la folie, le monde . . .
- **La femme** (*murmurant*): Seulement par solitude . . .
- **L’homme** (*à voix basse*): Seulement par ennui . . .
- **La femme:** Seulement par faim et soif . . .
- **L’homme:** Seulement par désir . . .
- **La femme:** C’est insupportable.
- **L’homme:** Seulement parce que c’est insupportable . . .
- **La femme:** Seulement parce que c’est insupportable d’être incarnée en femme.
- **L’homme:** Seulement parce qu’on est un homme et que c’est insupportable.
- **La femme:** Seulement parce qu’on n’est pas seulement une femme, mais aussi une personne . . .

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112 Here, one notes Gao’s examination of the notion of nothingness in contrast to Buddhism’s more positive evocation of the similar concept. Gao is closer to Martin Heidegger’s exploration of man forming his existence, in contrast to the sense of nothingness, which produces feelings of existential angst or dread.
**L’homme**: Une personne vivante, faite de chair et de sang . . .

**La femme**: Seulement pour sentir . . .

**L’homme**: Seulement pour résister à la mort . . .

**L’homme**: Seulement par soif de vie . . .

**La femme**: Seulement pour éprouver la peur de la mort . . . (Gao, *Dialoguer-interloquer* 38)

Coming together in a common existential lamentation, the man and woman then go on to find themselves freed from their bodies if not their genders in the next act, appearing as disembodied heads, but still finding that they must confront their fears and memories, the shadows that follow them throughout the play, and that they must address the fissure that divides them and all human beings. In Gao’s visual representation of his dismembered dialogue, linear, consecutive, vocalizations are replaced with new discursive methods, some echoing Buddhist practices of attaining enlightenment, and other times veering toward postmodern deconstruction of the unity of thought embodied in dialogue. Nonetheless, Gao advances his ideas on being and nothingness uniquely by taking Eastern and Western thought, philosophies, and religions and putting them into practice on the stage embodied in discernible bodies, even if they often remain archetypical in their anonymity and generalized labels, and then showing the impediments to overcoming the solitude of their singular existences and binary conversations.

Gao admits that the inherently collaborative environment of the theater (and of filmmaking, to which he has begun to increasing devote his attention)—involving playwright,

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Xiaobin Yang has explored notions of dismemberment in Sinophone literature, specifically in relation to the works of Yu Hua (1960-) in *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-Garde Fiction*. Yu Hua’s works explore both surrealism and realism; his *China in Ten Words* bears some similarities to Gao’s *Soul Mountain* in the way it blends fiction, memoir, self-analysis, cultural analysis, and trauma literature.
actors, and audience—is one of the reasons he has been so drawn to the avant-garde theater, which he designates as an often “plotless” form in which he tries to create an atmosphere, a dominant element that produces new meaning, and to find new ways to explore the experience of being human. The diverse nature of Gao’s explorations of the stage and of film have often been called “tripartite” by critics and the author himself (Conceison, “The French Gao” 307, 318). Gao indeed formulated a tripartite theory of acting which emphasizes the actor’s multiple subjectivities: the person playing the actor as himself, the individual as an actor, and the actor as the character in the creative work (Conceison, “The French Gao” 319; M. Lee, “Contextualizing”). Similarly, in filmmaking, language shares representation with image and music, each autonomous and yet creating an amalgamated work (Conceison “The French Gao” 319; M. Lee, “Contextualizing”). To tease apart the experimental nature of Gao’s work, it is important to look further at what he uniquely tries to do with form with *La Neige en août*, one of his truly groundbreaking plays that, like other parts of his work, reflects the tripartite qualities for which Gao’s work, particularly this play in its unique combination of music, dance, and acting, as well as his filmmaking, has often been noted. “You have a collective,” Gao said at a 2013 conference in Boston. “A play is not a complete story when I’m finished writing it. Just as important is how the audience reacts.” Referring to his plays *Au bord de la vie* and *Ballade nocturne* in particular, he mentions the intention of creating a general, universal, environment, devoid of realism. Gao’s newest works, he stated, have also become more fluid in the identity of

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114 Gao spoke in January 2013 of working on a new film in three languages—Chinese, French, and English—thus creating a film that the audience will understand and from which it will derive meaning without subtitles if the audience members are fluent in any one of the three languages. Most films in more than one language—Theo Angopoulos’ 1995 film *Ulysses’ Gaze* and the African films of the late author and filmmaker Ousmane Sembène come to mind—rely upon subtitles rather than imagery and music to bridge these linguistic gap.

115 From discussion with Gao Xingjian, January 4, 2013, in Boston.
the characters, as they move around and even implicate the audience members through language or by having each audience member deal with the drama in multiple, individual and collective, ways. Rather than strictly adhering to the Aristotelian model of the author working to get the audience to identify with characters, of unity of place, time, and action, and of harnessing the power of spectators who insert themselves in the play through the vehicle of dramatic character development, Gao said he aims at other times to build upon a Brechtian distance between the audience members and the characters. Gao achieves this sense of alienation spoken of by Bertolt Brecht, in his Third Space, in the interplay between the speaking actors and the often silent audience. In many of Gao’s plays, he uses the second person subject pronoun and the imperatival use of verbs to implicate the audience, in addition to the crowd of actors, in the action. For example, in *La Neige en août*, Huineng repeatedly addresses “hommes et femmes d’intelligences” and commands them to listen or instructs them (181-84). The character of the writer within the play implicates all living beings in telling the old Buddhist master, “Tous les êtres vivants ne sont-ils pas le Bouddha? Moi-même je le suis!” (203). In *L’Autre rive* (1986), the collective is implicated in a woman’s murder. “Je n’ai commencé à crier que parce que tout le monde criait,” one member of the crowd of actors states. “C’est toi, c’est lui, c’est moi, c’est nous tous qui l’avons assassinée,” a man replies (70-71). Gao has spoken of theater’s ability to take literature, often a singular or solitary experience, and make it interactive, individualizing it for each audience and each audience member.

Gao’s theatrical works advance the importance of the visual aspects of drama to play with the multiple meanings of signs, which in Bhabha’s Third Space produce meaning that “is never simply mimetic and transparent” (Bhabha, *Location* 53). “This has less to do with what anthropologists might describe as varying attitudes to symbolic systems within different
cultures,” Bhabha states, “than with the structure of symbolic representation itself . . .” (52). One such visual example, rich with multiple meanings, emerges in *La Neige en août* when a character, the painter Lu Zhe, discusses the *gathas*, the first one painted in characters like black earthworms by misguided disciple Shenxiu to gain attention, and the one that Lu will paint for the illiterate Huineng, on a corridor wall inside the temple in which Lu will enumerate almost infinite possibilities offered by the five shades of black, the vermilion red or jade green, the standard script, and the official script used on seals (145). Singularity and multiplicity are juxtaposed both in the language of the gathas and also in their visual representations. Gao’s secondary characters, such as Shenxiu, often lose sight of the broader significance and multitudinous threads woven into an existence, whether it is a disciple seeking a patriarch’s attention, desirous of enlightenment, or individuals quarreling with each other at a bus stop (in *L’Arrêt de bus*) while time and buses literally drive on without the would-be passengers. This allows Gao, like other writers before him—including Samuel Beckett, one of his earliest and most significant influences in his reading of *En Attendant Godot*, which is strongly evoked in Gao’s *L’Arrêt de bus*—to use his constant interruptions of the action as a centerpiece, placing his works alongside those “directed against what since Aristotle had been the purpose of drama: the representation of action” (Puchner 169). Most of Gao’s plays are indeed less action-driven and constitute meditations on certain existential themes, increasingly incorporating visual elements, such as carnavalesque play, gesture, or painting.

Gao further creates his Third Space not by merely straddling binaries to create a Middle Way,¹¹⁶ but also through the exchange of traditional binaries to create something completely

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¹¹⁶ See the discussion in Chapter One on the work of Chinese-Francophone writer François Cheng’s work on the notion of the Middle Way and dialogue, which echoes the type of musical and spoken dialogue used in Gao’s play *La Neige en août* (F. Cheng, *Le Dialogue* 16).
new, as he did with the operatic aspects of his play *La Neige en août*, in a transcultural collaboration with the Francophone-Chinese composer Xu Shuya to produce the libretto for the play/opera and through his intense collaboration with the National Theater of Taiwan and Peking Opera performers. The Peking Opera actors demonstrated a unique method based on reversals that effectively created new transcultural artistic spaces for the actors, singers, and audience to inhabit. The Peking Opera actors, Gao stated, trained extensively at the opera house in Marseilles, France, to learn how to ignore their many years of training in Chinese opera, some beginning from age eight, and spent a year engaging in Western voice training to recalibrate their voices, and in Western modern dance choreography.\(^{117}\) Gao played with ideas of Chinese and European opera with composer Shuya Xu, who has studied at the Shanghai Conservatory, as well as at the École Normale de Musique in Paris and at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique there, but who is primarily interested in Chinese music and dissonance, both subjects of great interest to Gao as well (“Xu Shuya”). Xu’s family had been sent to northeast China during the Cultural Revolution for re-education from 1969 to 1973, where he observed *yangge*, local dances involving rice-planting, and heard the suona, the Chinese oboe, and the *sheng* or mouth organ Xu used in his compositions. Xu’s work, which has been called “expressionist studies in anti-melody, made up of small units of climax/anticlimax,” melds particularly well with Gao’s avant-garde theatrical techniques and ideas. Xu also works with microtonality and other experimental composition techniques. One example shows him encouraging the cellist to “use glissando and pull the strings, as is done in qin-playing to inflect the pitch, while also alienating the pentatonic melody employed in the piece” (“Xu Shuya”). The creation of *La Neige en août* proved to be unique in the history of modern opera. Most profoundly, the harsh dissonance of

\(^{117}\) Gao discussed these reversals at the MLA Conference in Boston in January 2013.
Xu’s compositions works well with Gao’s oppositional styles of literature, in both form and content, which will be further explored through his connections with modernism and postmodernism. It was not enough for Gao or Xu to create a work that was entirely Western or entirely Chinese, a heritage they both shared and to some extent sought refuge from; as transcultural artists, their collaboration sought to immerse the other in an experience that was entirely different from his own, shifting the actors and the audience into a place of transcultural transformation unlike anything they had previously experienced or witnessed.

Gao’s transcultural Third Space, particularly in *La Neige en août* but also in other works and in his film *Silhouette/Sinon l’ombre* (2003), causes audiences to reconsider the notion of “intercultural theater” through Gao’s aesthetic, paying attention to the ways in which he avoids strict adherence to either an Eastern or a Western tradition of theater, dance, or music (Łabędzka 208). Isabelle Łabędzka, author of *Gao Xingjian’s Idea of Theatre*, sees this intercultural aesthetic as resulting in a dramatic opera that is not dominated by any single style or tradition, “a theatrical work of coherent form and subtle elegance, derived not only from the unexpected and innovative combination of different means of artistic expression, but also from the perfect way in which they were performed” (208). While inhabiting a Third Space of creation, Gao’s work is rooted in the long tradition of intercultural theater, especially by avant-garde playwrights and other innovators, especially Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, and Antonin Artaud, whose intercultural theater borrowed elements from Asia, particularly China and Japan, as well as Indonesia (Łabędzka 209). Often called a “nomad of the imagination,” Ariane Mnouchkine (b. 1939), founder of the avant-garde troupe Théâtre du Soleil, which draws its members from twenty-one countries and has partnered with theater companies in Cambodia and Afghanistan, is perhaps one of the most well-known directors of intercultural, one could say transnational,
theater, incorporating Asian influences into her productions, those written by Shakespeare and others, such as Hélène Cixous’ *L’Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (Féral, “Ariane”; Miller 1). Rather than serving as a vehicle for cultural comparison, intercultural theater is often used to draw on an array of theatrical tools and, as in Gao’s case, at times to create new methods.

One Buddhist dialogic practice called *kōans* or *kuans*, used in Gao’s theatrical work is another tool for him to work beyond binaries into a Third Space where the individual is to be awakened. The transformative ideas and forms that fill Gao’s theatrical works are embedded in places of change, many derived from Zen Buddhism, where the idea of a Third Space, also often known as a Middle Way, is evident in Buddha’s statement that “the Middle Way . . . — producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to . . . self-awakening, to unbinding” (“Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta”). The Third Space allows a transnational, and often contested, subjectivity to emerge and to reside in the gap between cultures and between individuals, often in dialogic form. Just as Gao relied on the oppositional historical figure of Huineng in *La Neige en août* to draw dialogue to new spaces, Gao furthers this process in his play *Dialoguer-interloquer*, first performed in 1999, in which the Third Space element derives from traditional Zen Buddhist practices. Gao specifies in this play that the sense of a Third Space is exemplified in the Zen Buddhist *kuans*, in French, or *gongan* in most English translations, which Gao describes in the following way: “Le dialogue emprunte au mode questions-réponses des kuans de l’école Chan.

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118 Patrice Pavis in the *Dictionnaire du théâtre* describes this intercultural theater as weaving together different theatrical traditions from diverse cultures but also warns of the dangers inherent in doing so, such as engaging in exoticism and stereotyping (Łabędzka 210).

119 The practice is known as *kōans* (the form most commonly used in English dictionaries, one derived from the Japanese), *kuans*, *gongan*, *gong’an*, *gong-an*, or *koan* and involves questions and rebuttals used to provoke doubt and/or test an individual. See Steven Heine’s work *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), for ways that this practice has been adopted as a literary genre full of allusions, indirect references, motifs, and so forth.
Mais la pièce ne se veut pas propagande pour le bouddhisme, et le metteur en scène n’a pas à tenter d’exposer la quintessence de cette école. L’auteur considère juste que dialoguer et interloquer de la sorte peut avoir de la théâtralité” (Gao, Dialoguer-interloquer 70). Gao adapts this Buddhist play in which dialogue and rebuttal take the participants to a third metaphysical place, often considered one of pure or unmediated consciousness in Buddhist practice. Terry Siu-han Yip and Kwok-kan Tam point out that this use of the gongan appears in Gao’s post-exile plays, in which he’s abandoned his earlier attempts to “address the problems of traditional forms of performance for a contemporary theater” and save “the national theater through theatrical experimentation,” an undertaking that is too monumental in terms of moral and political implications for any Sinophone writer (215). Yip and Tam point out how Gao’s later plays employ a number of Zen Buddhist practices, including the gongan, primarily rooted around notions of communication, to explore subjectivity and the self (215). The dialogic gongan offers a platform to probe the “cross-subjectivity” of the characters and the space that lies between them through the use of echoes, negation, and a type of deconstruction of idées reçues, all of which work to break down categories and oppositions, those locked-in binaries, to reach a new espace entre.

Gongan dialogues often contain an element of a question, a riddle, and even at times a certain measure of nonsense intended to explore the Third Space between the riddle and the response. One of the famous ones begins with the question, “What is the sound of one hand [clapping]”\(^1\)? They are intended to advance one’s awareness beyond the realm of rational thought. The gongan is not merely “an inert object upon which to focus attention” but “a dynamic activity, the very activity of seeking an answer” (Hori). Through this dialogue, “the self sees the self not directly but under the guise of the kōan [gongan]” (Hori). Gao’s play Dialoguer-
interloquer is full of questions that the man and woman protagonists probe, their senses
awakened by a knock on the door and no one entering at the beginning of Act II (49). The
woman asks the man, “Ne sommes-nous pas déjà morts?” when the man fears the intruder (51).
The couple continues after a reflective silence:

**L’homme:** On dirait que oui. *(Il regarde les deux têtes)* Il n’y a que toi et moi.

Les gens dehors ne sont pas au courant. Et puis, tu ne vas pas parler, je ne vais pas
le faire non plus, personne, absolument personne ne le peut!

**La femme:** Enfermés pour toujours ici?

**L’homme:** On se croirait sur une île. C’est désert et on est coupé du monde; ce
n’est pas désagréable. Mais puisqu’ici il n’y a pas de ciel et qu’on ne voit pas la
mer, entendre comme un bruit de marée est plaisant ...

**La femme:** Sans pouvoir distinguer le jour et la nuit.

**L’homme:** Inconnu, un coin oublié des hommes. Non, une boîte fermée, qui n’est
pas un cercueil! Qui n’est rien, que le temps même ignore, le temps existe-t-il
d’ailleurs encore? Ah, le temps, n’est qu’une idée. Tu penses qu’il existe, alors il
existe. La mort n’est pas si effrayante que ça. *(Gao, Dialoguer 51)*

In another gongan-esque passage, the man asks the woman, “Derrière cette porte, derrière elle, il
n’y a vraiment rien, le crois-tu?” *(Gao, Dialoguer 60)*. The woman interrogates further, “Même
pas d’illusion? . . . Même pas de rêve?” And later says, in a low voice, “Même pas de souvenir”
(60). In Gao’s work, the dialogue between the man and woman takes the two individuals beyond
their immediate physical presence, which is the place where they begin with their sexuality and
physical exchange, moving to a plane of dreams, memories, past the enslavement of language,
and to a paradoxical place of both connection and separation, ending with emphasis on the
feûre, the crack, the space between, which can be understood as another form of the Third Space. Buddhist scholar Morton Schlütter writes:

Encounter dialogue is unique to Chan Buddhist literature. It depicts Chan masters interacting with monastics and sometimes laypeople in highly unconventional ways, using disruptive and illogical language and seemingly bizarre and shocking actions. These stories also came to be referred to as *gongan*, although strictly speaking such a story only became a *gongan* when it was commented upon or used in instruction by a subsequent Chan master (15).

Moving past the traditional master-disciple relationship, advancing dialogue in new ways, rose to prominence during the Song dynasty period (960-1276) in which scholars were aiming to achieve levels of enlightenment and knowledge that paralleled those of the great Tang dynasty (618-906), a period known as the Golden Age of poetry in China.¹²⁰ Even the word “encounter” carries a sense of the Third Space or Middle Way in that two individuals—in other instances two cultures or two places—butt up against each other, with the heat of that encounter, that metaphysical friction, creating a new way of perceiving or experiencing the subject. In Gao’s writing, as in the passage quoted between the man and woman above, it is often two individuals who encounter each other, the you and the me of existence, while other times it is the exterior world of the other or one’s geographic space that rubs up against an individual’s sense of self or interior space. The sense of being “*enfermé*” is diluted if not dissolved, creating a new space of intellectual engagement rather than a place of hybridity where dissimilar entities merge.

¹²⁰ Interestingly, there is little evidence that the dialogue-rebuttal form called *gongan* was prominent during the Tang dynasty. Most samples of it are derived from the late Song dynasty, and include tales, although the possibility that some originated in the Tang dynasty cannot be ruled out (Schlütter). Some of these tales include cutting a cat in two and proving that a piece of dried feces is the world’s most valuable object, according to Schlütter.
Similarly, Gao’s emphasis on dialogue and multiplicity is nowhere more evident than in his play *Quatre quatuors pour un week-end*, a work with a more European feel that does not specifically situate itself within a Chinese topography, a play whose very title evokes the multiplications of meaning within the unity of time and the interplay of the parts in a musical composition, such as a fugure with variations on a theme. Written in French in 1994, thanks to a grant from the Centre National du Livre in Paris, the play was published in 1998. Gao himself warns readers and directors that the play, “abandonnant la logique des événements et l’ordre temporel, la structure de la pièce s’apparente plutôt à une composition musicale” (Gao, *Quatre quatuors* 4). Gao plays on the themes of expansion, openness, and unity throughout the dialogue between the four characters, spanning a range of ages: Bernard, Anne, Daniel, and Cécile, as the characters immerse themselves in their own observations and thoughts, at times intersecting with those of others. The forty-something-year-old Anne provides commentary on the multiplying meanings of their conversations, stories, and exchanges. “. . . il y a au moins un sens,” she states (10). Later she adds, “Une trace de pas recouvrant une autre trace de pas ne fait qu’une trace des pas. Une empreinte de pied sur une autre empreinte de pied ne laisse qu’une seule empreinte. Une empreinte de pas succédant à une autre empreinte devient une trace de spectre” (45). By layering traces onto other traces, Gao creates an intersectionality, which Jessica Yeung compares to an “orchestrated score” with instruments overlapping. This is accentuated by Gao’s stage directions for *Quatre quatuors pour un week-end*, which defy the conventional structure for a script for the characters—in this case Anne, Bernard, Cécile, or Daniel, whose names stand out for their alphabetic order beginning with A, B, C, and D—but instead gathers them into the use of first, second, and third-person pronouns, addressing at times him- or herself, at times the audience, at at times the other actors, in a style that Gao likens to the musical quartet of the
play’s name without instrumentation (Yeung 142-43). Conversation and inner monologue are layered, creating both realistic and psychological layers, demonstrated in the differing acting styles when voicing these two modes. At the end of the play—and the weekend—two endings are performed, in which the audience can imagine that one is the psychological, perhaps wished-for, ending of niceties, and the other is a darker ending that alludes to a character’s suicide (Gao, Quatre quatuors 62-66). Furthermore, in the course of the play, Anne’s companion Bernard, an old painter, further describes this state with its pleasures and its dangers, as in-betweenness, he feels, that always offers the “risque de glisser à tout instant dans l’abîme” (Gao, Quatre quatuors 47). In addition to the intractable allusions Gao constructs in his characters’ dialogues—the Gordian knots (50), the broken vases that cannot be repaired, the lost moments that cannot be reclaimed—another character in the play, the writer Daniel, describes the openings and the force of imagination that perseveres in the interstices (50). “Et puis … et puis la porte est ouverte par le vent,” Daniel states as his words are obstructed by the sounds of wind and rain. “Tu vois vaguement la porte s’ouvrir, devant laquelle tout ce que tu as fait git inutile” (50). Daniel seeks miracles and dreams but is weighed down by an awareness of neglect, the obscurity of the fog, disappearance, and fear. He fears the erasures that come with time and change, thinking of the unknown individuals who inhabited the spaces, rooms and buildings, before him. “Brusquement, tous sont morts et ont été, d’un coup, totalement oubliés. Personne ne les connaît aujourd’hui: ils sont plongés dans un silence absolu. N’est-ce pas effroyable. Lui, toujours dans un mouvement tournant, risque de glisser à tout instant dans l’abîme” (47). In some ways, Daniel’s insistence on fear of negative space finds a counterpoint in Bernard, the old painter, and the imagery he recounts with words, the snowy landscape where absolute silence reigns, and all is calm, concentration on points shows their inherent fluidity, a fact that increases with age, when
distinctions between mountain peaks and the sky vanish, as the wind immobilizes the landscape. In this vision, perhaps a painting or perhaps a hallucination, astonishment exists without fear, while a fissure full of dark water grows, provoking neither emotion nor thought, creating the emergence of more expanding fissures. The individual in the landscape, meanwhile, surrenders to the *va-et-vient* of the world and experiences only a sensation of floating amidst the different elements evoked by the painter Bernard.

In *Quatre quatuors pour un week-end*, as in many of his plays, Gao expands upon the European avant-garde and modernist roots he has often paid homage to in his criticism, a theater with strong Brechtian influences. With defined characters, four “quartets” that can stand on their own, an abandonment of temporal order, and emphasis on the musicality of the language, Gao advances his work in drama and music in the style of contrapuntal compositions, such as a fugue, although the author limits himself to the term quartet or *quatuor* in French. Gao has spoken of his debt to Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), the German playwright, dramatist and poet, and to owing his avant-garde and modernist tendencies in part to Brecht’s influence during his early studies. Like Brecht, Gao relies mostly on music that is diagetic, integral to the meaning of the play, rather than nondiagetic.\(^{121}\) Furthermore, the threads of avant-garde theater in opposition to realism, individual innovation in opposition to national drama, and the uses of traditional Chinese theater had been subjects of debate in literary and theatrical circles since the 1950s and intensified in 1960s and beyond. Gao was in some ways declaring his intention to innovate from the 1980s to the present that came to fruition and resulted in the banning of his works within

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\(^{121}\) The singer, who serves as the narrator, in Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944), performed recently by the Apollinaire Theater Company, in the Boston area, is not unlike the singers in Gao’s operatic *La Neige en août*, although Gao has expanded the role and importance of singing in using Peking Opera singers as his actors, while urging them to ignore their years of training and explore different ways of using their voices and bodies.

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China. In fact, Gao’s accomplishments in the world of drama have often been compared to those of Chinese film director and dramatist Huang Zuloin (Quah 28; X. Chen “Wild Man” 116).

Chinese critics attribute Huang’s introduction of Brechtian theatrical concepts and his theater into China as a pivotal moment in Chinese history. Huang indeed produced the first play by Brecht performed in China, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, publically spoke about Brecht and his notions of epic theater, and considered a merger of Stanislavsky, Brecht, and operatic director and singer Mei Lanfant’s ideas as a way forward to a “new dramaturgy” (Quah 28).

Gao has embraced many of Brecht’s notions of epic theater, at times addressing the external forces that affect his characters such as in his play *La Fuite*, who are in hiding following the Tiananmen Square uprising. The play stresses the audience’s integration into the performance, and focuses on the ways the human being is constituted as subject through its social relation to the world while exploring the role of opera (both Western and Chinese operatic forms), and the interplay of diverse, avant-garde theatrical forms. Gao, Brecht, and Huang each revolted in his own way against the orthodoxies that limited them whether in terms of political action or, most significantly, through imposing longstanding theatrical conventions.

Gao’s earlier revolt with plays such as *L’Arrêt de bus* (1983) and *L’Autre rive* (1986), both absurd and experimental in nature and therefore banned in China at the time, and his later play, *La Fuite* (1992), concerning the Tiananmen Square massacre, earned him the title of

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122 The direct and indirect links between these four theatrical individuals, Brecht, Huang, Mei, and Gao, are many. Brecht saw Mei perform and was profoundly affected by the experience, and became interested in opera’s role in his epic theater and work on alienation. Gao recalls coming across Brecht’s plays and his article “A Short Organum for the Theater,” which was available in Chinese only in restricted circulation due to its controversial subject matter. Gao produced Brecht’s play, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, and he states that he learned much about Brecht’s approach to theater from directing Huang’s play *Jiliu yongjin* [Surging Ahead Against the Current] (Quah 29).
“persona non grata” with the Chinese Communist Party,¹²³ and since 1992 all of Gao’s works have been banned there. Ma Sen points out that the Theater of the Absurd—generally accepted as having appeared in Paris in the 1950s, despite precursors like Alfred Jarry’s (1873-1907) Ubu Roi (1896)—is a product of the West. The tide of Theater of the Absurd rose with the rise of such playwrights as Eugène Ionesco (1912-1994), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), and others. The emergence of this genre, originally called “anti-théâtre” or “anti-pièce,” was attributed to the sense of loss and reason, particularly following World War II (S. Ma 79) and tried to show the “irrationality of the human condition” (Esslin 24). “In seeking the meaning of life, they [members of the post-World War II generation] saw nothing but ‘nothingness.’ When a man loses direction, ‘absurdity’ becomes the best words to describe and explain everything,” writes Ma, who interviewed Ionesco when he visited Taipei, Taiwan, in 1982. However, this form of theater was not accepted in China where it was viewed as “a further embodiment of the decadence of capitalism” and called a “typical ideological manifestation of a class doomed to destruction” (S. Ma 80). As early as 1942, Mao had stated in his “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” that art and literature must serve the state and the “people” as defined and administered by the Chinese Communist Party (Schoppa 290). Even in 1980, after the demise of the “Gang of Four,”¹²⁴ when some absurdist theater was published, Gao’s work was accompanied by a harsh, critical introduction. Gao’s theater, starting with Signal d’alarme (1982

¹²³ Gao left the Chinese Communist Party officially in 1989, following the Tiananmen Square massacre (“Gao Xingjian”).
¹²⁴ The “Gang of Four” is the title given to four of Mao’s top political leaders, charged with carrying out many of the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). They were Jiang Qing, Mao’s third wife, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan. The emphasis on strongly censoring the arts during the revolution is often attributed in part to Yao, who denounced the playwright Wu Han’s 1965 drama The Dismissed of Hai Rui as “a poisonous weed” for political reasons (K. Li 138).
Expanding on Tradition: Beyond Historicism and Historiography

Gao’s later works, such as *La Neige en août* (2002), and especially *Chronique du Classique des mers et des monts* (1989 and 1993 in Chinese as *Shanhaijing zhuan*, 2012 in French) exemplify epic tendencies, blending Chinese history and mythology in a creative Third Space, away from what Third Space theoretician Edward Soja calls “‘hegemonic historiography’ and Eurocentric historicism” (*Thirdspace* 165). It is a postmodern epic theater devoid of a central hero, expanding on Brecht’s more limited notion of epic theater, with Gao’s latter work subtitled “a tragicomedy of the Gods in three acts.” The play is replete with ritualistic chantings reminiscent of shamanism and acrobatics, and critics believe that Gao is not merely trying to merge avant-garde or experimental theater with those parts of tradition that he finds valuable, but that he is seeking to use these elements as “manifestations of a deep collective consciousness” and to create what Gao himself calls “a modern epic imbued with modern man’s predicament” (Fong, “Purity” xiv). Perhaps the traditional epic hero is replaced in Gao’s literature with many heroes, at times antiheroes, and at other times jesters, or with this troubled collective consciousness where the hero resided in antiquity. Gilbert Fong, one of Gao’s English-language translators, points out that form and content are inseparably linked in Gao’s work as he explores these vast notions of plurality. Referring back to the ancient text *The Classic of Mountains and

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125 The Chinese version was published in Hong Kong. The play draws on a book of Chinese mythology dating from the third or fourth century BCE called *Shanhaijing (Le Classique des mers et des monts)* (Che and Dutrait 7-9).
Seas and its mythical figures, often attributed to Yu the Great (third century BCE to second century CE), Fong demonstrates how Gao’s play combines elements of Western psychoanalysis, specifically Jung’s theories and his archetypes, with Buddhist practices. This combination of Eastern and Western practices, of the presence of myth, along with the role of the Storyteller, who reflects on ideas voiced by the diverse characters who cross the stage, narrates the play and informs the audience of its relationship to the ancient text, and, at times, speaks with the audience about the action, has led critics to speak of this Storyteller character as representing the “third eye” present in the Taoist practices studied by Gao, as well as in other religions, such as Hinduism (Fong, “Purity” xiv). The third eye thus functions as a hybrid “meta” organ, that combines one’s mind and all senses working together, creating a powerful energy or type of cognition that supersedes or assists the other senses in perception. The Storyteller thus tells the mythical and silent character called Long-Life Hemp, “Ah, vous n’avez pas de langue. . . Remarquez, la langue est souvent mauvaise conseillère, c’est peut-être aussi bien de ne pas en avoir,” or, as his perception becomes more acute and adds to what traditional senses can tell him, he says to Long-Life Hemp who gestures and shows directions on the ground (Gao, Chronique 114):

Vous voulez me dire que vous n’avez pas d’ombre, c’est bien cela? Un être sans voix et sans ombre, c’est extraordinaire! Mais oui, j’ai compris! Vous voulez me

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126 The multivocality of these heroes, well known to Chinese readers, if not Western ones, emphasizes human traits, such as pride, cruelty, frailty, and lust, in the form of the archer battling the nine suns, the Queen Mother of the West, who guards the empire’s western borders, and ten golden crows, each inhabiting a sun, among others.

127 Long-life hemp, called Shou Ma in Chinese or Shouma in the French version, is a mythological character who leads people to safety when his town is in danger of being submerged by the sea. He is selected as leader of his people in a new land, called Shou Ma Country, a sweltering place where people have no shadows at noon and emit no voices (Gao, Chronique, Notes in English translation by Gilbert Fong 108).
dire que vous n’êtes de nulle part, que vous errez aux quatre coins du monde, c’est cela? Vous voyez, vous souriez. Sans voix, sans ombre, mais pas sans intérêt! Sans voix, sans ombre, sans liens, sans entraves—voilà un esprit tout à fait merveilleux. Seriez-vous le dieu de la Pensée? Peut-être êtes-vous vous-même libre comme la pensée? Au point que le Seigneur d’En-Haut lui-même n’aurait aucun contrôle sur vous? Peut-être êtes-vous libre au point de ne connaître aucune contrainte? Ou peut-être, étant sans voix et sans ombre, êtes-vous totalement indifférent à toute contrainte? . . . Mais oui, c’était Shouma [Long-Life Hemp], celui qui arrive et repart sans laisser de trace?” (Gao, Chronique 115-16)

Gao simultaneously confers on his character this third way of perceiving the world through the various senses, the mind, and a hybrid metacognition that combines and expands upon those elements, while simultaneously challenging the traditional Aristotelian concept of the omniscient narrator by having him ask questions and puzzle through clues, responses, and silences. Being without shadows, without voice, originating from nowhere, wandering everywhere, entails a type of freedom that human beings will never attain. Adding a character who cannot speak and a narrator who admits that language is often used for ill purposes, points out that thought is the only free realm remaining to corporeal beings, a perspective often employed by those in prison or living under totalitarian regimes.

Gao’s stage notes for this play further capture some of his variations on tradition, the ways in which his work is neither conservative, nor seeking a return to a golden or mythological ancient way, while it emphasizes the importance of specific types of tradition, elements that he has uniquely melded in Chronique du Classique des mers et des monts. Gao’s text also challenges cultural standards that favor Western culture as he states, “Les légendes chinoises de
l’Antiquité ne sont pas moins nombreuses que celles de la Grèce antique. Malheureusement, elles été déformées par les lettrés confucéens gardiens de l’orthodoxie, qui en ont presque entièrement étouffé le véritable aspect” (Gao, *Chronique* 149). Furthermore, Gao suggests that he attempts to capture the richness and value of the “innocence” inherent in the ancient Chinese mythology rather than impose “rationalized interpretations” of the original ancient text through a twenty-first century—one could say a post-Enlightenment or post–Cultural Revolution—lens on the work. Gao’s direction takes visual cues from sources as diverse as Chinese folk art; the ancestral worship ceremony of the Miao people, an ethnic minority in southwest China; the sutra of the Yi ethnic minority in China; and folk music from areas bordering the Yangtze and Lixia rivers in northern Jiangsu, becoming quite specific at times to avoid what Gao perceives as the vulgarity of popular art derived from certain post-Tang and post-Song dynasty eras. Gao also allows for a high level of playfulness in recommending a fairground atmosphere with elements stylistically closer to the performances of roadside salesmen, monkey shows, puppetry and sideshow plays than to high theater. In between, the Storyteller speaks to the audience, addressing its members repeatedly in ringmaster-like fashion, saying:

> Il parle d’êtres étranges qui n’existent pas en ce monde: animaux sauvages à plusieurs têtes, hommes sans tête, oiseaux à trois pattes . . . Ce sont des créatures mi-hommes mi bêtes, ni tout à fait humaines, ni tout à fait animales. Chacune est douée de pouvoirs extraordinaires, mais manque quelque peu de qualités morales et humaines. Sois indulgent, cher spectateur, ces créatures sont étranges, mais tu finiras par les comprendre. (Gao, *Chronique* 15-16)

Nonetheless, when referring to a series of mythological stories with intertextual significance, Gao goes so far as to document their historic authenticity, relying on the work of contemporary
A scholar of Chinese mythology Yuan Ke on the *Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhaijing)* from the third or fourth century BCE. Gao thus mixes high- and low-art forms, Eastern and Western literary forms, and realism and absurdity within his oeuvre for a unique, contemporary perspective on the applicability to human experience of Chinese mythology.

Gao’s impetus to seek roots that he reconstructed in contemporary terms, through avant-garde formal exploration influenced by the work of major modernist literary figures, creates a unique artistic fusion that makes relevant the entire sweep of Chinese history and culture as well as that of Western thought, in all their inherent complexities, a balancing act that was difficult for Gao to manage without severe political and personal ramifications prior to immigrating to France. In the move to explore avant-garde theater in China in a climate where anything beyond revolutionary and realistic theater was deemed unacceptable, scholars state that Brecht was a fairly safe and acceptable choice through which Gao and others, such as Huang Zuolin, could begin to make inroads into advocacy for new theatrical forms that had been banned. Brecht was that relatively safe choice because of his praise of realism and his political leanings as a militant Marxist (Quah 40). Furthermore, as Sy Ren Quah states in his work *Gao Xingjian and Transcultural Chinese Theater*, “Brecht is a realist who is paradoxically against realism” (40). Gao, while living in China, knew he could face censure if he veered away from realism and Communist dogma and therefore walked a tightrope between the dictates of realism and avant-garde exploration. Brecht, in his essay “On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism,” spoke of his own “realistic point of view” despite urging dramatists to seek out new skills and to interpret realism’s dictates in the broadest possible sense (*Brecht on Theater* 70-76). Brecht advocated using realism as a base, stating:
Our concept of realism needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restrictions and independent of convention. Realist means: laying bare society’s causal network/writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/emphasizing the dynamics of development/concrete and so as to encourage abstraction. (*Brecht on Theater* 109)

The impact of Brecht’s epic theater on Gao’s work was profound, even though Gao would eventually diverge from the notion of the political goals of literature, especially theater, which Gao came to find repugnant and led to his work on *la littérature froide* (“cold literature”), which is to be the domain of the individual and of culture and not a tool with political ends (Gao, *Raison* 16). At a 1985 seminar on Brecht in Beijing, Gao said, “Brecht was the first to make me understand, to my surprise, that theater could be like this; that the rules of this art could be reconstructed completely anew” (qtd. in Tatlow 58-59). Diverging from Brecht’s views on the political and moral impetus for theater to advocate for social change, Gao has, since the receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000, stated that literature needed to recover its intrinsic values by resisting “[au] pouvoir politique et à la pression des usages sociaux” (Gao, *Raison* 17). Gao further explains this notion of *la littérature froide* with these words:

La littérature froide est une littérature de fuite pour préserver sa vie, c’est une littérature de sauvegarde spirituelle de soi-même afin d’éviter l’étouffement par la société; si une nation ne peut admettre cette sorte de littérature utilitariste, non seulement c’est un malheur pour l’écrivain, mais c’est triste . . . (17)

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128 Sy Ren Quah points out greater similarities between Gao and the French playwright and director Antonin Artaud and his idea of total theater, which Gao adopts with the visceral elements of his theater of cruelty through actions
Of course, it is important to know that Gao spoke these words in front of the Swedish Academy in 2000 upon receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature for his novel *Soul Mountain*, a work that is a deeply personal meditation and celebration of Chinese history and tradition, even when writers are faced with life-and-death experiences and decisions.\(^{129}\)

Both dramatists, Gao and Brecht, were influenced by the works of the Irish Francophone writer, Samuel Beckett, although this transcultural influence on Gao was more sustained, allowing him to rework Beckett’s notions on alienation early in his career as a playwright.\(^{130}\) However, Gao’s homage in *L’Arrêt de bus* to Beckett’s *En Attendant Godot* and its simultaneous critique of China proved far more troublesome. Sy Ren Quah points out that “Brecht was a safe choice for Chinese dramatists to explore and exploit in this era. Interest in Brecht was thus much stronger than interest in Western dramatists such as Samuel Beckett or Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999)” (Quah 40). Gao’s early play *L’Arrêt de bus* clearly pays homage to Beckett’s *En Attendant Godot*, initially performed and published in 1953 in Paris. Rather than concerning itself with dramatic development, the play situates itself in a stagnant situation in which the Chinese characters are waiting for a bus that never arrives or never stops, arguing with each other, assigning blame, and failing to resolve the problem until they all walk on together toward the town—and one could speculate a difficult and uncertain future—with a solidarity formed in

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\(^{129}\) Gao was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1983, a veritable death sentence, but a second scan six weeks later showed no cancer and caused Gao to re-evaluate his personal and professional choices, causing him to embark on the five-month journey, which became the novel *La Montagne de l’âme*.

\(^{130}\) Brecht envisioned creating a Brechtian version of *En Attendant Godot* with a more direct Marxist expansion in the script. However, Brecht died in 1956, just three years after the first performance of Beckett’s masterpiece. In 1971, Peter Palitsch, Brecht’s former student, did see the project to fruition in producing Brecht’s *Godot* (Brater, “Brecht’s Alienated” 195). Writing in *Beyond Minimalism*, Enoch Brater states that “Brecht was one of the first to recognize the historical applicability of Beckett’s mise-en-scène” and also drew out “the typology of oppression in Beckett’s dramatic repertory” (143).
opposition to the state-run bus company (Tay 68). Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon are multiplied by four to create eight characters indicative of the different segments of Chinese society suffering to varying extents, from young to old, from laborer to administrator, all of whom enter this absurdist drama where years pass and time loses meaning while they are waiting for the bus. Looking back, scholars depict influences of Western modernism and the Theater of the Absurd, a phrase coined by Martin Esslin, himself a transcultural dramatist in 1961, as early as 1980 in the works of Chinese playwrights such as Jia Hongyuan and Ma Zhongjun in Shanghai, quickly followed by Gao’s seminal work, *L’Arrêt de bus* (Yan, “Theater” xv).

Esslin defined the Theater of the Absurd in ways that he specifically applied to Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, as well as works by Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, and the Francophone Romanian writer, Eugène Ionesco. Esslin’s definition was expanded to include a number of Second World Francophone writers predominantly from Eastern Europe, including playwright Vaclav Havel, the last president of Czechoslovakia and first president of the Czech Republic; the Polish writers Tadeusz Rózewicz and Slawomir Mrozek, who emigrated to France for a time before returning to Poland.¹³¹ His definition applies aptly to Gao’s earliest works, including *L’Arrêt de bus*. In addition to the clowning, verbal nonsense, use of allegory, plotlessness, and abstract scenery, all elements of *L’Arrêt de bus*, Esslin writes of the concepts embodied in the Theater of the Absurd in this way:

> Concerned as it is with the ultimate realities of the human condition, the relatively few fundamental problems of life and death, isolation and communication, the Theatre of the Absurd, however grotesque, frivolous, and irreverent it may appear, represents a return to the original religious function of the theatre—the

¹³¹ Mrozek fled to Paris in 1964, gaining French citizenship. He moved to Mexico for a time before returning to Poland in 1996.
confrontation of man with the spheres of myth and religious reality. Like ancient Greek tragedy and the medieval mystery plays and baroque allegories, the Theatre of the Absurd is intent on making its audience aware of man’s precarious and mysterious position in the universe. (402)

Indeed, Gao captures the position of various classes of individuals and their response to the frustration, disappointment, negative consequences, and feeling of betrayal embodied in waiting for a public bus that never arrives at a bus stop that audiences learn is probably no longer a bus stop. The Third Space, here one that mediates reality and the imagination, is representational. As Bhabha wrote, “[M]eaning is never mimetic and transparent” in this Third Space (Location 53). Diane Lynn Moroff writes of this Third Space notion with similar echoes related to Beckett’s Waiting for Godot, stating, “For so many modern and contemporary theater practitioners, precisely because of the text’s expansion to multidimensioned spectacle, the theater is a Third Space, hovering between fictive and real, with elements of each inherent to it, and of direct relevance to both, to art and to the art of the living” (3). As Moroff writes of the important demarcations, both psychological and physical, between Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon, the tree, the road, and their bowler hats, Gao’s would-be bus passengers live in a world with a similarly “befouled foundation,” with the characters’ words and actions circumscribing their subjectivity in relation to each other and, ultimately, to the People’s Republic of China.

Jia-Yun Zhuang, a theater professor at UCLA, wrote in 2004 that Gao’s plays Signal d’alarme and L’Arrêt de bus had been mentioned in class during her studies at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, specifically the production of the former and the audience’s reaction to the latter, marking them as a “phenomenon” of Chinese theater during the era. Being a student in China when Gao’s Nobel Prize was awarded, Zhuang recounts how his national
identity was called into question along with where his work fit into Chinese literature and theater and mainstream Western literary circles. Of course audience reaction was not merely to the avant-garde aspects of the play *L’Arrêt de bus* but to the scandalous aspects of presenting a play that adhered more to Beckett’s absurdist form than to the political dictates of realism. Absence, more than presence, was the center of the production, as with Godot’s unrealized arrival in Beckett’s play. Even the set, with the bus stop sign on which, “due to many years of wind and rain, the words on the sign have weathered away to illegibility” and an iron railing urging individuals subtly to get in line, was radical for Chinese theater at the time. While Gao includes a certain measure of character development needed to advance both conflict and compassion between the segments of society depicted, the characters are only designated with broad strokes in an everyman style evocative of the medieval morality play *Everyman*. The character called Gramps, a man in his sixties headed to town to play chess, clashes with the nineteen-year-old Hotheaded Youth who lacks respect, offers to put nails in the bus’s tires, and refuses to play by the rules, merely wanting to spend the money he earns doing odd jobs in order to have the possibility of getting a yogurt in town, but waiting years along with the others to do so. In response to the passage of time, the unmarried young woman prefers to ignore reality, despite verbally acknowledging the senselessness of the situation. “It’s best not to know,” she says, refusing to look at what year, month, or hour it is, preferring to settle for an attraction to someone at the bus stop, a student called Spectacles, rather than seek her original destination. Gao pushes the Theater of the Absurd elements beyond their European counterparts, ending with a sentimental but strong conclusion. All of the remaining characters, some having just stepped out of their roles as characters to be themselves as actors and speak directly to the audience, then care for each other, and hold each other up, while the light goes down on all of them as they are
about to start off for town, encountering one more obstacle, Director Ma’s untied shoelace, which necessitates him seeking a further delay to tie it (59). Ga, working under the strictures of the Cultural Revolution and the Reform Era, found ways to merge both elements of realism that could potentially escape the censors’ wrath and innovative, avant-garde techniques gleaned from the West and contextualized with Chinese issues and characters. Of course, Gao’s play L’Arrêt de bus did not escape notice by the Communist Party machinery, despite running as rehearsals, a technique designed to avoid the full-scale attention of performances. After only a few intimate public rehearsals in 1987, the play was denounced by the Chinese Communist Party and was then banned, labeled by Chinese culture officials as the “most pernicious work” since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.132

In Gao’s first play, L’Arrêt de bus, the borders crossed are not national borders but the line between departure point and destination that produces a geopolitical Third Space that is initially defined by its sense of being in-between or entre133 but progresses toward what Bhabha and Edward Soja call the notion of “going beyond” (Soja, Thirdspace 143). Bhabha writes:

“Beyond” signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary—the very act of going beyond—are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the “present” which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displaced. The imaginary of spatial distance—to live somehow beyond the border of our times—throws into relief the

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132 The poet and culture ministry official who made this remark was He Jingzhi who had not seen Gao’s play. Having read reports on L’Arrêt de Bus, he declared the play worse than Hai Rui Ba Guan [Hai Rui Leaves Office], a play from the early 1960s declared “a poisonous weed” due to the perception that it was critical of Mao Zedong. Some historians view denunciation of Hai Rui Ba Gan in 1965 as marking the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (MacFarquhar, The Origins 440-44; Zhuang 5).

133 François Cheng discusses this notion of entre in his book Le Dialogue (46).
temporal, social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity. (Location 5-6)

In ways similar to Samuel Beckett’s *En Attendant Godot*, the characters are waiting for a bus that never arrives at a bus stop that may not be a true bus stop, while life, and other buses, pass them by, until they find agency and empowerment outside of the nation-state to pursue their goals. The play, written in 1981 and published in the literary magazine *Shiyue* in 1983, was banned, and Gao was put under state-sanctioned surveillance. *L’Arrêt de bus* had only played to limited audiences at the Beijing People’s Art Theater (Karolides 184; Tam, “Drama” 45) and was controversial not just for its avant-garde form but also for its “ideological inclination and challenge to the socialist doctrines of literature and art rather than on its artistic achievements and innovations, which are unique among contemporary Chinese plays” (Tam, “Drama” 45). Characters are unable to move on in what is portrayed as a rigid society with a framework that prevents individual advancement. “*The Bus Stop* is about not going anywhere,” one critic states “it is about waiting” (Riley and Gissenwehrer 116). In a sense, the characters are not able to surmount the borders they need or want to cross. Without the characters arriving at a desired destination, or having personal agency, the play moves along for most of its trajectory by pointing to “the pointlessness of life, the lack of sense in living” (117). Critic He Wen further points to the play as advocating freedom of choice in the existential sense of the phrase. Wen underlines the fact that it is essentially about traversing those frontiers, both geographically and culturally; it is not about “the tragedy of paralysis or inaction, nor the tragedy of any social mismanagement within China, nor a questioning of man’s individual relationship to life” (qtd. in Riley and Gissenwehrer 118). Rather, He Wen says, the message is to “go on” and the repetition of the word “go” drives home that point for would-be audiences. The Silent Man, the only
individual at the bus stop who speaks to no one, disappears to walk into town, assuming the kind of agency that is claimed by the individual but accorded also by the state. The Silent Man, accompanied by music, moves forward with great strides and highlights the difference between going and waiting (Tam 61).

Each character in *L’Arrêt de bus* has his quest, large or small, which has been stymied by the wait at the defunct bus stop. The vociferous, babbling, Director Ma, director of the state-run store who finds himself slighted because of lack of reciprocation for past favors, states to the young man in spectacles who wonders what the use of writing a letter of complaint would be: “Well then, just keep waiting if you’ve a mind to. What am I getting anxious about? I’ve long ago given up on that meal in town. . . . Go ahead and wait then. It’ll serve you right to wait!” (Yan, *Theater* 37). The sobbing mother who sends her child to school in town because of the poor quality of schools on the outskirts cannot retrieve her child, saying of her distant son: “Peipei must have cried himself nearly to death calling for his mama. My poor Peipei . . .” (Yan, *Theater* 23). And they are both suspicious of the Silent Man who takes matters into his own hands and walks toward town, never looking back. As he walks, music begins to play that comes to be identified with the character and expresses “a kind of pain and a stubborn searching and longing” (Yan, *Theater* 20-21). Once the would-be passengers notice that the Silent Man is gone, they comment with suspicion, as though no individual can truly trust another while living under a repressive government: “When he looked at you his eyes had such an unblinking expression. It was like he was looking right through you . . .,” “He couldn’t have been a cadre sent from town to investigate, could he?” “He didn’t gather any evidence . . . for instance the situation with distributing [black-market] cigarettes? Opening the back door to sell Great Front Doors?” (Yan, *Theater* 29). Despite Gao’s fervor for individuality and individualism in the arts, he depicts the
negative aspects of individuals finding huge obstacles to banding together in order to solve widespread problems due to the punitive role of the government. Repressive societies, Gao shows, can diminish the ability of the individual to thrive, emphasizing the collective, to the point where neither the individual nor the ability to collaborate in positive ways is celebrated in such societies. The ending of *L’Arrêt de bus* highlights each of the characters as an individual, each individual as an actor, and the individual’s needs (e.g., Director Ma’s need to tie his shoe, gramps’ need for guidance of his unsteady feet, and the young woman’s need to gather her belongings, which another has done for her), as well as their ability to work together for the betterment of all and of their society. The ending shows that for lack of agency, they cannot cross the border at the state-regulated departure point and walk on their own with the help of other ordinary citizens to arrive at their diverse destinations.

The characters grapple with their subjectivity, interrogating their own identities along with the ineffectuality of the state in this Third Space (Bhabha, *Location* 57-93). Initially, their antagonism is misdirected at other common citizens waiting for the bus and also at the state-run bus company, which has abandoned them, leaving behind a weather-worn, incoherent sign. “Get out of my way!” the grandfather calls as would-be passengers bump into each other. “Mind your own business,” says the young man. “We’d be better off dead,” says the young woman. “This is really a mess,” says the mother trying to take the bus to reach her child, Pei-pei. As others inquire about the time, passing at an absurd rate of minutes and then years, the young woman says, “It’s best not to know,” preferring ignorance over a knowledge that is disappointing at best and prison-like at worst (Gao, *Bus Stop* in Yan, *Theater* 45-47). Ironically, the most powerful of the remaining group, Director Ma, who ran a state store, says, “I’m going! I have to go into town to lodge a complaint against the bus company! . . . I’m going to court and sue. I want them to
make reparations for their passengers’ damages—health and all those years of life!” (54)

However, he is unable to go and is hampered at the very end by an untied shoelace. The announcement posted at the stop provides few clues as its traces offered only a faint hope that a bus would stop. “Come look,” calls the youth. “It seems like there was a piece of paper pasted here. There’s just a few marks left.” The youth finds the traces in response to the grandfather’s call to “[t]ake another look. There’s a sign—how can there not be a station name?” (55).

Freedom of choice here is an illusion because there is no expectation of change, and it is presented paradoxically because voluntary waiting is contrasted with the futility of the situation (Tam, “Drama” 46).

Gao’s later works, especially those he wrote after emigrating to France in 1987, were emboldened both in terms of the avant-garde form and content by Brecht’s and Beckett’s influence. Gao continued to build bridges—of space, time, and geography—to create what Bhabha calls a “Third Space of enunciation,” in which this multivocality, often times in a contested cultural space, makes untenable what Bill Ashcroft calls “that purity and hierarchy of cultures that is so beloved by imperial discourse,” a contestation that leads to transformation (108). In a move that marked his further distance from the world of Mainland China, while he held a place for his homeland in his works, Gao responded to the Tiananmen Square massacre, like many other Sinophone writers living abroad and even some writers within China willing to risk imprisonment and tremendous suffering, by writing his play La Fuite.134 Unlike many who voiced a kind of pure support for the student protesters while China upheld a ban on discussion of the events in the media and on the Internet, Gao offered a different, third perspective that

134 The play was written in 1990 under the title Taowang, appearing in French in 1992 as La Fuite and in English first under the title Fugitives in 1993 and as Escape in Gilberg Fong’s 2007 translation. Gao’s play about Tiananmen Square is further considered in Chapter Four of this study.
advocated neither identification with the pro-democracy movement, nor support for the current Chinese regime. Rather, he advocated a retreat from politics and from a world in which collective action too often becomes a manipulated tool, a kind of “political weapon” (Yeung). Gao recreates the binary so prevalent in L’Autre rive, written before his flight from China and before the Tiananmen uprising, that of the individual on the side of good and of the negative environment that envelopes the collective, be it that of the powerful or that of the powerless. The play’s tripartite action is framed through the three characters on-stage, hiding in an abandoned warehouse following the massacre: the young man and the young woman, both in their twenties, and a disillusioned middle-aged man of about forty who accepts the accusations of being “égoïste,” “salaud,” and “ignoble” for his beliefs, and his intent of transferring his pain to the bodies of others (Gao, Fuite 43, 56). The dialogue spans the time following the massacre from the end of that day until the sun rises again (Gao, Fuite 4-5). The individualism that permeates the content of so many of Gao’s works is prevalent here in both context and form, as the characters at times break into simultaneous, alternating monologues of their own. Still, they come together in the face of panic, death, and crisis.

Gao’s creation of a Third Space stems in part from the unique ways in which he merges genres. A more neutral zone and meditative expanse opens through its singular narration in Gao’s 1993 play Au bord de la vie, created with funding by the French Ministère de la Culture and first performed in Avignon. Au bord de la vie combines distinct genres in unexpected ways; Gao states, “La pièce est à la fois tragédie, comédie et farce, sans exclure l’acrobatie, la danse et la prestidigitation. La pureté de sa forme réside dans la seule narration” (4). Once again working within the tripartite form (actor as self, actor as actor, and actor as character), Gao presents three main characters on an empty stage, characters whose thoughts and actions are entirely mediated.
through the narrator without any dialogue of their own (Conceison, “Fleshing Out”). The male protagonist is a silent clown, returning in the role of old man and demon. But it is the omniscient and intuitive female narrator who dominates the play with her dialogue delivered with complete neutrality. “La narratrice,” Gao states, “ne cherchera pas à s’identifier à son rôle. Elle y entre et en sort sans quitter sa position d’interprète neutre. Sa diction ne sera pas naturelle; elle gardera constamment un ton théâtral. La comédienne ne cherchera pas le détail naturaliste, mais convaincra les spectateurs par la précision de son jeu” (4). The Third Space that Gao creates is a disturbing one that echoes with elements of the Theater of the Absurd that serve as a kind of Kafka-esque warning to humanity and the audience, which has already confronted, like the female protagonist, mortality in the guise of a headless body on the stage, extending its hand. The narrator states, “Sens est peut-être non-sens. ELLE est abandonnée par les sensations, ELLE n’a ni chaud ni froid, ne distingue plus ni forme ni couleur, se plonge en un chaos” (32). Between the tangible elements rest an uncertainty and chaos that envelop the characters and make them question the nature of existence and the very message of the play, which floats in the fog that at times engulfs the stage. The narrator asks:

Est-ce une histoire? Une romance ou bien une fable? Une comédie ou une leçon de morale? . . . De qui s’agit-il dans ce qui est dit, peut-être de lui, peut-être de toi, peut-être de moi, ou d’ELLE, de l’héroïne? Mais lorqu’ELLE dit “elle,” ce n’est pas ELLE, ni toi, ni moi, ni vous. Ce “elle,” tout comme celle que vous voyez en moi, n’est pas non plus vraiment moi. Et ce moi n’est pas moi, ni toi, ni lui, ni ELLE. Aussi, ne devrait-on pas dire “soi”?
Gao plays here with both avant-garde and modernist theatrical tendencies to explore the various facets of the self and how others are seen in the perspectives of oneself, this through dialogue, a technique that he used throughout his novel *La Montagne de l’âme*, creating characters only identified by their shifting pronouns. Perception and gaze make visible the Third Space that rests between the protagonists—in the case of *Au bord de la vie*, an actrice playing a woman; a female dancer interpreting the interior monologue and images of the woman; and a mime clown playing the roles of the man, the demon, and the elderly gentleman;—along with the interference of others, the old man who removes his hat, reminiscent of Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon, leans on his cane, watching a snow flake, invisible to the audience, flutter to the ground. The mass of stone on the ground in front of him, whose shadow shifts imperceptibly, is contrasted with the imperceptible snow he then catches in his hat before putting the hat back on his head. Gao’s play pushes into new territory through the combination of elements that can only be elucidated by the emphasis he places on the flux that rests between them, even when paying homage to Chinese cultural figures, as in *La Neige en août*, or to Western dramatists, as in *L’Arrêt de bus* and other works.

Gao’s works, especially *Au bord de la vie*, push the boundaries of hybridity—not merely in the sense of two entities ceasing to exist and becoming a mixture of the two, but in the merging of disparate forms into a sole work of art that belongs to transnational literature (Conceison, “The French Gao” 309). Gao’s works overtly rely on sound, through music and the poetry of language, as in the poem-play (in Chinese *shiju*) written in French, *Quatre quatuors*.
pour un week-end, and through a mixture of Chinese and Western opera, as in *La Neige en août*; while Gao has not returned to China where his works are banned, he has many times returned to the Chinese language, even with his works originally written in French, *Quatre quatuors pour un week-end, Au bord de la vie, Le Sonambule, and Ballade nocturne*. Speaking of *Au bord de la vie*, Gao said, “It was difficult [to write my first play in French] . . . I had to face a new life and think about a new audience and a new world. . . . Using French was not a process of translating, but was a process of thinking in French and structuring the play in French. I had to approach it using the possibilities that the French language presented and using its music” (Conceison, “The French Gao” 310). Furthermore, Gao then translated the play, penned in French, into Chinese, tuning to the musicality of that language and discarding the music of French, and not translating directly, as Gao has emphasized. Conceison adds that “this instance shows how Gao’s writing in one language (Chinese) was directly informed by his previous authorship of the piece in another language (French), indicating greater hybridity in his bilingualism than he had previously acknowledged. Gao chooses to emphasize the distinctness of the two languages rather than their coexistence in his bilingual consciousness, and he deliberately shifts his cultural milieu when writing in French rather than Chinese” (309-10). Gao’s choice of language is also fluid in his works, and his writing process is always a musical and personal one, and act of authorship rather than one of literal translation.135

Gao’s genre-crossing dramas make it possible, furthermore, to speak almost simultaneously of the modernist and postmodern tendencies in his work, which engage the reader through different channels, be they the exploration of the self, political oppression, formalistic

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135 When asked about his authorship of literary works in two languages, Chinese and French, in 2006, Gao stated that he chooses to write in French primarily when commissioned to write a play by a French or Francophone organization (Conceison, “The French Gao” 309).
experimentalism, or novelistic narration. While he refers predominantly to the modernists in paying homage, writing criticism, or taking the works of earlier authors in new directions, his roots in China allow him to incorporate elements of postmodern criticism at the same time without feeling out of place; it is another kind of boundary crossing in which Sinophone writers, specifically, often engage. Western critics clearly delineate the boundaries of modernism, by including early twentieth-century writers, such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, André Gide, and D. H. Lawrence, as well as a vast number of poets and avant-garde dramatists, many of whom featured prominently in Gao’s early studies, criticism, and in the creation of his own literary works. Modernism is characterized by an increasing sense of fragmentation, a loss of linearity in the plot, a lack of universal truths often embedded in a growing use of the first-person narrative and of individuality in voice, and a questioning of truths often replaced with a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory truths. In the West, modernism as a literary and artistic movement marked the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, influenced largely by World War I and II, while postmodernism emerged primarily in the contentious spirit of the 1960s, influencing the latter half of the century. Gao is in fact also specifically interested in postmodernism and applies some of its concepts, introduced into China in the mid-1980s, shortly before Gao’s departure from the country in 1987 (Dirlik and Zhang). When Jean-François Lyotard was writing La Condition postmodern in 1979, most concisely defining the term “postmoderne” as “l’incrédulité à l’égard des métarécits,” he was describing a post-Marxist world and anti-Communist reaction in France, himself being a former Marxist (Lyotard, La Condition 7; Jameson x). “Dans cette transformation générale, la nature du savoir ne reste pas intacte,” Lyotard wrote. “Il ne peut passer dans les nouveaux canaux, et devenir opérationnel, que si la connaissance peut être traduite en quantités d’information” (La Condition 13). Gao shares a similar disposition and a
similar reaction to dialectical, totalizing, and essentializing discourse, of different schools and political parties. He is attuned to the semiotic implications of the world and of language used and to the importance of simulacrum in ways reminiscent of Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacres et Simulation*. Nonetheless, Gao’s leap is not toward a *société du spectacle*, à la Guy Debord, except in the most literal sense of making artistic creation central to theatrical performance, nor is he very attentive to the implications of technology. Unlike the relatively clear delineations of the criteria for modernists and postmodernists that are current in the West, Chinese schools of thought have allowed the two to exist simultaneously and even overlap, as is indeed the case with Gao. Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu, professor at National Taiwan University, writes in an essay on “Global Post Modernization”:

Contemporary China consists of the superimposition of multiple temporalities; the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern coexist in the same space and at the same moment. Paradoxically, postmodernism in China is even more spatial and more postmodern than its original Western model. Spatial coextension, rather than temporal succession, defines non-Western postmodernity. Hybridity, unevenness, nonsynchronicity, and pastiche are the main features of Chinese postmodern culture. (146)

Gao clearly fits into Lu’s inclusion into a Sinophone postmodernity of writers and artists who are part of the post-1989 avant-garde artistic movement, consisting of artists “who live and work in China as well as artists who were born in China but now reside in the Chinese diaspora (North America, Europe, etc.).” The works of such artists and writers are often labeled as “iconoclastic,” “subversive,” and “antiestablishment,” Lu states, and Gao, whose work Lu does not specifically mention, belongs to the antiestablishment camp with his work on “*la littérature froide*” and his
writings against dominant doctrines and dogmas. Nonetheless, Lu advises audiences to view these works in a political context, regardless of whether the content is overtly political or not, because the Chinese government, in denying such works official recognition or outrightly banning them, has made their works political, forcing the creators to exhibit their works underground in China or seek recognition and audiences in legitimate circles outside of Mainland China (S. Lu 155). Such work abroad in the Sinophone diaspora has furthermore forced these individuals to confront questions of their “Chineseness” on both cultural and nationalistic levels, to address complex transcultural issues, and to consider China’s past and their nation’s (and their own) place in “contemporary global culture” (S. Lu 156).

This type of opposition originally derived, in terms of literary genres, from modernism in the early twentieth century, a movement whose applicability to Gao’s work and predominantly to its oppositionality remains important to consider. Gao’s experimentation in his novels and short stories also harkens back to European modernists even as he is exploring a Third Space that may have Eastern origins. Gao’s literary path was set in oppositional mode, a modernist idea, from the earliest times with his publication in 1981 of his first book, Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan (A Preliminary Exploration into the Art of Modern Fiction), initially written as a literary critic and then as a creator. In this work, published during the so-called Reform Era that followed the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Gao learned that the spirit of reform had not extended.

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136 One visual work that has much in common with Gao’s writing is Zhang Peili’s 1995 installation titled Divided Space (Xiangdui de kongjian), which was exhibited in Barcelona, Spain. Two tiny rooms are joined by a wall, a kind of Third Space, claustrophobic for viewers. Furthermore, a surveillance monitor was placed in the middle wall between the two rooms so that activities in one room could be observed by individuals in the other (S. Lu 159). Critic Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu claims that the sense of restricted space that is dominant in Zhang Peili’s installation finds cinematic counterparts in Bernardo Bertolucci’s film, The Last Emperor, and Zhang Yimou’s Raise the Red Lantern, in which “walled-in human space threatens to annul temporality” (S. Lu 159). One could make similar claims about Gao’s novels, short stories, and plays.
significantly beyond the Maoist social principles, which affected literature by demanding social realism and certain archetypal characters, such as the revolutionary hero or the notorious villain, essential to a literature that served as a medium of propaganda to educate the people about acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the state’s opinion (Yeung). Gao challenged this notion in particular by calling for the introduction of more human characteristics into literary form and his ideas expressed in this critical work and his early plays were well received in intellectual, if not political, circles (M. Lee ctd. in Gao, *Aesthetics* vii-viii). He is credited with introducing European modernism into China in the early 1980s through journal articles and *A Preliminary Exploration of the Techniques of Modern Fiction*, strongly advocating that Chinese fiction veer away from realism (Yeung). Having studied French literature extensively, he highlighted the works of French writers, particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as the emerging Chinese modernist Wang Meng, a writer whose ideas earned him time being re-educated through manual labor in the 1960s but who went on in the mid-1980s to be the Chinese Minister of Culture (Yeung).

Gao’s Nobel-Prize winning novel *La Montagne de l’âme*, published first in Chinese by a Taiwanese publisher in 1990 and then in French in 2000,\(^\text{137}\) specifically shows strong influences of European modernists, such as Joyce, Kafka, and Woolf, as well as modernist playwrights, including Beckett and Pirandello. Gao acknowledges his early education in French litterature. Gao, while being one of the older writers studied here, younger only than Académie Française member François Cheng, is situated at an interesting moment in history, in which he is influenced by many of the twentieth-century movements, including avant-garde theater, the

\(^{137}\) Gao’s short-story collection, *Une Canne à pêche pour mon grand-père*—initially published in journals between 1989 and 1996, before its French publication as a collection in 1997—shows similar modernist techniques, especially the title story, which Gao has said he has hoped to turn into a film.
Theater of the Absurd, as well as both modernism and postmodernism. He completed his university studies in 1962, just before the start of the censorious Cultural Revolution, but did not see his first work published until 1980. In fact, Gao wrote extensively on European modernists, particularly French ones, in his book *Premier essai sur les techniques du roman moderne* (1981) and published journal articles in the early 1980s introducing a Chinese audience to such writers as new novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, existentialists Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, and modernist poet Jacques Prévert (Yeung). Gao’s university education in French literature led to a position as a translator at the Foreign Language Press, a publishing house focused on writers from abroad, in addition to working for the Foreign Affairs Unit of the Writers’ Association of China shortly after his 1975 return to Beijing following five years of labor in the country as his “rehabilitation” during the Cultural Revolution.¹³⁸

It is both surprising in some ways that one of the French writers to whom Gao gravitated most in the early years of his criticism was André Malraux, more of a writer *sui generis*—a term that could aptly be applied to Gao in his genre and movement-crossing works—than a modernist in the purest form, although his works coincided with that movement. Malraux once wrote, “Ce qui compte essentiellement pour moi, c’est l’art. Je suis en art comme on est en religion” (qtd. in Lacouture, 214, 304). It is in Malraux’s artistic fervor, underlied by culture and politics as experienced and lived by the individual, that Gao found inspiration. In 1980, Gao wrote of Malraux’s *Antimémoires*: “He has merged historical facts with fiction, and created an alternative self to engage in a dialogue with the author. The book demonstrates the author’s wisdom and breadth of knowledge in its extensive discussion of political figures in history, of arts and

¹³⁸ Gao declines to speak about this time of his life, the hard labor of the Cultural Revolution, and instead refers readers to his novel *Le Livre d’un homme seul*, which addresses the atrocities of this time period, to understand what he endured.
literature, and of modern culture” (Gao as qtd. in Yeung). Gao undertakes a similar approach to history in both of his novels, *La Montagne de l’âme* and *Le Livre d’un homme seul*. The literary stream detected in Malraux’s writing during the modernist period, with its avant-garde style, flowed into the postmodern. Postmodern theorist Jean-François Lyotard invented the term *hypobiographie* in his work *Signé Malraux*, a term that has been defined as “going beneath the figure and inventing ... [an individual], one that expresses deeper movements and influences than could be defined from life proper” (Williams 1). Lyotard further invented the term “mythopoïesis,” meaning “the artistic distillation of a figure from a mixture of heterogeneous elements” in a work that “is not afraid to invent to make a success of that expression” (Williams 1). Certainly Gao’s two novels, which have strong autobiographical elements, suggest a pushing of the boundaries of *hypobiographie* into a realm that could be termed *hypoautobiographie*, a domain that is neither purely autobiographical, as expressed in its novelistic and fictionalized form, nor purely historical, although often treating real places, real journeys along the Yangtze River, and real historical events, including the Cultural Revolution, along with real cultural elements, including the people, cultures, and religions with whom he had contact. Gao’s Third Space, however, pushes Malraux’s avant-garde writing of the modernist period and Lyotard’s postmodern criticism even further, into the domain of flux, that expresses profound truths and explores humanistic ideas and artistic expression, while being neither purely autobiography nor purely historical fiction. While classified as a major literary figure internationally whose novels are read and plays are performed in such disparate localations as Hong Kong and Tunisia, Canada and the Ivory Coast, Bordeaux, Budapest and Benin, Gao still remains on the fringes of the literature classified as Francophone, perhaps because of its historical emphasis on postcolonial literature and the latter’s saddling with unifying themes that even critics such as
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have said are “not suited to developments today,” instead preferring globalization models in our contemporary world in which one “needs borders to be borderless” and in which we have come to inhabit a “digitally borderless society.” Malraux himself, Gao’s early model, was interested in the idea of decentralization of this French culture, of which Gao is a part, producing his plays with the assistance of the French government in Paris, Marseilles, Bordeaux, and Avignon. Malraux advocated for this through his work to “forcibly decentralize French culture” and his effort to spread his cultural project of creating a musée imaginaire or musée sans murs, a wall-less expanse of culture that has been often evoked by postmodern critics (Krauss, “The Ministry” 1000-1001).

Unlike Malraux’s political advocacy, as well as that of some of the existentialists, Gao himself displays a “retreat from politics, if not a return to l’art pour l’art” to a far lesser extent than Beckett. . . Beckett’s “attacks on both the character and the actor, as well as the enclosed spaces in which so many of his plays take place, do suggest a retreat of the theater into some sort of theatrical closet, into a space closed off from the world of the audience” (Puchner 169). Gao has in fact pointed to the need to return humanity and the individual to the center of artistic and literary creation, removing the role of the state. “If the artist today wants to preserve independence as an individual,” Gao writes in his newest book Aesthetics and Creation, “it would be best to move history out of the way so that he will totally relax as he paints his own paintings” (155). Gao’s opposition to using literary and artistic expression as a tool for anything other than individual expression set him on this modernist course. “For the artist to preserve creativity in art, it is essential that both historicism and historical determinism be discarded.”

139 These comments are from two talks given by Spivak in January 2013 at the MLA Conference in Boston, a talk titled, “A Borderless World” and comments she made on a panel discussion titled “Between the Postcolonial and the Global.”
Gao further writes. “Historicism places art and artists within the confines of the times. So-called tides of the times have become irresistible laws, and the artist’s creative individuality is sidelined. Historically determined laws, in fact, are merely laws determined by some sort of ideology, yet they have been treated as dictates of the times” (Aesthetics 75). Gao refuses a role as an activist writer, stating, “To overthrow and to create are two separate things” (Aesthetics 77) placing himself more firmly on the side of artistic and literary creation.

**Conclusions: Intercultural Theater**

In the end, new dialogues, new ways of perceiving the world and lived experience, new truths about the self and others emerge in Gao’s many works at the crossroads of a Third Space where an artist and writer meets the temporal and cultural forces at work in his transcultural, translingual world. Gao’s ability to further the world of intercultural literature came about because of his ability to explore the intersection of many binaries to create new spaces. Gao seeks to be create in a free space, which he did not find possible in China during or following the Cultural Revolution. “Le langage est la cristallisation la plus élevée de la civilisation humaine,” Gao said in expressing “la raison d’être de la littérature” upon receiving the Nobel Prize. “Si raffiné, profond, insaisissable, tellement envahissant aussi, il pénètre les sensations et les connaissances de l’homme et établit un lien entre le sujet sensible et la connaissance du monde” (Gao, Raison 12). He finds no conflict in the paradox of setting himself apart as a free, transcultural writer—in some sense an apolitical one—while situating his characters both in the West and at the heart of China’s twentieth-century political crises, the Cultural Revolution and the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre, in particular. Gao explores the interstices
between the Chinese and French cultures, histories, and languages, what Bhabha calls the “discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity” (*Location 55*). One could say that in adopting and transforming theater, reversing Eastern and Western operatic and dance traditions and pushing Ionesco and Beckett’s Theater of the Absurd into new, often dialogic spaces, Gao seeks to destroy old unities and create new transcultural discordance, often drawing on historical, oppositional figures and Zen/Chan Buddhist rituals, even when works are situated beyond the borders of his former homeland.

Being a writer who has been anchored with so many labels—Francophone, Sinophone, *un écrivain chinois d’expression française*, transnational, and more—Gao shuns labels at the same time that he acknowledges that he is becoming a symbol of the importance of the Chinese diaspora’s writers since his receipt of the Nobel Prize. “To some extent, I’m disappearing as a person and becoming a symbol,” Gao stated in one interview. “Of course this symbol is what a lot of Chinese people have been wishing for. People see it as an affirmation of Chinese writers or Chinese literature, or of the Chinese people” (C. Li). Seeking to work as an individual writer, Gao nonetheless inhabits this transnational world in which postcolonialism is increasingly being diverted to a historical category and new forms of transnational literature rise to prominence.

Gao’s Third Space, one that expands twenty-first century exploration of *la forme et le fond*, escapes the abstract opposition between one and many, the dichotomy of political activists and apolitical writers, the age-old tension between East and West. Ultimately, Gao’s examination of the self and the self’s shifting position in an increasingly transnational world, the internal and external geographies, maps new, nomadic territories that stand to elucidate readers and audiences’ views about the complexity of the transnational human experience and psyche in the world.
Rapid bursts of gunfire can be heard through the walls of an abandoned warehouse in ruins. There, two men and a young woman huddle in darkness amidst the rhythmic dripping of water that produces growing puddles. The playwright, Gao Xingjian, calls for “obscurité totale” on the set during this scene in the play, *La Fuite* (1992), first published in Chinese as *Taowang* [逃亡] (1989), and performed for the first time in 1992. Murmuring and collapsing, the nameless characters speak of the tanks rolling behind them, crushing everything in their path, of the banners, the trash bins, the bicycles, and the tents. “D’où vient ce sang sur mes mains?” the young woman, a fictional protester and leading voice in the pro-democracy movement, asks (5). “Tout mon corps . . . tout le corps,” she cries, wondering if she has been wounded or is stained with the traces of others’ blood. The existential despair expressed in the multiple, contrasting perspectives of Gao’s three protagonists, the only characters in this play that has received international attention, lays the foundation for this avant-garde work that managed to please neither supporters of the Chinese pro-democracy movement nor the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which had previously declared Gao a persona non grata (Kong 64; M. Lee, “Two Autobiographical Plays” xv). The characters, who hope they are secure in hiding until dawn, discuss the 1989 events at Tiananmen Square, called the June Fourth Incident or June Fourth

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140 This play, which is dated October 1989, was translated from Chinese into French in 1992 as *La Fuite* by Michèle Guyot. It was translated into English as *Fugitives* in 1993 and as *Escape* in 2007. It was published in French by the Belgian publisher Lansman in 1992 with support from French and Belgian organizations, including l’Association Beaumarchais, the Festival International des Francophonies in Limousin, the Magasin d’Écriture Théâtrale in Brussels, the Médiathèque/Compagnie Râ in Joué-lès-Tours (Gao, *La Fuite* 4; Lee, “Two Autobiographical Plays” xix). The play has been performed around the world in French and English, including in Sweden, Germany, and Poland.
Massacre in China, without mentioning them by name. Thus to the broader existential notions implied by the action and description, they add effects ranging from heroic, naïve, and lustful to cynical, harshly critical, and disillusioned. Similarly, in the novel, *Porte de la Paix céleste*, written in French and published in 1997, the Chinese-Francophone writer Shan Sa depicts the flight of Ayamei, a fictionalized leader of the 1989 student protests that occurred at Tiananmen Square. However, she flees first to a seaside village and then to the forest where she hides in a temple, dedicated to Guan-Yin (观音), the Buddhist bodhisattva of mercy and compassion, undertaking a lengthy escape that endangers those who give her refuge. Rather than presenting the complex antiheroic subjectivities of confinement shown in Gao’s play, Sa’s heroine wins the admiration of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Lieutenant Zhao, who is assigned to pursue and kill Ayamei but ultimately empathizes with her and allows her to flee, furthering this fantastical escape account in which real historical and imagined borders blur. Gao and Sa’s portrayal of the historical violence that has been presented and re-presented in literary works

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141 The pro-democracy movement is also referred to as the June Fourth Movement, and authors from outside of China are the primary source of both fiction and nonfiction concerning the events that occurred at Tiananmen Square from April through June of 1989. Chinese authorities still censor any mention of the protests and crackdown on publications and on the Internet (Z. Li). Internet searches in China for the following terms turn up no results: “June Fourth” (and the short-hand “64” in Chinese, Hindu-Arabic, and Roman numerals), “tank man,” and “Zhao Ziyang,” general secretary of the CCP whose perceived sympathies with the demonstrators resulted in his dismissal and arrest (Z. Li; Garber). In advance of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2014, the CCP began blocking several related terms, including “nostalgia,” considered a reference to surviving family members; 侏儒之歌, a song used in commemorations; 2的6次方, a term for “two to the power of six,” which equals 64; and more (Garber). Internet searches in China for Tiananmen Square produce only historical and tourist information.

142 Guan-Yin is also known as Guanyin, Kuan-yin, and Kuan-tzu-tsai in China, short for Guanshiyin, which means “perceiver of the world’s cries or sounds,” (Yü 1; R. Wang 285; Leeming 166; Andrews).

143 A Bodhisattva, in the Buddhist tradition, is an enlightened being, one who has been awakened and whose whole being is devoted to reaching an enlightened state (Sangharakshita 8-10). Buddhist enlightenment refers to the unification of compassion and wisdom. The term Bodhisattva comes from the Sanskrit bodhi, meaning spiritual “knowledge” and sattva, meaning “being.”
penned by authors of Chinese birth from new sites of residence outside of Mainland China stand in contrast to each other through the different Chinese perspectives presented and through the varying degrees of confinement and flight in each of these two works. However, the notion of an ex-centric existence—one of rupture with the forces of the center and of so-called “minoritarian discourses” on the peripheries of Beijing politics after the PLA’s violent action that ended seven weeks of protests, are striking in both texts (Hutcheon xi). Whether the protagonist remains in hiding outside of Tiananmen Square after the massacre in the case of the protagonists, or writing about the aftermath of the events from France and Switzerland, this ex-centricity is critical to the subjectivity of these literary figures, as well as to both Gao and Sa. These are two very different writers in what has come to be called the “post-Tiananmen literary diaspora” in which overseas Chinese writers—writing primarily in English, French, and Chinese from abroad—possess the freedom to explore the complex issues that surround the 1989 events, narratives that on many levels are replete with what critic Michael Berry calls a “centrifugal force” that emanates outward from the center and sets loose an array of “unofficial” destabilizing narratives that challenge the official reports and integrity of the nation-state (Kong 2; Berry 7).

The fugitive narratives in both Gao’s play and Sa’s novel convey a sense of urgency in the face of imminent danger and in the wake of seven weeks of protests and a night of catastrophic violence, much different from Gao’s immigration to France, as he left China initially to accept an invitation to lecture at an art institute in Germany and then continued on to France where he sought political asylum (Kong 37). With her parent’s support and father’s assistance, Sa similarly decided to leave China to study in France in 1990, a move that was

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144 Shan Sa sought exile in France in 1990; however, she spent two years in Switzerland as an assistant to the French painter Balthus (1908-2001) and his Japanese wife Setsuko (b. 1943) from 1995 to 1997.
influenced by her reaction to the Tiananmen uprising but was less urgent than that of her character Ayamei whose life is in imminent danger. Both Gao’s and Sa’s characters in *La Fuite* and *Porte de la Paix céleste* respectively, fled from the violence in the square on the night of June 4, 1989, when Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) troops opened fire on the protesters and used tanks to end the demonstrations. However, the protagonists assume different roles and demonstrate varying perspectives on the event—in public discourse and the media at times called pro-democracy protests, an incident, an uprising, or an event, and at other times a massacre with the actual casualties suffered ranging from several hundred to more than 5,000.²⁴⁵

The position of the authors and protagonists, moved from the center of Beijing to the periphery, carries weight in these narratives. “Storytelling in action accumulates political import,” write Karen Schaffer and Sidonie Smith in *Human Rights and Narrated* (2004). It is in this politically charged moment that Gao and Sa situate the literary texts analyzed here. Schaffer and Smith write:

> All stories emerge in the midst of complex and uneven relationships of power, prompting certain questions about production: Who tells the stories and who doesn’t? To whom are they told and under what circumstances? Why, when, how, and where do narratives become intelligible as stories of human rights? What

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²⁴⁵ In *A History of Pain*, Michael Berry captures the shifts in the original tally that came from the Chinese government. In early reports, PRC spokespeople said no one—not a protester, bystander, or PLA soldier—had died in the square, ignoring reports of hundreds killed in the peripheral space around the square which is described in both Gao and Sa’s works that are the subject of this study (301). The government later issues a report that claimed that “according to reliable statistics, more than 3,000 civilians were wounded and over 20, including 36 college students, were killed” (J. Li qtd. in Berry 301). Unofficial reports put the death toll in the thousands and conflict with further government statements that suggest that the PLA soldiers trying to “restore peace and quell the disturbance” bore the brunt of the violence, not the protesters (Berry 301); however, video evidence, censored and not officially sanctioned in China, suggests otherwise.
historical, cultural, and institutional conditions affect the shapes stories take? What are the personal, social, political, and ethnical effects of stories and their venues of production for both tellers and listeners? (5)

Living in Mainland China and affected by the national institutions and interests situated there, the protagonists created by Gao and Sa confront not only their fears and lack of physical safety but also their own disillusionment, loss of dreams, as well as different points of view on the protests and their country from a place of hiding in concealed locations beyond the square, in warehouses, homes, temples, and under a canopy of trees. Furthermore, Michael Berry situates the Tiananmen event in important ways within the longer view of Chinese history, citing the Tiananmen incident at the end of a long series of violent episodes that stretch from the end of the nineteenth-century through the twentieth century. This history of trauma and violence, at times directed outward and at times toward its own people, includes defeat by the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the collapse of China’s last dynasty and empire in 1911, the violence of the May Fourth Movement and student protests in response to China’s subordinate status in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, the Second Sino-Japanese War (also known as the War of Resistance against Japan) (1937-1945), the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), and the Cultural Revolution discussed in Chapter Two of this study (1966-1976). Berry divides the events into the earlier events, which he terms “centripetal forces of trauma,” one that began with external forces as the impetus behind the conflict and moved toward the center of China’s national discourse (7).

In contrast, in the later events mentioned above—particularly the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square incident—Berry seeks a “centrifugal force,” one that begins in the center of Chinese political discourse and then reaches outward through the establishment of a number of destabilizing narratives often used against the people of the nation and which, through their
fragmentation, challenge the precepts that partially form the notion of the nation-state (7). It is these centrifugal forces that push dissenters toward the construction of an ex-centric subjectivity.

Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* describes this ex-centric subjectivity that the authors and their protagonists construct as having a “decentered perspective” that is marginal, separated from the primary discourse of the center at the time, and represents “those marginalized by a dominant ideology” (12, 35, 41). “To be ex-centric, on the border or margin, inside yet outside is to have a different perspective,” Hutcheon writes (67). To possess an ex-centric subjectivity is to desire what the center is or could be but to be denied acceptance or agency and thus to embrace the associated deviance to some extent. One constructs and deconstructs meaning via the tension between spaces and subjectivities, often through a series of counternarratives that are outside of so-called “normal” society, or on the periphery of squares and geographical spaces. This polyvocality, the use by both authors of multiple voices, rather than presenting a comprehensive narrative view of the perspectives of those involved in the 1989 Tiananmen Square events, results in a fragmented and contested space throughout Gao’s play and throughout Sa’s novel until the dénouement when the soldier sides with the protester over his fellow PLA soldiers. The ex-centric subjectivity is concerned with examining and calling into question what the centered space and subjectivity represent (Hutcheon 65). Subjectivity, as defined by one critic, denotes the “process of empowerment of certain discourses, norms and ways of being . . . a technique, or rather a technology of the self, not a new metaphysics” (Braidotti, *Patterns* 48). The construction of subjectivity acknowledges the tension of its “dual nature,” the normative aspects that come from an external position and bind the subject to certain essentializing notions and practices, but more often—and more relevant to the transnational writers and literary devices studied here—related to the “positive process of affirming one’s own
specific way of being (potentia)” (48). The notions of ex-centricity, previously described, are further encapsulated in the figuration of nomadism, which Rosi Braidotti links to a “politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity” that uses mythic images to suggest “the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 1-5). Applied to these fugitive narratives constructed by Gao and Sa, writers of two different generations living in exile in France themselves, the subjectivities explored in these literary works dissolve into “an ex-centric explosion of behavior to the outside” (Krüger 264). Exploring this subjectivity involves a significant loss of innocence as the tension between the center and its multiple edges is worked, hierarchies are exposed, explored, and challenged, and what Hutcheon calls an “antitotalizing” plurality of subjectivities is emphasized.

Four of the central characters in the two works have fled for similar reasons, three as protesters seeking refuge after the PLA opened fire on them in Tiananmen Square and one, Gao’s Middle-Aged Man, who fled his home after receiving threats related to his writing, and this flight pushes the main characters toward new locations and new radical subjectivities. The common leitmotif of flight emerges in both works and dominates the lives of each of the main characters, including the PLA soldier Lieutenant Zhao who is charged with assassinating the protester Ayamei. Zhao initially leaves his rural home in the south of China to join the PLA, then travels east from his post to Beijing, and following Ayamei’s trail, out to the coast and the mountainous forest, moving outward from the familiar landmarks to unfamiliar geographical landscapes and from military indoctrination toward Ayamei’s ideological and ontological positions, as shown through her adolescent journals, where Zhao encounters new interior landscapes with multiple perspectives that contrast with his initial single-minded fervor. The schema of both Gao’s and Sa’s texts suggest that they will, in the tradition of dissident stories
written after and about the Tiananmen Square uprising, focus on the struggles of the protesters, stories promulgated and well-received by Western publishers. “Shaped and framed by advocates in the West, these collections recirculate Tiananmen Square memories within the dominant liberal humanist discourse on human rights,” write Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith (192). However, one will see in this study that that is not, finally the case, particularly in the portrayals of characters in Gao’s play and in the West’s reaction to his play. While both texts do “[p]ersonalize human rights abuse in China” and “enable empathy for and identification with the protesters and their claims,” they go further than those goals and create spaces in which the protesters’ naïve and idealistic notions can be contested too (192). Like Ayamei, the unnamed young man and woman in Gao’s *La Fuite* have physically fled; however, they have escaped the exposed square and its surrounding boulevards to sequester themselves in a hidden interior space, the seeping warehouse. The sense of panic of both Gao and Sa’s fugitives in exposed spaces, the physical remnants of the violence in the visuals of blood and brain matter left behind, and their desire for concealment and sanctuary are evident in the texts; the young man enters the dark warehouse at the start of Gao’s play, panting, and urges the young woman to enter, too. The room appears deserted, and they are temporarily disconcerted by the uncertainty posed by the total darkness. “Une fois habitués, ça ira mieux,” the young man says. “C’est quand personne ne peut voir personne qu’on est en sécurité” (Gao, *Fuite* 5). Similarly, Sa emphasizes vulnerability for anyone in the streets. “[Q]u’attends-tu pour fuir?” a fellow student asks Ayamei, encouraging her to flee. However, Ayamei protests; she intends to return to the square after trying to help her classmate Xiao who died at her feet; she cannot overcome her feelings of responsibility toward the vulnerable protesters. With people running in the streets, soldiers firing, and bullets flying, Ayamei accepts a ride from the truck driver, Wang, who recognizes her as a protester and
conceals her in his vehicle. “Ce n’est pas le moment de te promener,” Wang cautions. “Il fait noir et les balles sifflent de partout” (16). Overt details in Sa’s novel—and suggestive details in Gao’s play La Fuite, which he wanted infused with elements of classical Greek tragedy rather than read as social realism related to the Tiananmen Square events—link the characters to the pro-democracy movement and further position the subjectivity of the characters as ex-centric, a minority position that students, workers, and other supporters brought to the center of Beijing to challenge the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Gao, “About Escape” 67). Furthermore, the fugitive fictions’ use of multiple consciousnesses and polyvocality moves the narratives into the domain of Edward Soja’s “Thirdspace,” a space that is both geographical and narrative. Soja’s Thirdspace exceeds the limits of his Firstspace, a perspective he defines as centered on the “real,” physical world, and is not limited to the Secondspace, the “‘imagined’ representation” (Soja, Thirdspace 6). This narrative and geographical Thirdspace, as conceived by Soja, involves “restructuring” binaries to produce new alternatives, often paradoxical ones that “encompass a multiplicity of perspectives” previously considered incompatible (85). As Soja—echoing notions bell hooks expressed in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics—suggests, writers such as those considered here open themselves to new and at times radical subjectivities and a politics of location that involve “the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practices” and resistance while finding spaces to begin that difficult and often unsafe project of revisioning146 (hooks qtd. in Soja, Thirdspace 85).

146 Soja builds here on Homi Bhabha’s work on Third Space in The Location of Culture.
The Square as Center

In Gao’s La Fuite and Sa’s Porte de la Paix céleste, the construction of that altered subjectivity for all of the characters relates in large part to Tiananmen Square and the protests that transpired there from April through June 1989, culminating in the June Fourth massacre. The square is as much a symbolic space as a geographical one and exemplifies the current intersectionality between social and cultural theory and spatial studies in geography, as discussed in Julia Lossau’s essay “Pitfalls of the (Third) Space: Rethinking the Ambivalent Logic of Spatial Semantics.” Mao Zedong, chairman of the CCP, announced the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949 from the square and later expanded and reconstructed it in 1958 and 1959 (Black and Munro 22). The design of the one-hundred acre expanse was intended to be a symbol of Mao’s Great Leap Forward, his ambitious program of sweeping and social economic changes, which signified an intent to modernize China and demonstrably position the nation as a world power before the Soviet Union and the West. The arched gate known as the Gate of Heavenly Peace, also known as the Tiananmen Tower, after which Sa’s novel is named, has also been rebuilt several times from its inception during the Ming dynasty around 1420, serving as the gateway to the Forbidden City, which contains the Imperial Palace and is recognized for the large portrait of Mao that faces the square, a portrait that was defaced with black paint and ink during the 1989 protests.147 Two monumental buildings flank the square, the twin Museum of Chinese History and Museum of the Chinese Revolution to the east

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147 The three protesters charged with the May 23, 1989, defacement received the following jail sentences in Chinese court, respectively: 1) life imprisonment, 2) twenty years, and 3) sixteen years (“Three Get Jail”). Yu Zhijian, Yu Dongyue, and Lu Decheng posted so-called reactionary posters, defaced Mao’s portrait, and were convicted in August 1989 of “counterrevolutionary destruction and counterrevolutionary incitement.” Officials replaced Mao’s portrait with a spare.
and the Great Hall of the People to the West. The year 1989 was not the first time that the square had been the site of political protest and unrest. In 1919 approximately 3,000 students—partnering with many workers as they did in 1989—all part of the May Fourth Movement, protested China’s treatment in the Treaty of Versailles there and advocated for greater equality and democracy in China; those students would later be honored in the square with the ten-story high Monument to the People’s Heroes erected in the 1950s in which a young man is shown seeking “national sovereignty as a defense against the foreign powers and punishment for all traitors.” The PLA led by the Chinese Communist Party is also honored as a national hero for the 1927 action in Nanking against the opposing Chinese Kuomintang forces. In 1976, protesters, including the well-known Chen Ziming, drew attention to citizens’ perceived dissatisfaction with China’s administration when they placed wreaths in memory of Zhou Enlai, along with poems, some criticizing the ruling Gang of Four—Mao’s third wife Jiang Qing, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan, at the Monument to the People’s Heroes; the subsequent removal of the wreaths in April of 1976 provoked riots in the square (“Three Chinese Leaders”; Black and Munro 24-26). The site from which Mao declared the founding of the PRC thus remains the center of China’s political sphere, a place that exists in relation to other spaces both inside China and abroad and—in the words of Edward W. Soja, writing in *Thirdspace*—“problematizes the interplay of spatiality and historicality and . . . sees the necessity to rethink them together as co-equal modes of representation, empirical inquiry, and (social) theorization” (172). The narratives of Tiananmen that already exist outside of Gao and Sa’s Tiananmen texts, layered on top of the geographical and historical events, enrich and complicate the textual practices of eccentric subjects, those who have fled the square, on whom Gao and Sa focus in writing of a place and time with a multitude of signification related to that center of Chinese political life.
However, the displaced subjectivity of escape in Gao’s and Sa’s Tiananmen works and in their own lives is inherently one of de-centered liminality, neither at the center of the event, i.e., Tiananmen Square, nor situated in the indeterminate future of those who were sought by the PRC, whose names—like Sa’s protagonist Ayamei—were published and broadcast on the radio, and who were executed,\(^{148}\) served prison time, or secured political asylum abroad. In fact, many of the events that immediately preceded the moments in hiding are only hinted at or painted in broad strokes, and both texts end without the reader knowing what will ultimately happen to the protagonists when presumably they exit their concealed spaces. Gao, who bristled against China’s demands for realism in producing his controversial and subsequently banned avant-garde plays before leaving China, further adds to \textit{La Fuite}’s liminality by emphasizing in the play’s accompanying notes that it is not intended to provide a realistic portrayal of the Tiananmen events and their aftermath. Rather, Gao says, “I believe that being alive means always [being] on the run, either away from political persecution or from other people. One still has to run away from one’s self, which, once awakened, is precisely what one can never run away from—This is the tragedy of modern man” (“About Escape” 70). Gao himself sought

\(^{148}\) Those sentenced to death include Li Wenbao, 20, and Liang Hongchen, 18, who were convicted of “indulging in violence” following the June 4 protests, and Wang Guiyang and Zhou Xiangcheng, peasants from Sichuan Province, on arson charges (Munro 85). Seventeen people were executed on June 20 in Jinan, among a group of 45 people on trial. Those to be executed were marched through the city’s streets. Seven people were executed in Beijing on June 21: Lin Zhaorong, Chen Jing, Zhu Jianjun, Wang Hanwu, Luo Hongjun, Zhang Wenkui, and Ban Huijie. Furthermore, three others—Xu Guoming, Bian Hanwu, and Yan Xuerong—were executed on the same day in Shanghai, convicted of setting fire to a train (without casualties) that had run into a group of demonstrators, killing and injuring a dozen people blocking the track on June 6 to protest the massacre in Beijing. According to Robin Munro of the Asia Watch Committee of Human Rights Watch, these are only the executions that are known. “It should be noted, however, that the great majority of detentions or arrests carried out in China since June 4, 1989, have not been publicly announced by the authorities, so no details are available.” The Asia Watch Committee, formed in 1985, monitors and promotes “observance of internationally recognized human rights in Asia.”
political asylum in France in 1987 and became a French citizen in 1998, expressing his anger through his works in relation to the oppression and persecution he experienced during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and as his plays were censored in the 1980s, rather than the 1989 events in China which he witnessed from abroad. “After I went to France, I finally had an environment where I could work freely,” said Gao, whose banned plays, written in China, include *L’Arrêt de bus* and *L’Autre rive*, (discussed in Chapters Three and Chapter One), respectively (Cheung). Gao seeks to create a more generalized subjectivity in *La Fuite*, a play written in exile, in which characters identify not only with the need for flight but with the state of “exilic alienation,” which necessitates “cultural self-translation,” and involves construction of a self that is narrated so that it can be understood by audiences reading or seeing the work performed in different cultural contexts (Yeung; Besemeres 32). Gao has discussed extensively how the solitude of the writing life—a liminal psychological place that reflects his status as both Chinese by birth and French by citizenship—has been essential for his creative pursuits and the fact that it has, in part, involved a flight from political concerns both in China and in Europe. “C’est toujours sous la plume d’un grand solitaire, lettré, loin du pouvoir, loin de la Cour souvent,” Gao said, describing the tradition of the solitary writer that exists in a place apart from the state in China’s varied literary achievements, infused with not only Confucianism but also Zen Buddhism and the spirit of the hermit. Gao stated:

149 Some of Gao’s works treat the subject of flight metaphorically, such as his short story “La Crampe” in *Une Canne à pêche pour mon grand-père* (2001), in which a swimmer flees the shore only to become trapped in the currents and by his own body; the play *La Neige en août* in which Zen’s sixth-patricarch Huineng’s wanderings between temples in his existential journey convey to him the role of an outsider; the novel *La Montagne de l’âme*, in which the semi-autobiographical narrator flees an atmosphere of oppression and threat of government-imposed exile to wander through the Sichuan forest. *La Montagne de l’âme* is discussed in Chapter 1 of this study, and Gao’s avant-garde theater is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.
Il y a une forte littérature très, très belle, souvent la plus brillante, on peut l’appeler aussi la littérature de forêt et de montagne, mais ce sont souvent des lettrés qui fuient la politique, qui fuient l’oppression. Les pages les plus brillantes de la littérature chinoise sont plutôt marquées par cet esprit-here calls l’ermitage-, comme ce grand poète Li Pei du temps. Il a quitté la Cour et ça c’est la plus brillante page de ce poème. (“Transcript”)

Following a period of withdrawal from Beijing’s theatrical world, pursuing the travels through the Sichuan region that would become his novel *La Montagne de l’âme*, Gao left his homeland permanently two years before the Tiananmen 1989 protests; by contrast, his fellow Tiananmen author Shan Sa was still an adolescent in China at the time of the uprising, influencing their different treatment of the events and perceptions of the exile they both experienced as Francophone-Chinese writers, despite being from different generations. Gao’s “self-imposed marginality,” a desire to remain beyond the tug of mainstream politics and national concerns to avoid being tainted by them, in the opinion of some critics, including Belinda Kong, cause him and some of his characters at times to fall short of the responsibility of the modern intellectual, suggested by Edward Said, “to speak truth to power” (Said, *Representations* 52-53, 98; Kong 50-51).

Gao’s *La Fuite*—and to a lesser extent Sa’s *Porte de la Paix céleste*—have become part of a growing body of literature that causes readers to confront some of the more uncomfortable notions about the June Fourth events and the world’s perceptions of them as viewed through the dual lens of the media and the literary works of the transnational authors who write about them. In a speech given to the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden in Stockholm, where *La Fuite* was first performed in May of 1991, Gao explained that he had agreed to write the play in August of
1989 at the request of an American theater company, shortly after a group of Chinese friends arrived in Paris as exiles in the aftermath of the massacre (Gao, “About Escape” 69-71). Gao said he finished the play within a month. However, the American theater requested revisions. “I refused,” Gao said, “and had my friend pass on my words: Even the Communist Party could not coerce me into making changes to my manuscripts when I was in China, let alone an American theater company” (69). The play—initially published in the literary journal *Jintian* (*Today*) [Today]₁⁵₀, which resumed publication in Stockholm after being censored in China—was performed again in Stockholm in 1992 at the Kungliga Dramatiska Teatern, followed by performances in Nuremberg, Germany (1992); Poznan, Poland (1994); Tours, France (1994); Osaka, Kobe, and Tokyo, Japan (1997-1998); Cotonou, Bénin (1998); and elsewhere. It has continued to be performed around the world with a large number of productions in France at the Festival d’Avignon (2014). Belinda Kong writes that “Tiananmen has brought about, and into stark relief, a distinctly politicized Chinese literary diaspora” and that “Tiananmen has functioned as a particularly productive node for the diasporic literary imagination,” but not without controversy (2). Gao’s controversial construction of his subjectivity is shown in his willingness to write about the atrocities of not only the Cultural Revolution but also the Tiananmen Square massacre primarily through a character known as the middle-aged man who criticizes the pro-democracy movement in China in *La Fuite*, and whose subjectivity will be explored further in this chapter. This controversial protagonist and the construction of his

₁⁵₀ The writer Bei Dao founded the journal *Jintian* in 1978 with other Chinese poets as the first unauthorized literary publication since the 1950s; however, it soon faced censorship and was officially shut down after nine issues by Chinese authorities in 1980 during the Democracy Wall Movement (X. Chen, *Occidentalism* 71; M. Lee, “Two Autobiographical Plays” xiii). The Democracy Wall Movement, which *Jintian* and its editors supported, involved thousands of people posting written grievances and objections on a wall on the famous Chang’an Avenue, just west of Tiananmen Square.
subjectivity—which Gao’s translator has said align closely with Gao’s own—constitute the primary source of much of the criticism of Gao’s play, along with its use of nudity and sexuality, which have been at times called “pornographic” (M. Lee, “Nobel Laureate”; M. Lee, “Two Autobiographical Plays” xi). These elements, explored among his three protagonists in La Fuite, situate him in that discursive space—perhaps the so-called enunciative Third Space—that avoids polarities or binaries as described by Homi Bhabha in The Location of Culture (1994) and Nation and Narration (1990). In the former work Bhabha encourages readers to “remember that it is the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the inbetween space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” and “makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of ‘the people’” (56). However, the ways in which Gao expands on this controversial and vehement individualism goes beyond Bhabha’s stated desire to “elude the politics of polarity,” which he says should not be confused with “some form of autonomous, individuality pluralism” (Bhabha, Location 56; Bhabha, “The Third” 208). Both Gao and Bhabha maintain controversial positions that separate the individual not only from the nation but also from the potential for connection, cooperation, and working toward sustainable societal structures that benefit the oppressed, the displaced, and the persecuted. Both Gao and Bhabha distance themselves from the discourse of nations, while using in their discourses and their texts the individuals who make up those nations. “The discourse of nationalism is not my main concern,” Bhabha states in his essay “DissemiNation” (Nation 291). The tension between writing about nations and writing about their individual citizens—particularly those at the margins—remains and stirs controversy throughout both Gao’s and Bhabha’s œuvres. However, both present notions—at times overly simplistic ones that veer away from consideration of the institutions and inequalities inherent in them—on the transnational consequences for individuals
caught up in the violent, life-threatening oppression and migration prevalent at the dawn of the new millennium. “The hegemonies that exist at ‘home’ provide us with useful perspectives on the predatory effects of global governance however philanthropic or ameliorative the original intention might have been,” Bhabha writes. “Minoritarian affiliations or solidarities arise in response to the failures and limits of democratic representation . . .” (Location xv-xvii).

However, Bhabha shortsightedly gives far too much credit in the same passage to the “new forms of agency, new strategies of recognition, new forms of political and symbolic representation” that emerge from these destructive limits—which require extrapolation beyond notions of agency and can extend to persecution to the loss of life, home, and or stability (Location xviii). Gao’s controversial writings on Tiananmen Square, limited to the one play discussed here, *La Fuite*, do embrace the dialogic exploration of multiple positions not just on the event itself but on its more existential underpinnings concerning collective action, and personal desire, and individual freedom.

Indeed, Gao and Sa are not the only expatriate writers or writers in exile who have fictionalized the events of June 4, 1989, and consideration of the varying emphases of the Chinese-born writers who live abroad who have written of the protests and violence provides a multilingual voyage that looks at the “representational afterlife” of these events along with confusion when they are labeled “dissident writers” (Kong 2, 37). In fact, the 1989 events produced a transnational literary explosion because only writers outside of China may write of it, making writing of the event a diasporic undertaking. L. Ling-chi Wang and Belinda Kong both point out that the works—some written in Chinese but often read or performed in translation, such as Gao’s *La Fuite* and Ma Jian’s *Beijing Coma* (2008), and others written in French, such as
Sa’s *Porte de la Paix céleste*, or in English, such as Ha Jin’s *The Crazed*¹⁵¹ and Annie Wang’s *Lili,*—represent the “massive hemorrhage” of intellectuals from Mainland China to the West that increased dramatically from a steady stream in the seventies and early eighties to a torrent beginning in 1989 (D. Wang, *Running Wild* 208; Kong 3).¹⁵² The square becomes the canvas onto which Francophone-Chinese writers and others from the Sinophone diaspora can project fictional depictions of the events (Kong 2; Berry 353). Some novels, such as Ma Jian’s *Beijing Coma,* emphasize the graphic nature of the violence, along with the quotidian lives of the students who gathered there—crossing the square to eat at the three-story KFC restaurant, for example—while still portraying the ideas and high emotions stirred by the incident. While readers must face the discomfort that arises from the graphic descriptions of a country killing its young people, some readers have been more uncomfortable with writers, including Gao, who seem to criticize not only the rule of the CCP but also actions and/or motivations of the pro-democracy protesters in the voice of his character known as the Middle-Aged Man. This side of Gao’s writing, Kong suggests, has been overlooked in the wave of attention paid to Gao that

¹⁵¹ Like Gao, Ha Jin has had his work banned in China and been unable to return and similarly explains that politics affect his character. In one interview, he explained this ban. “I write about taboo subjects: Tibet, the Korean War, the Cultural Revolution, the Tiananmen Square incident. After the Tiananmen massacre I became very outspoken. *The Crazed, A Free Life, War Trash*—these books offend the authorities in China. I’ve never intended my writing to be political, but my characters exist in the fabric of politics. That is to say, it is impossible to avoid politics, especially in China. And of course, the Chinese authorities are afraid of truthful stories told from an individual’s point of view. It’s also because I am a misfit. I write in English, which is viewed as a betrayal of my mother tongue. I came to America. I don’t serve the party’s cause” (Fay). Jin won the National Book Award for his novel *Waiting* (1999).

¹⁵² Another fascinating example of the transnational nature of writings about Tiananmen Square is found in the history of Liao Yiwu’s epic poem “Datusha” (Massacre). Liao wrote the poem on June 4, 1989, in the Sichuan province, filling it with images of destruction, murder, and howls of outrage. However, knowing that it would be impossible to publish such a poem in mainland China, he made audiotapes of his reading/performance of the poem, which were shared underground in mainland China and available in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and in the United States. Like many works of transcultural writers, the poem appeared due to what Kong calls a “linguistic detour” into another language, in Liao’s case, English (32).
followed his receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000, recognition that largely focused on his status as the first writer of Chinese birth to be awarded that prize. Kong writes:

[W]hat has been critically obscured in the post-Nobel discourse on Gao is Tiananmen’s cardinal role in shaping his theories of writerly individualism and existential flight—and this political relation must be retrieved if we are to counteract this conceptual erasure of totalitarianism and a possible world amnesia about the massacre and its implications for human responsibility. (36)

Works about the Tiananmen uprising, which combat a global amnesia, often contain amnesia as a leitmotif. Ha Jin’s novel *Beijing Coma* draws on themes of consciousness and unconsciousness, remembering and forgetting, while Louisa Lim’s nonfiction work, *The People’s Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (2015), looks at the erasures and forgetting that occurred in the twenty-five years since the massacre. Gao and Sa focus to a greater extent on themes of erasure and invisibility. Certainly, Gao’s portrayal of the events comes not from his eye-witness experiences, as the now seventy-six-year-old Gao (b. 1940) had fled to France two years earlier. Although he has been called, a “dissident of the Tiananmen generation,” that is partially a misnomer as he did not flee because of that event. These elements do not obscure the fact that he renounced his membership in the CCP following the Tiananmen Square massacre and had previously suffered physical hardship, censorship, and feared for his life and livelihood during the Cultural Revolution and as a playwright in the years that followed, particularly as a result of the 1983 Spiritual Pollution Campaign153 (Kong 37; ”Gao Xingjian: Life”; “Gao

153 The Spiritual Pollution Campaign of 1983 was perhaps the crescendo of an anti-modernist, pro-realist campaign that had been growing since Mao Zedong’s death in 1976 (Larson 38). Realism, the “official literary ideology,” specifically sought to show progress and transformation in society, associated with the political framework of the CCP. The push to enforce this brand of realism is said to have subsided to some extent in 1984.
Xingjian—Biographical”). Furthermore, the conflation of such universal and highly charged
terms as “dissident,” “refugee,” and “writer in exile”—bothers critics such as Kong who
highlight Gao’s implied criticism of the pro-democracy movement via what some call a
semiautobiographical character, his voluntary flight from China, and what Kong calls “the larger
issue of an international cultural politics that goes into the manufacturing of Gao’s literary
identify via his political one” (37). Outside of constructing characters who protested at
Tiananmen Square and others who challenge the protesters’ ideals, Gao’s own politics outside of
the text make some uncomfortable, specifically Gao’s position on avoiding support for collective
political action. Belinda Kong says it appears sullipistic. “More disturbing is that his retreat into
the self has led him to quietistic positions on national and gender politics,” Kong writes in
Tiananmen Fictions: Outside the Square (60). Kong asserts that “while his [Gao’s] eschewal of
politics is entirely understandable in light of the thorough politicization of art in PRC history and
his own experience with harsh political criticisms in the 1980s, for more than two decades now
he has found a comfortable place in a new polity that not only protects his existence but prizes
his writing . . . Despite these political benefits, Gao has yet to rethink his theory of the polis”
(60). The fictional works concerning Tiananmen Square and the lives of the Chinese writers
abroad who have penned them is complex and at times challenges Western assumptions,
particularly the labeling of such writers purely as “Tiananmen dissident voices” (Kong 36-38).154

154 Kong discourages the use of “dissident” with regard to the writers of fictional accounts of
Tiananmen Square’s June 4 events, saying that the label is too often associated with pro-
democracy activism, with which many of the writers, such as Gao, were not involved (37).
Furthermore, the term promotes misunderstanding with Westerners ascribing anti-communist
ideology to those bearing the “dissident” label, a lack of specificity given to one’s grievances
with the CCP, and furthering, in Kong’s opinion, a “reductive and binary image of the Chinese
population as comprising either complacent communists or dissatisfied dissidents” (37). The
unfortunate stereotypes that often emerge from this oversimplification evoke images of heroic
but failed resistance against a despot, the kindly offers of help from a supposedly morally
The characters in both Gao’s play and Sa’s novel who are portrayed as enemies of the Chinese state—Sa’s protester Ayamei, the truck driver Wang and his parents who give her refuge, Gao’s young man and woman who were involved in the protests, and perhaps the Middle-Aged Man who must self-censor and still receives threats—are drawn as part of an alternative, although not always dissident, subjectivity, and the source of their fear is also, albeit less vividly, sketched. “A range of new, alternative subjectivities have indeed emerged in the shifting landscape of postmodernity,” writes Rosi Braidotti, expanding on her earlier nomadic theory, which portrayed a contemporary subjectivity that is often unstable, not necessarily opposed to the center or dominant discourse. Like Gao and Sa, Braidotti highlights the importance of these ex-centric subjects—while often understating the trauma of those who have been dislocated from their homelands—stating that the fragmentation of the center “does not make it any less central, or dominating” (*Metamorphoses* 13-14). Well before the 2015 surge of more than a million refugees fleeing Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere, Braidotti wrote of nationalism, violence, and destabilizing globalization creating “an influx of refugees and a rise in violence, exclusion, racism and human misery that has no equivalent in post-war Europe” that contributed to these ex-centric subjectivities portrayed by transnational writers (*Metamorphoses* 17). Individuals—like the pro-democracy leaders Ayamei in Sa’s novel and the young woman in Gao’s—resemble those seen in media images, in the transitory global consciousness of the international events that threaten and displace individuals, and at what Braidotti calls “the intersection of some formidable locations of power” (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 17). Sa portrays in greater detail the source of that power, the PLA officer Zhao and his commanders and fellow superior West, and flight and exile to those benevolent, democratic nations, which Kong paints as a very limited and ill-informed narrative arc. How one frames the literary identity of these Chinese-born writers presents a conundrum for the writers themselves and for all of us who study and describe their complex works.
soldiers as they travel toward Beijing, and the violence that they cause and witness—and which only Zhao appears to challenge internally and confront in the novel’s final pages with his decision not to report his sighting of the wanted Ayamei. The menacing sounds outside the warehouse in Gao’s play, tales of phone calls of warning and advice to flee given to the middle-aged man character, create a sense of both the immediate threat and imminent danger and contribute to the ongoing existential unease and threat of denunciation that the characters felt caused them to seek refuge in the ex-centric space of the warehouse. The characters remain “in the dark,” so to speak, about the ongoing threat to their lives and the events that transpired after their flight from the square, while the rest of the world watched in televised broadcasts. Michael Berry states that by the late 1980s, cable media had changed the way individuals “perceive, understand, and ‘witness’ violence” (319). And Susan Sontag, writing in 2003 in Regarding the Pain of Others, shows, images have the ability to “arrest attention, startle, surprise,” even as they often seen unreal and detached from experience (23). However, she states, “The understanding of war among people who have not experienced war is now chiefly a product of the impact of these images” (21). Gao’s play focuses as a re-diffusion of these images on a confined stage, too, as the audience contemplates not only the diverse perspectives on the pro-democracy uprising but on the source of the violence, intervening in sound effects, itself.

**Ex-centric and Fugitive Dialogues**

The three characters in Gao’s La Fuite, with their fugitive dialogues, provide the voices that Gao has said are often absent—in political discourse, through global amnesia, as well as because such stories of the Tiananmen uprising remain censored in some parts of the world,
including in Mainland China. He presented this notion in his 2000 speech to the Nobel Prize committee upon receipt of that prize. Gao cited the importance of flight to what one can call ex-centric spaces in order to preserve one’s voice, aligning the case of those Chinese who went into exile following the Tiananmen Square massacre with other instances of persecution and censorship in his Nobel Lecture called “The Case for Literature,” stating the following:

> If the writer sought to win intellectual freedom the choice was either to fall silent or to flee. However the writer relies on language and not to speak for a prolonged period is the same as suicide. The writer who sought to avoid suicide or being silenced and furthermore to express his own voice had no option but to go into exile. Surveying the history of literature in the East and the West, this has always been so: from Qu Yuan to Dante, Joyce, Thomas Mann, Solzhenitsyn, and to the large numbers of Chinese intellectuals who went into exile after the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. This is the inevitable fate of the poet and the writer who continues to seek to preserve his own voice. During the years when Mao Zedong implemented total dictatorship even fleeing was not an option . . . and to write even in secret was to risk one’s life. (Gao, “The Case”)

In *La Fuite*, Gao similarly emphasizes both the difficulties resulting from persecution and the importance of the voices of those who witnessed and survived the events. The young woman in the play asks the young man who, also fleeing the violence, led her into the darkened warehouse, “Dis-moi, je suis encore en vie?” (7). He replies, “Nous vivrons tous . . . du moins ceux qui ont pu fuir la place.” In the distance, according to the stage directions, one hears “le sinistre crépitement d’un fusil d’assaut” from the main avenue, presumably Chang’an Avenue. Expanded in the 1950s, this enormous avenue became, according to Shuishan Yu, an expert on Chinese
architecture, an image as much as a thoroughfare of “a wide, open, and straight road, a visible metaphor for China’s bright socialist future” (23). The events of June 4 in the adjacent square called that openness into question. Fugitive subjectivities and narratives, often in conflict with each other in Gao’s La Fuite, allow for the creation of counternarratives in which multiple viewpoints are exposed and sometimes transformed during the narrative. Gao manipulates what Bhabha calls “spaces of proximity,”—the conflicting desires of his characters, both personal and political—along with those external to their subjectivities, which place them in danger, those Bhabha refers to as the “language of enmity,” with Gao’s emphasis resting on the claustrophobic concealment of the three characters who must forcibly remain in close proximity to avoid death (“In the Cave” xiii).

The sharpest difference between Gao’s play La Fuite and Sa’s novel Porte de la Paix céleste resides in the spatial sense of each work—one of confinement or release, respectively—which informs the psychological tenor of the tale—one of defeat or liberation. Gao’s characters are in a place of confinement, the warehouse, and their vision is further restricted by the lack of illumination as they wait for sunrise to allow them some sight. The brief glimpse at the outset as they enter their prison-cum-shelter gives only a glimpse of chaos, of unidentifiable machinery and objects scattered about, which echoes their psychological state. The actors are confined to the stage, a space in which the characters have been thrust together, and are exposed, metaphorically and physically as the young woman sheds her bloody dress, and the characters later engage in sexual relations, and seek respite from the leak on an elevated narrow plank. Neither the dialogue nor the intimate encounters bring them a sense of community or peace, further portraying social unease and conflict between them. The sexuality portrayed, intended as a liberating, life-affirming escape from the anxiety of the life-threatening scenario is a source of
friction rather than solace among the three characters, trapped in, if not a love triangle, at least a triangle of desire. The lure of a sensuous, freeing sexual encounter becomes a hollow experience and the emptiness of such sex and the aftermath of disconnection is exposed and wrestled with in the awkward, confined space of the warehouse. As Gao faced the challenge of situating himself as a post-Tiananmen playwright portraying unpopular opinions on the uprising, the characters themselves face the same social awkwardness and the predicament of how to react to each other in a place from which they cannot easily or safely escape. Ironically, in criticizing the demonstrators within the play for their naïveté, Gao is, in essence, escaping from what Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith call “the Western media’s prescripted narrative of the events in Tiananmen Square” (193). By confining his characters and making them painfully face the Tiananmen experience along with their own metaphysical demons, Gao is escaping the formula of Chinese writer in exile, which critics show is often unpopular to contradict. In this way, Gao achieved his escape, created his own ex-trinsic subjectivity, by formulating this confined theatrical space. Writing on a different play by Gao, La Neige en août, which is discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation, Li Ruru states that “[b]eing attracted to the rebellious antiestablishment spirit of Zen philosophy, Gao Xingjian argued that escape is the only solution to maintaining one’s self-respect and dignity, mirroring his own experience of being an exile” (R. Li 320). In causing his characters to confront danger and discomfort, Gao is securing his own escape and controversial individualistic mode of integrity.

Quite differently, Shan Sa’s novel almost entirely avoids that sense of constriction in a more typical escape narrative—the type associated with narratives of freed slaves—in which the protagonist Ayamei finds herself moving from civilization to a natural setting in which she identifies with the elements of nature, the flight of birds, and instead of being in conflict with
others, almost fantastically comes to communicate with a mute forest-dwelling boy who helps her survive, and without speaking a word to her pursuer, Lieutenant Zhao, appears to win him over to her cause. The expansiveness of Ayamei’s personal attraction, messages of freedom and intelligence contained in her journals that the reader experiences in the novel, and her alliances with notions of empathy and compassion win her success even in the midst of the tragedy of the Tiananmen Square massacre’s aftermath. The important spatial distinction evolves into a fuller semantic one: While the social and political challenges the characters confront in the warehouse become a means of inscribing the defeat of the pro-democracy demonstrations, Sa’s novel turns into an allegorical fantasy of the success of flight, further echoed in Sa’s subsequent novel, *Les Conspirateurs* (2005), which finds Ayamei living in France.

Gao repeatedly refers to the situation of the three characters in his play *La Fuite* as enduring hellish conditions and fearing for their lives, but it is not merely those moments that led to comparisons with Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Huis clos* (1944). Both plays were written in the shadow of authoritarian regimes and draw on themes of flight from oppression and the internal and external sources of persecution. Sartre wrote *Huis clos* in one-act to meet the curfew during the Nazi occupation of Paris, and Gao concerned himself with the CCPs violent measures to quell the pro-democracy protests in a different nation’s capital. The three characters in Gao’s play, unknown to each other before their arrival in the dark, puddle-ridden warehouse in the midst of gunfire, bear striking parallels to the three characters in Sartre’s *Huis clos* in terms of the challenges they present to each other, their arguments, their differing points of view and circumstances, the themes of bravery and cowardice, and the romantic entanglements and petty jealousies that engulf all three of them even when confronted with larger, more catastrophic circumstances. Early in Gao’s play, the Middle-Aged Man ignites his lighter to survey the
environment, and the young man comments, “Ça ressemble à l’enfer” (10). Later in the play, the young man refers to the three of them as “[d]es morts-vivants, comme en enfer!” (41). Much like Sartre’s protagonist Joseph Garcin in Huis clos, the young man in Gao’s play then decides it is time to escape this hellish existence and attempts to flee from the warehouse. Gao’s young man confronts further disappointment and disillusionment in human interactions, beyond the violence outside the warehouse door, as he returns a short while later, saying he feared losing the young woman forever before realizing that she had moved on from him and had a sexual encounter with the middle-aged man while he was gone (48-51). Finding this abhorrent, the young man wrestles with his desire to flee again, but like Garcin, he cannot, partly because of his own volition and partly because of the influence of others. While Sartre—and also Gao, one might speculate—might see this subjectivity as hellish, their plays are, nonetheless, quite different. Sartre’s allegorical play is grounded primarily in philosophy, while Gao’s is rooted in the specifics of the historical, violent Tiananmen Square crackdown.

However, in both plays, the forced presence of others, particularly strangers, in the ex-centric spaces that the characters inhabit, is seen as a counterpoint to the central spaces. It becomes necessary to construct a grammar and lexicon in the ex-centric space that sets them apart to understand their pre- and post-atrocity subjectivity and loci. Michael Berry calls this “the grammar of atrocity” in his text A History of Pain. In Gao’s work, government—paradoxically both the acceptance of the state and its authoritarian rule over the capital and opposition of the pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square—provides the central loci, while in Sartre’s Huis

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155 Michael Berry explores Chinese director Emily Tang’s film Conjunction (Dongci bianwei), which was “conceived precisely as a cinematic exploration of the aftermath of the incident, a potentially dangerous subject for any artist in China” (333). Tang portrays characters six months after the Beijing events of 1989 and depicts the psychological state of these recent college graduates who struggle with “disillusionment and desperation, struggling to come to terms with what they have experienced and the choices that lie before them” (333).
clos, the “living dead” characters who believe they are in hell see their situation in relation to those on Earth or in paradise. Those who are rejected by society in both plays, as defined above, find themselves pulled to other ex-centric spaces. The violence in Gao’s play creates the geographical and rhetorical difference. In Gao’s play, as performed in French, a language which he speaks fluently and in which he often writes, the repeated double-entendre of the word “tirer” contrasts the shooting in the square and adjacent avenues with the sense of being pulled or drawn into hiding. The nameless young woman, speaking of the young man, says, “Nous avons fui la place ensemble. J’étais terrorisée. Il m’a tirée, je l’ai suivi en courant” (32). She is pulled to the ex-trinsic warehouse. Thinking she is wounded and bleeding, the characters discover evidence of the violence around her imprinted on her clothing, as on her psyche. She credits her relative safety and success in fleeing to the young man’s help, saying, “Tu m’as tirée jusqu’ici . . .” (7) In her fantasies, verbalized in the darkness, the young man pulls—“tu tires,” she says—her winter hat down farther to cover her ears, too, a protective gesture. Her fingers are red from the cold and losing feeling, but he pulls her by the hand and squeezes her fingers (37). The contrast between the troops opening fire on the crowds and the young man compassionately pulling her to warmth and safety is also between the central space outside the warehouse and the ex-centric space of concealment. In addition to sharing her fantasies, the young woman also expresses her nightmares, leaving an aquarium of fish, particularly goldfish (“poissons rouges” as the color red appears symbolically throughout the play, in the blood, the fish, and associations with the Chinese Communist Party), that the wind sends falling to the ground, where the fish lie flailing. The symbolism reinforces other references to the lack of an escape plan from the square, or access to retreat for safety, mentioned by Gao in La Fuite, as well as the penned-in nature of Tiananmen Square, alluded to by journalists and others, where people were “really just fish in a
barrel, easy targets” (Russell 40). As Gao’s fugitives construct their subjectivity, the cessation of firing and silence in the aftermath of the massacre cannot signify peace or safety but call forth images of destruction, ruins, and the absence of life. Sartre’s play differs dramatically, with a greater sense of resignation to one’s existential state. Garcin advises his companions in hell, “Eh bien, continuons” (94). While Gao’s play keeps the notion of protest and dissent at the center of *La Fuite*, Sartre depicts characters with far less agency then the Chinese dissenters, unable to leave, unable to close their eyes, unable to change their fate by any other means than acceptance.

Gao’s characters, in contrast to Sartre’s, possess distinct voices, which are not diminished by their peripheral location or dissenting subjectivities, even when the eyes of the world are not upon them or when they are unable to tolerate the others’ gaze. In the warehouse, Gao’s young woman, an actress and self-avowed “voice” of the protests, removes her bloodied dress and cannot stand the eyes of the middle-aged man on her. Gao portrays the darkness and hiding, the state of flight which he states is essential to the human condition, as preferable to “l’abbatoir en pleine lumière” (Gao, *La Fuite* 10). Gao’s young woman is hiding both from the eyes and ears—she says her voice is recognizable as the voice of the protests—of the state and also, to some extent, from the eyes of the two men in the warehouse who lust after her. Hidden away, the characters also want to know what is going out outside, what the aftermath of the protests entails, whether people are going to work the next morning or whether the city has been hobbled by the protests. The young man wants to return to the streets and eventually does, only to come back for the young woman. “J’ai eu envie de voir le dénouement,” Gao’s middle-aged man states and recounts how he ended up in the neighborhood not far from the square, having fled his home after a menacing phone call. “Un dénouement pourtant prévisible pour toi,” the young man replies, the older man having told him the students’ efforts were futile and that he
knew they were destined to fail. Eyes in this ex-centric space are on each other but also focused on seeking the center and news of its events, events that intimately concern them and their fates.

Furthermore, Gao’s characters in *La Fuite*, though hidden, realize that the gaze of the world is upon them, and paradoxically they both seek and avoid this international attention, the gaze, which the young protesters desire and yet which stands to endanger their very existences. The young woman is an actress, and she toys with the idea of the spectacle in relation to her career and aspirations, her leadership and “voice” in the square, and the world’s eyes watching the seven-week spectacle and its bloody conclusion. Playing a role, the young woman says, is what is most dear to her. “Mais quel sens peut avoir un spectacle sans spectateur?” the young man then asks. Before sobbing, she replies, “Laisse-moi jouer! Je veux jouer . . . Jouer!” (36).

She concocts a stream-of-consciousness narrative of a dream in which the worst fate is to be invisible. In her tale great snowflakes cover the city, making the streets and squares disappear, the snow settling like a large shroud over the city. In the darkness of the warehouse she feels that she no longer exists, and that causes the young man to reassure her, “Nous allons fuir cette obscurité” (37). The double meaning of *obscurité*—implying both darkness and obscurity, in the sense of invisibility—is not lost on the audience. “Ils nous ont oubliés,” the young woman says after some time spent in hiding (46). “Ou ils n’ont pas encore eu le temps de s’occuper de nous,” says the middle-aged man. Those on the periphery of political action see multiple perspectives and possibilities, which only serves to heighten their anxiety and ignorance as they construct their new subjectivity as fugitives in hiding. Their role as protesters has been lost by seeking shelter and obscurity. To save their lives, the protesters of Gao’s play have sacrificed their voice, their agency, and their ability to contribute an ex-centric discourse to the political, social, institutional, and historical discourses occurring outside of the warehouse. While the protesters
are interested in being actors on what Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith call the “political stage,” of not failing either their personal or political ideals, Gao has no such pretensions of being an activist and commenting on the Tiananmen events. However, unlike the character of the pro-Democracy protester in Shan Sa’s novel, *Porte de la Paix céleste*, Gao’s protagonists are not being overtly pursued, the audience for the play does not see their names and images on the television screens, and no one is living in fear of their own lives for hiding them. The young woman in Gao’s play longs for a mirror to magnify her image, and perhaps her role, in the movement, for recognition on the theatrical stage to mirror her previous role in the political realm. She desires the recognition that would kill her and also seeks shelter to avoid being killed. “J’aimerais qu’un miroir couvre tous les murs afin de pouvoir m’admirer et de voir tomber les gros flocons, les gros flocons de neige,” she says. “Je marche dans la neige. Je mets mon corps à nu” (38). In the closing scene of the play, the three characters gather around the puddle of dirty water, which has mirrored them with the light of the lit cigarette, the lighter, and the approaching dawn. The puddle, Gao states in stage directions, glows red and resembles a puddle of blood. They have been exposed to each other, if not to the outside world, and have wounded each other through their beliefs, affections, and disaffections.

Meanwhile, the eyes of the world were focused on the square at the center—at the spectacle, the protesters, the tanks, and the so-called Goddess of Liberty\(^\text{156}\) (自由女神; ziyóu nǔshén) statue, the 33-foot statue that towered over the square and the 10,000 protesters before the violence erupted. The young woman in Gao’s play stakes her role in the warehouse as the Goddess of Liberty, saying:

\[^{156}\text{The statue is referred to as both the Goddess of Liberty and the Goddess of Democracy in English and } \text{La Déesse de la Démocratie in French.}\]
Je veux jouer une dernière fois avant de mourir. Je tiens le flambeau, je suis la déesse de la liberté, votre idole... mais je ne peux surmonter mon tourment. Je marche au bord du gouffre, regardant l’eau noire, paisible et profonde. Je suis la déesse de la vie, je tiens dans ma main le flambeau. Marchant sur la passerelle étroite, je regarde l’abîme sous mes pieds... Je ne sais pas si je peux passer ou non... (33)

She walks along a gulf, symbolized by the blood-like puddle of water, crossing a narrow bridge, that evokes the separation of spaces, the plank serving as a threshold to a Third Space. The young woman balances, neither in one place nor the other, neither as the actress, neither as the protester in the square, nor living in freedom as in the role she brings with her into the warehouse as she mimics the statue’s pose, but in the in-between space of hiding. Edward Soja, writing in Thirdspace of other international events in the year 1989, states, “Remembering the events and the particular sites and sights... provides an opportunity to begin grounding Thirdspace” (187). The young woman also grounds her subjectivity in remembrance, which Soja asserts allows a heterotopology, a geography of “lived spaces of representation” to open the way to new knowledge and perhaps understandings of power. As the Goddess of Liberty, the young woman is not standing in a free land, but mimetically representing the styrofoam and white plaster simulacrum, similar to America’s Statue of Liberty, a gift from the French. The student protesters’ statue was indeed not identical to the statue in New York Harbor, as the Tiananmen statue held the torch with both hands.157 Guy Debord who writes of the importance of spectacle

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157 One of the sculptors of the Goddess of Liberty statue, Tsao Tsing-yuan, said that the students decided not to model the statue on the Statue of Liberty both because it was not an original notion and because it could be seen as too blatantly pro-American. Rather, the art students based the statue on the work of Vera Mukhina, a Russian sculptor associated with revolutionary realism, and her statue was integral in designing the goddess’ head and face, which has an Asian
in *La Société du spectacle* (1967), echoes Gao’s thoughts, via the words of the middle-aged man, that the spectacle is unreal or apart from reality, concerned with image rather than individuals, and can serve as a uniting point for collectives.\(^{158}\) “Le spectacle se présente à la fois comme la société même, comme une partie de la société, et comme instrument d’unification,” Debord wrote. “Le spectacle n’est pas un ensemble d’images, mais un rapport social entre des personnes, médiatisé par des images” (10). He thus questions the truth of images, saying, “Dans le monde réellement renversé, le vrai est un moment faux” (12). Debord paints a world in which images are transformed into real beings, much like the image of democracy became the Statue of Liberty and later Tiananmen’s Goddess of Liberty, a world in which such mimesis in the fullness of its materiality, Debord suggests, is prone to engendering a complete “univers spéculatif” and Gao’s characters inhabit that speculative spatiality, exempt from knowledge about the aftermath of the June Fourth events (Debord 15).

The status of being on the periphery of violence is one of fear and powerlessness, however, and a level of disengagement from the political events of the square—be that disengagement voluntary or involuntary—for all three characters, creates a play not of heroes but of antiheroes. All three characters show flaws, perhaps flaws which Gao values, as well as their individual and sometimes selfish desires, fears, neuroses, and none exemplifies them more than appearance (Tsao). The statue was rolled into the square in several pieces, assembled and plastered primarily by students from Beijing’s Central Academy of Fine Arts, completed on May 30, 1989, and stood for five days before it was crushed by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (Rosett; “The Goddess”).

\(^{158}\) The unreality of the scene is captured, too, by Hong Ying in her Tiananmen protest novel *Summer of Betrayal*, in which the protagonist Lin Ying says, “Surely this was a scene in some movie, a fabrication. Bloody battles like this happened only in nightmares. She had only to wake up, to call out with relief, ‘It’s not true!’ . . . Like a human tide, people dodging bullets had flowed into the alleys and lanes on the north side of the Avenue of Eternal Peace” (4). Hong Ying describes the tanks flattening everything from bicycles to buses, the odor of scorched tar, blood, and charred bodies, and the calls to run. The character describes feeling like a dog trying to find a place to hide.
the character of the middle-aged man whose subjectivity is constructed around his antiheroism. “Dubious as the apparent value judgment in the traditional definitions may be, the hero is he who embodies and preserves the highest values of the community, the antihero he who marches, or dawdles, to a different drumbeat, the cadence of his own iconoclastic sensibility,” writes Jo Brans (437). Heroes—defined in Victorian times as “genius manifesting itself in action,” often in the form of martyr, inventor, saint, explorer, or through acts of valor of physical courage—do not emerge in Gao’s La Fuite as they do in Sa’s novel Porte de la Paix céleste (Ricks 23). Critics have stated that the middle-aged man in Gao’s play is semiautobiographical and representative of many of Gao’s views on collective action while the two young characters support the pro-democracy movement and the protests in Tiananmen. With the world’s eyes trained on Tiananmen at that moment, the middle-aged man seemed to question what the reality of the situation, as opposed to its images, truly was. “Entre l’eau sale et le reflet, où est la réalité?” he asks. “Est-il bien nécessaire de faire la distinction? Les choses les plus simples ne sont-elles pas les plus difficiles à comprendre . . .” (33). While acknowledging the existing oppression that questions what he writes and endangers him, he does not easily accept the young people’s idealism and faith in the collective action occurring in the square, which they fully embrace. The play’s main theme, writes Jessica Yeung, is “to draw a line between active nationalist support for the democracy movement and a total retreat from politics, and to argue about the futility of the former which in consequence justifies the latter.” Gao uses the characters to present a variety of views on the massacre, as well as on idealism, collectives, politics, and personal relationships. The middle-aged man does not support the regime that sends the tanks into the square, but he is also harshly critical of the protesters’ actions, sharing his condemnation with the young protesters in the warehouse. Yeung states that unlike the references in Gao’s other works where
collectives suppress individual voices, in *La Fuite* “the image of the collective is not of the ugly or the vicious, but of the powerless and manipulated.” In other works, such as *L’Autre rive*, the attack on collectives is more brutal—and one could say simplistic—with the individual on the side of good and the collective on the side of evil as the crowd goes so far as to beat a woman to death (Yeung). The middle-aged man mocks the idealistic young man, pointing out that he fled when the tanks rolled in. He tells the young man:

> Tu parles au nom du peuple mais tu ne sais pas te diriger toi-même. Tu parles de victoire finale mais tu ne parviens pas à te vaincre toi-même. Cette lutte pour la liberté n’entraînera que la mort: elle équivaut au suicide. S’il n’y a plus de vie, quel sens peut encore avoir une hypothétique victoire finale? La vérité, c’est que toi et moi devons fuir! (14)

Gao was not the only one to question the movement’s methods. The documentary *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, shows Han Dongfang, a protester and leader of the Independent Workers’ Union of Beijing, who said in the early protests and clashes with police at Xinhuamen in April 1989, just west of Tiananmen Square, “To sacrifice yourselves like this is completely meaningless. We should use other methods to achieve our goals.” Gao cites the influence of Henri Laborit’s *Éloge de la fuite* (1976), and said in his 1991 speech in Sweden that he shares the view that “when the different forces of resistance converge into a collective, the individual will immediately be reduced to servility inside that collective” (Gao, “About Escape” 70). Gao said that he does not aspire to return to “a so-called motherland under authoritarian rule” and intends to retain his independence, without which freedom ceases to exist. Readers recognize Gao’s motivations, along with those of the middle-aged man in *La Fuite* in reading Laborit’s *Éloge de la fuite*. Laborit writes of a world in which reality consists of varying degrees of
submission and revolt, dominance, and anxiety-provoking scenarios in which only flight appears to be the logical response to maintain a good rapport with oneself, avoiding the necessity of seeking dominance over others, other groups, classes, nations, or blocks of nations. Laborit writes, “Il y a plusieurs façons de fuir” (9). He cites the influence of drugs, psychosis, and isolation as means of flight. “Il y a peut-être une autre façon encore de fuir dans un monde qui n’est pas de ce monde, le monde de l’imaginaire,” Laborit states. “Dans ce monde on risque peu d’être poursuivi. On peut s’y tailler un vaste territoire gratifiant, que certains diront narcissique” (9). Laborit speaks of anxiety that comes from the inability to fight or to flee, along with the disillusionment and ideologies that rise from futile battles in which both sides believe they are right, causing people to believe that they are dying for a cause that will allow the establishment of a more just world, when they may just be dying in a contest of dominance (41-42). Both Gao and Sa in their literary works that concern Tiananmen depict the anxiety and flight that followed the students actions and state-sanctioned killings in the square. Laborit speaks of this need to act, whether in hiding or in the events that led to the hiding. “Mais l’angoisse était née de l’impossibilité d’agir,” Laborit writes. “Tant que mes jambes me permettent de fuit, tant que mes bras me permettent de combattre, tant que l’expérience que j’ai du monde me permet de savoir ce que je peux craindre ou désirer, nulle crainte: je puis agir” (87). The middle-aged man does not see his destiny in combat, but rather asserts three times that their destiny is to flee, that the young man must accept defeat, and that blind enthusiasm in the face of death is pointless. He accuses the young protester of being duped into believing that his actions could change, that instead people were killed in a veritable suicide mission and many of those who survived were forced to sign confessions. The middle-aged man’s tone is harshly critical, as he says:
Le combat d’un peuple . . . ! Tu veux parler des quelques millions d’habitants de 
cette ville, mains et poings nus, sans armes, avec seulement des bouteilles de 
limonade et des briques pour s’opposer aux fusils et aux tanks. Un véritable 
suicide . . . héroïque sans doute, mais naïf et stupide! Les gens ne peuvent hélas 
éviter ce genre de naïveté et de bêtise. (13)

To conclude, the man then includes himself, a writer whose words have posed a danger to his 
existence, among the naïve and stupid people, setting aside his own regret, as well. He calls the 
movement “short sighted” because its leaders organized the protests without knowing how to end 
them and attacked without plans for a retreat, if necessary. “On se présente en victime 
consentante,” he declares (24). He admits his frailties, unfit to serve as a leader, jaded, afraid 
to dirty his own hands, perhaps living in fear of being denounced by others, and embraces man’s 
fate as flight to the periphery and placing his life in fate’s hands to determine whether he dies by 
gunfire in the streets, is executed, or lives to be killed in a car accident.

Gao refuses to construct the subjectivity of his three characters in _La Fuite_—or one 
could say, himself—as heroic, selecting instead various antiheroic traits. The heroic archetype 
resides often at the center of a narrative in which a hero is featured, while the antihero in the 
form of Gao’s middle-aged man is one of three protagonists. At times he takes a central role and 
at other times steers away from centrality and a decisive part, smoking his cigarettes on the 
periphery. Gao’s English-language translator Mabel Lee writes that Gao developed a “profound 
loathing” for Nietzsche, especially Nietzsche’s notion of the _übertmensche_, translated into

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Protesters at the time also had diverse views on both the necessity of the protests and the 
means and methods to achieve them. Renowned protester Chai Ling, who is compared here to 
Sa’s heroine Ayamei, was interviewed by Philip Cunningham, fearing that these words could be 
her last. She said, “In many ways the movement is not very mature” (“The Gate”). She said that 
the movement emerged as a manifestation of the natural democratic tendencies, “a spontaneous 
expression of the people’s interests” among a people who felt no security.
English alternately as Superman or Overman. Nietzsche, as well as other writers before him, lauded the idea of heroes who rise above the typical man. “I teach you the overman. Man is something to be surpassed,” Nietzsche wrote in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (trans. from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 1883-1885).\(^{160}\) “What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And just the same shall man be to the overman: a laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. . . . The overman is the meaning of the earth. . . . Man is a rope stretched between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss” (13-15). Gao rejects this notion and paints humans as lustful creatures, such as the three characters in *La Fuite* who desire each other to varying degrees, and without citing Nietzsche he criticizes the pro-democracy protesters and their “psychology of self-proclaimed heroes who, fired by self-righteous moral indignation for some cause (even those as noble as nation, democracy, and human rights), can lead others to sacrifice their lives for that cause” (M. Lee, “Two Autobiographical Plays” x). Mabel Lee, who both translates Gao’s work from Chinese to English and writes about his work, strongly perceives the influence of Nietzsche in Gao’s thoughts on flight from the center and strong involvement with a protest collective, which he rejects, to an individuality. Lee, who has worked closely with Gao, said that Gao had read all of Nietzsche’s major works in editions published in Hong Kong during the last year before he left China for France in 1987, a time in which China was “at the height of a Nietzsche craze in the Chinese intellectual world” (Lee, “Two Autobiographical Plays” x). Gao flees from the so-called heroism of the protesters and the

\(^{160}\) Nietzsche also relates the idea of the übermensch to the central notion of *Also sprach Zarathustra*: eternal recurrence. This Superman would be able to accept this notion of eternal recurrence, of infinite repetition, without change, without trying to flee it or hide from it through self-deception.
grandiosity of the nation-state to pursue what Gao terms “une littérature froide,” which is “une littérature de fuite pour préserver sa vie, c’est une littérature de sauvegarde spirituelle de soi-même afin d’éviter l’étouffement par la société; si une nation ne peut admettre cette sorte de littérature non utilitariste, non seulement c’est un malheur pur l’écrivain, mais c’est triste pour cette nation” (Gao, La Raison d’être 17). Gao specifies that this flight—portrayed in La Fuite as a flight from violence, filled with mortal terror for oneself and one’s loved ones—can also be viewed less harshly as part of humankind’s essential state of perpetual quest, not of material satisfaction, but of a purely spiritual nature (16). Perhaps this exploration of the spiritual quest that is not allied to any one political ideology is what set Gao, as a result of his play La Fuite, at odds with many over the multivocal, political viewpoints portrayed in the play, which critics portray as semiautobiographical. Mabel Lee and others see Gao’s autobiographical writing—present in many of his other works, such as La Montagne de l’âme, Le Livre d’un homme seul, and Le Quêteur de la mort—in the character of the cynical middle-aged man, who criticizes the naïveté, the selfishness, and the lack of forethought of the pro-democracy student protesters. “In the case of Escape [La Fuite], it was the trauma of witnessing events unfolding in Beijing on

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161 Hannah Arendt wrote that “[A] man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man” (Major 134). It is a condition which philosophers and theorists, such as Arendt and the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben have called “bare exile” or “bare life” in which one rejects the attendant, engaged conditions of modern citizenship (Major 134). Agamben’s notions of the bare life, which critics link to the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics, discussed earlier in this chapter, are echoed in literary terms in Gao’s “littérature froide,” as offered in his speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize. Gao describes the type of literature that he seeks to create, this “littérature froide” as having “no duty to the masses,” having recovered its “innate character” and seeking a “purely spiritual activity beyond the gratification of material desires” (“The Case”). Gao says, “This sort of literature of course did not come into being today. However, whereas in the past it mainly had to fight oppressive political forces and social customs, today it has to do battle with the subversive commercial values of consumerist society. For it to exist depends on a willingness to endure the loneliness.”
television news that resulted in his portraying of himself as Middle-Aged Man” (M. Lee, “Two Autobiographical Plays” xii). While Gao asserts that such flight is not just noble, taking the intellectual or writer to a higher spiritual plane, he has also acknowledged its tragic and painful elements of being on the run, not just from other situations but from one’s own flaws, failures, and struggles (Gao, “About Escape” 70). Gao paints this tragedy, exemplified through the middle-aged man, in contrast to the idealism—perhaps misguided and destructive in its own right—of the young protesters with whom he is in hiding.

The young man in La Fuite, on the other hand, embraces his ex-centric role as a protester now in hiding but longs to get back to his passions—to love and to fight, both fearful and excited to contest what he perceives as unjust and to be part of the collective. “Nous allons fuir cette obscurité,” the young man states. “J’ai toujours rêvé de ce jour où aura lieu la grande cérémonie commémorative en l’honneur de ceux qui se seront sacrifiés pour le pays…” (37). The alternative, he believes, by avoiding involvement, would be to permit the destruction of a nation. “Et tu peux regarder l’anéantissement de notre nation sans sourciller?” he asks the older man who says his only goal is to save himself and that he is indifferent to the state of the nation in which they find themselves. He attacks the middle-aged man, saying, “Si tout le monde était comme toi, ce pays n’aurait plus d’espoir” (28). The young woman backs up the young man’s assertions, accusing the older man of cruelty. The young man says that he detests him, and the older man responds that he often elicits this reaction, that he unleashes such feelings of disgust everywhere. In contrast, the young man rejects the subjectivity constructed for him by the others and decries accusations that he is a child, naive and stupid, affirms that he has not been a child for some time. He similarly rejects the pity he is offered by his companions in the warehouse. Even faced with disappointment, he does not forfeit his idealism or his naïveté, either in the
political realm or the psychological one. He tells the woman, “Je veux sortir vivant d’ici, avec toi! Nous devons continuer à vivre . . . je resterai avec toi! Quand nous quitterons cet endroit diabolique, nous irons nous cacher dans la campagne, ou dans la montagne! Je saurai t’apprécier. Je ne te blesserai plus . . .” (54) He continues to gives primacy to the lofty ideals of protesting injustice and pursuing love—even though the young woman has declared love to be dead—holding both in his consciousness even while in the indeterminate and provisional space of the abandoned warehouse. Writing in *Communicating in the Third Space*, Karen Ikas and Gerhard Wagner write of the illusion of “symmetrical social relations,” particularly between cultures, but also between individuals (1). Gao captures the asymmetrical nature and fluid nature of such social relations between the three characters. Jessica Yeung paints the characters as the literary foil of each other, particularly the young man and the middle-aged man. While not purely antagonists, seeing themselves as comrades in hiding, they represent obstacles to each other’s desire and possess both personal and political ideological differences, neither forfeiting his discursive agency.

In less idealistic moments the characters in *La Fuite*—particularly, the middle-aged man and the young woman—express the many mounting and personal fears that come with their peripheral and rebellious lives, fears that were real for those involved in the protests. “J’ai eu peur d’être arrêté devant ma fille,” the middle-aged man states, early in the play (11). “J’ai peur des supplices,” the young woman states. “Je ne supporte pas la torture. J’ai peur d’avoir mal . . .” (11). The young man, who says he didn’t notice the water when they first arrived, is afraid of an impending flood, be it of water or sewage, alluding to their precarious position as rebels in hiding. The characters thus play with the double meaning of the word *fuite* in French, as both flight or escape and as a leak, often caused by an increase of pressure—of water or political
will—until a weak point bursts and wreaks havoc. The characters wonder: Where does the leak come from? Is it from inside or outside? Is it getting worse? It is worsening, isn’t it? Is it toxic and fatal or simply a harmless inconvenience? “Peut-être que, dans un moment, nous serons dans un bourbier jusqu’au cou!” the young man states (32). While the young people fret, the middle-aged man uses the puddle like a mirror, resembling Narcissus from the Greek myth, bothered when the young woman stirs the surface of the water, interrupting his self-reflective and self-absorbed reverie. Toward the end of the play, the middle-aged man becomes less concerned with survival and more so with hopelessness and the fear of despair, telling the young woman, “Je ne crains pas particulièrement la mort. Ce qui m’effraie, c’est le désespoir . . . le désespoir avant la mort, qui pousse les gens à s’entredéchirer dans une sorte de danse hystérique” (55). Having gained insight into his psychological state during their time alone in the warehouse while the young man explored possible routes of escape, she counters that he is afraid of himself, of solitude, like most people, that he is a big child who needs consoling. “En face de la mort, l’espoir et le désir deviennent irréels,” the older man said, seeking the comfort of the young woman, whom he finds beautiful and vibrating with life, a source of solace in the midst of fears about life and despair. The man admits that he is eager to flee, particularly to flee from himself; however, all of the fears, the young woman asserts, have left the man selfish, egocentric, and craven. Gao’s exploration of the subjectivity of the outsiders’ fear shows that each character, faced with existential dread and danger, seeks a subjectivity of transcendence, overcoming their fears and finding either meaning and purpose or satisfaction and comfort, according to their desires. However, what has replaced the certainties of the square, of political involvement for the two young characters, and of impassioned writing and living, for the older man, is chaos and uncertainty, a primal animal-like existence. The nothingness and hopelessness in themselves
become freeing to a certain degree, from of society’s rules, obligations, and bonds and pushing the characters toward a subjectivity in which animals are valued for their lack of cruelty.

**Shan Sa’s *Porte de la Paix céleste***

Unlike Gao, Shan Sa (born Yan Ni) can aptly be called a writer of the Tiananmen Square generation and one who also concerns herself with escape and ex-centric spaces in her writing as in her life (A. Lee 21). Her father, a professor of contemporary Chinese literature, went to France in 1974 to teach Chinese literature for a time. Sa’s mother is a linguist. Writing and publishing from the age of seven, Sa’s first book released in China at age eleven, she calls her attraction to stories and poems a “*fuite en permanence*” because she was raised in an idyllic place, on a university campus with a view of the western mountains and a love of nature, which contrasted with the strict military education of the regime at the time and teachers who did not appreciate her poetry, despite her good grades. “J’étais une rebelle,” she told French journalist Bernard Pivot. She describes poetry as a place to which she fled, a shelter and a refuge. Without using the word “persecution,” too large of a concept for a young schoolgirl, she said she felt there was a sense of terror at school. Like Gao, she faced pressure in school to pursue realism in her writing and was found to be scandalous when she didn’t. Sa admits that she was trying to escape from reality, while educators were encouraging her to write about it, with homages, for example about the red flag. At age fifteen, however, she was elected as a member of the Beijing Association of Writers, appreciated by her peers and older poets, if not the Chinese establishment. Her poems, she noted, were remarked upon for their freshness and innocence— notions that would have little in common with the politics that would emerge in her later writing,
her novel *Porte de la Paix céleste*, in particular—qualities which Sa says she believes were attractive to writers who had known freedom before the communist regime of the 1970s, the era in which she was born.

Sa recounted her experiences with the 1989 Tiananmen Square events on the French public TV program *Double Je* in an interview with Bernard Pivot. She said she demonstrated with the protesters and enjoyed the marvelous spirit of enthusiasm and energy in the square, and she brought water to the hunger strikers, including on June 4, the day of the massacre. However, she cited her solitary nature as a poet, and that she’d invited a protester she’d come to know over the course of several weeks to go for a walk with her to the ruins of the Old Summer Palace, about five miles beyond the Imperial City on the northwest side of Beijing, where she enjoyed her first kiss with the young man. She returned home to find her mother out-of-her mind with worry, learning that the army had fired on the protesters in Tiananmen Square. Sa said that rather than being angry at her involvement with the students in the square, her parents were close to the students too, because some of their own students were involved in the hunger strike. Sa’s parents had housed some of the protesters, and her father was denounced by neighbors, causing him some difficulties, although Sa did not specify in the interview what those difficulties were. Sa said that being sixteen at the time, a sensitive adolescent who longed to become a woman, her initial thoughts were positive, that she would be able to read banned journals that came from Hong Kong. However, she then came to have doubts about the Chinese government and see the past as a lie, she said. She saw the individuals who were being called enemies of the people whom she felt were simply Chinese people and even patriots who advocated for progress in their homeland. She asked her father if she could go elsewhere, choosing France for the way it extols

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162 The interview is archived on the website of the Institut National de l’Audiovisuel: [https://www.ina.fr/video/2010534001008](https://www.ina.fr/video/2010534001008)
culture unlike the United States, although it meant she would need to learn the French language. Her father accompanied her to France, returning two months later to be with Sa’s mother. She said that this severing of the umbilical cord from her parents and her homeland led to a number of difficult years, despite her literary successes, including the publication of *Porte de la Paix céleste* in 1997, which received a number of awards, including the Bourse Goncourt du premier roman.

Sa’s Tiananmen Square novel—a classically narrated popular novel with alternating chapters from the point of view of Ayamei, the protester, and Zhao, the PLA soldier pursuing her with orders to kill—opens on the Avenue of Eternal Peace, the enormous Chang’an Avenue, in Beijing at midnight on June 4, 1989. A young man whispers in the protagonist’s ear, “Ayamei, qu’attends-tu pour fuir?” (Sa, *Porte* 11). Ayamei, a young leader of the student protests, spends the duration of the novel in flight, pursued by the army lieutenant Zhao, with readers wondering what the dénouement when Ayamei and Zhao meet will hold, Ayamei’s death, capture, or Zhao’s full recognition that he does not support the military action against a woman he has grown to understand and admire. After portraying the violence and death, both in the square and upon the army’s entrance into the city of Beijing from the provinces, the novel concerns itself with a series of ex-centric spaces, with Ayamei seeking refuge in family members’ homes, where she is rejected out of fear, hiding in homes in and near Beijing, near the seashore, and finally in the forest and in a temple in the mountains. Unlike the tumult in the square, the ex-centric spaces are those of silence and singing rather than talking and shooting, where nature serves as a nurturer and a balm, and where birds take flight easily, unlike Ayamei’s arduous journey of self-preservation. However, while the flight offers certain emotional comforts, it is often filled with darkness, shadow, fear of the government, isolation from city life and televisions, and insecurity,
as Ayamei recounts her flight in chapters that alternate with Lieutenant Zhao’s version of the pursuit to increasingly remote regions outside of the capital.

While much of the world views the June Fourth events as a moment in time, a single day, Sa paints a picture of the protests, even prior to the protagonist’s long flight, as a marathon, constructing a long-suffering subjectivity of protests and hunger strikes that media snapshots and sound bites failed to capture fully. Being ex-centric is a complex state rather than being encased in its temporality of a mere moment. In discussing “identity politics,” critics often talk about it as a quest, which suggests a prolonged state. Initially, Ayamei—and the actual protesters themselves—sought recognition by their presence in the square and their demands. As early as April 1989, students were flooding into the capital from around the country and thirty-five Beijing universities initiated a strike, and other actions. What came to be known as the Temporary Students’ Union of Beijing Universities—later to become the Autonomous Students’ Union of Beijing Universities (ASUBU)—presented demands. “The Union stressed that its goals were simply democracy, freedom, science, human rights and the rule of law; and that the means of achieving them would be legal and non-violent,” write Mok Chiu Yu and J. Frank Harrison in *Voices from Tiananmen Square*. Specific demands included equal dialogue with the PRC leaders, an apology for the Xinhuamen incident, a bloody conflict between police and protesters in front of a governmental building in Beijing, which students cited as an instance of police brutality, and lastly, accurate media reports of the student movement (19). In May, Beijing workers who supported the students formed the Beijing Workers’ Autonomous Federation (BWAF). About 200,000 students began marching to Tiananmen Square on May 4, presenting a “New May 4 Declaration,” which called for greater democracy in higher education and then progressively, in China’s state apparatus (Yu and Harrison 22). The hunger strike, joined by
about 3,000 students, began on May 13, while students still asked for a dialogue, having only obtained an unsatisfactory conversation with Yuan Mu, the state council spokesman. By May 17, more than 600 students who had participated in the ongoing hunger strike had been hospitalized or treated, and more than 800,000 people came to Tiananmen Square in support of the students, as Shan Sa says she herself did (24). The May 13 Hunger Strike Declaration mimicked the language of the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and captured both the severity of the demands and the idealism. It read in part:

We are young, but we are ready to give up our lives. We cherish life: we do not want to die. But this nation is in a critical state. . . . At this life-and-death moment of the nation’s fate, countrymen, please listen to us! China is our motherland. We are the people. The government should be our government. Who should speak out, if we should not? Who should act, if we should not?” (Lüsted 56-57)

The hunger strike ended on May 20, replaced with a sit-in. Zhao Ziyang, the general secretary of the CCP, apologized to the students and asked them to call off the hunger strike, but he was later removed from his position and lived under house arrest until his death. Both ASUBU and BWAF were declared illegal organizations; their leaders were ordered to surrender or face criminal persecution, and a hotline was established for individual informers to call to report those who had participated in the student movement in any way (Yu and Harrison 34).

In writing of this long march toward the massacre, not including the aftermath of executions, trials, and imprisonments of those connected with the protests, Sa writes in *Porte de la Paix céleste*:

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163 Yuan Mu provided the following press conference after meeting with students: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_hTA8LHxhc&feature=youtu.be (*Yuan Mu*).
Après un mois d’insomnie, de faim, de tension de nerfs extraordinaire, comme un coureur de marathon qui, au terme de son épuisement, se sent investi d’une énergie puissante et cérébrale, la jeune fille tressaillit et voulut rebrousser chemin.

(13-14)

Ayame does not describe herself as a leader but rather a catalyst in the spontaneous movement. “Ce rôle, cette responsabilité, je dois les assumer jusqu’au bout,” Ayamei tells her friend Xiao, who was later shot and fell dead at her feet while people ran and fled all around them. Similarly, Fang Lizhi, a professor and scientist who was a dedicated member of the CCP before the Tiananmen Square uprising, said in an interview during the protests, that the students “should understand, as I have often told them, that the struggle for democracy takes more than one or two months. I warned them not to let their health deteriorate, as democracy requires a long struggle, and cannot be attained by a single act. It might even take a generation, with extensive preparation” (Yu and Harrison 166). When asked in 1989 to visualize the spread of democracy in China, Chai Ling, an outspoken leader of the protests, said:

I think that it will be a long process, possibly sixty or seventy years. We hope that one day we might live securely in a China where people can enjoy the fruits of their labours whilst possessing the power to participate in the management of the country. . . . . The sort of democracy which we demand is very natural, a natural right. It is not hooked up to any specific ideology. We are fighting for control of our own lives. (160)

164 Fang Lizhi had penned an open letter to Deng Xiaoping early in 1989, calling for political prisoners to be released, a move that some say “helped galvanize a pro-democracy student movement that spring” (Wines). After June 4, fearing arrest, Fang and his family sought refuge inside the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. President George Bush offered Fang protection, creating diplomatic difficulties with China; however China allowed Fang and his family to come to the United States in 1990, where he became a physics professor, allegedly for medical reasons.
Chai left Beijing after the massacre, hidden in a cargo box bound for Hong Kong, ultimately immigrating to the United States (Tsui and Pang).165

Sa’s Heroine: Traitor, Murderer, Conspirator

As in Gao’s play, the conversation of those in ex-centric spaces seems to continue to concern the centered spaces and the knowledge that democracy will not come quickly or easily to China, as the protesters and their supporters pay close attention to what is going on in the square and see the images of those being sought, including Ayamei, on the television. Ayamei’s initial impulse—portrayed as that of a traditional heroine compared with Gao’s antiheroes—is not to flee, to return to help those for whom she feels responsible and possibly to pay with her life the price for the guilt she feels in witnessing their deaths. “Moi, je retourne à la place,” Ayamei tells her friend and fellow protester Xiao. Even after the options for a catalyst such as Ayamei are outlined—death, possible martyrdom, prison, or flight—her story concerns the events at Tiananmen Square and little else outside of memories triggered by the events in the square, her flight, and related nightmares. One such nightmare that makes Ayamei suffer concerns a middle-aged woman, walking majestically through a street in Beijing carrying a funeral urn, a woman to whom Ayamei goes to offer her condolences, assuming the woman has lost a child or husband in the massacre, only to recognize that the woman is her mother, looking at her with a disgusted expression and hurling insults like “traiîtresse, meurtière, conspiratrice” at

165 In the United States, Chai, a mother of three living in Massachusetts, founded the organization All Girls Allowed to fight gendercide and to work to end the one-child policy, which China decided in 2015 to phase out, officially ending in 2016.
her (100-01). Sa’s heroine rests in conflict with Beijing’s social order. Writing of ex-centric subjectivities, Linda Hutcheon states, “The center may not hold, but it is still an attractive fiction of order and unity that postmodern art and theory continue to exploit and subvert” (60). Ayamei may not believe in Beijing’s central dictates but they hold power in her psyche from the years of inculcation, which Sa describes. For Ayamei, her ex-centric existence, by the nature of her fugitive status, has become primarily a solitary one, after the community of the square and the assistance of the truck driver Wang, who helps her and is denounced. She is alone except for the few individuals who agree to help her, unlike her own aunt and uncle. Like Gao’s characters, she constructs her subjectivity in relation to her activities in the square, those who have suffered or died, and in relation to the fear these traumas have embedded in her. “Après avoir été entourée, elle vit aujourd’hui en solitaire . . . L’hiver va arriver, où ira-t-elle pour fuir la neige? Peut-on fuir la solitude dans un monde de frimas et de gel?” notices the PLA Lieutenant Zhao, who is pursuing her (Sa, Porte 141). The characters in Sa’s novel can flee the PLA, much like those in Gao’s play La Fuite; however, they cannot flee the reflections of themselves and of the world that they find in nature—whether it is the water seeping into the warehouse in Gao’s play or the changing weather during the time Ayamei is hiding in the mountains in Sa’s novel—nor can they flee themselves, particularly their own shortcomings, feelings of guilt, and the desires that pervade both works. Lieutenant Zhao, Ayamei’s adversary, comes to see the protesters as people. In the chaos of entering Beijing, his Jeep hits people, the bodies sounding on his vehicle, and he sees houses and vehicles in flames, people running, tanks speeding, rocks breaking windshields, and hears explosions that trigger deafness. He is met with threats but also sees “d’innombrables

The character Ayamei serves as a protagonist in Shan Sa’s transnational spy novel called Les Conspirateurs (2005), in which Ayamei, like Sa, has moved to Europe. The novel is set fifteen years after the 1989 Tiananmen Square events.
visages tordus d’effroi et de haine” (Sa, *Porte* 32). Entering Ayamei’s childhood bedroom, looking for evidence of her whereabouts, he describes the room as “une véritable cellule de prison,” shooting the lock on her desk with his revolver and finding some political journals that had been banned by the government, while Ayamei’s father dies in the other room from a heart attack. At the dénouement of the novel, having read Ayamei’s *journaux intimes*, Zhao chooses not to alert the PLA troops to Ayamei’s presence in the forest.

The necessity of flight and the related necessity of hiding oneself when one is in opposition to government policies, dominates Sa’s novel *Porte de la Paix céleste*. “Il faut que tu te caches,” says Ayamei’s friend and fellow protester Xiao. “Je suis sûr que le gouvernement veut ta tête” (13). Unlike the dark warehouse that feels almost organic with its sounds, the dripping of water, and the rising levels of water, reflected red, like blood, the shelter Ayamei seeks is nature, which she said, like Sa herself in interviews, provided solace. Ayamei recounts a previous instance of fleeing and hiding in her life with a classmate others found unacceptable and whom she loved. They hid in an abandoned cabin and imagined running away to the Himalayas together, after Ayamei’s family, informed by teachers of their secret meetings, had banned their relationship. Min would tell her that at the summit of each mountain there was a door to the heavens, an allusion to the name of the square, where the massacre would change the fate of Ayamei and Sa’s life. Tiananmen means “Gate of Heavenly Peace” in English or *Porte de la Paix céleste* in French, the title of Sa’s novel. It is also a central feature of Tiananmen Square, the gate that has stood through renovation and reconstruction since it served as a gatehouse through the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, and which many still consider the symbol of modern China, featuring a portrait of Mao Zedong (1893-1976) and banners reading “Long Live the People’s Republic of China” and “Long Live the Great Unity of the
World’s Peoples.” For Ayamei and Min, the idea of flight and hiding was initially romantic, idealistic, and naïve. “Min a étalé par terre une carte de l’Himalaya où nous voulons nous enfuir. Traçant notre itinéraire avec un crayon rouge, Min me raconte les aventures dont nous serons les héros,” Ayamei said. (Sa, Porte 75). The reality was more painful, paralleling the similar aspirations and outcome of the Tiananmen protesters. Ayamei returned home from her time with Min to receive a painful slap from her mother, be accused of poor behavior and encounter mistreatment by her parents, and to hear her mother utter the phrase, “Depuis quand sommes-nous devenus ses ennemis?” (76). Ultimately, Min, whose name in Chinese means “the people,” is forced to move away to attend yet another school, and Ayamei plans to commit suicide to seek vengeance against her parents. Another plan goes awry, when Min returns and the two plan to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff together, but only Min jumps as Ayamei cries, “Non, Min, arrête . . .” (84) The reader learns of these events through the eyes of the PLA soldier.

167 The Chinese name of both the square that the gate opens onto to the south and the gate itself is made up of the three Chinese characters for “heaven,” “peace,” and “gate,” however it comes from the longer phrase that means “receiving the mandate from heaven and stabilizing the dynasty.” A Tiananmen mountain (Heaven’s Gate mountain) is also located near the city of Zhangjiajie in the Hunan Province, about 1,000 miles southwest of Beijing.

168 Tiananmen Square protesters identified the movement using the Chinese word minzhù, which is often simply translated as “democracy” and literally means “people” (min) as “masters” or rule (zhù). It’s also translated literally as “rule of the people” and is not necessarily equivalent to the Western connotations of the term “democracy.” One protester filmed in Tiananmen Square in 1989 said, “Yesterday we talked here about minzhù, democracy. What is minzhù? Min means ‘the people.’ Zhù means ‘to be in charge.’ We want to be in charge!” (“The Gate”). Frederic Charles Schaffer writes, “Minzhu has been been an important concept in Chinese political discourse at least since the nineteenth century, when Liang Qichao, a journalist, activist, and later cabinet minister, wrote a series of essays on important Western political thinkers” (142-144). This notion of democracy in China is a complicated one. Liang defined it as people participating in the political process to achieve “national unity,” whereas Mao saw it as the masses supervising bureaucracy, using the word min but under the direction of a national leader. However, minzhu movements erupted, using that term, in 1978-79 and again in 1989. Writers frequently translate minzhu as “democracy,” but in doing so some contradictions, as mentioned above, do emerge. Frederic Charles Schaffer’s 1998 book Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture gives greater insight into the transcultural aspects of the term and the Tiananmen Square movement.
Lieutenant Zhao, who is reading Ayamei’s journals at her parents’ home, creating further
distance. The ex-centric position is often one that is not enacted in person, but mediated through
images, writing, or other means. In Sa’s novel, partly narrated through Ayamei’s personal
journals as they are being read by Lieutenant Zhao, Ayamei’s subjectivity as a person in hiding
becomes an enunciated or authored space. Michel Foucault’s analysis in *Histoire de la folie à
l’âge classique* depicts the ways in which one can think without the categorization society has
inherited from previous eras, and how one can learn to think differently, particularly about
marginalized peoples. The act of interpretation is central to the creation of ex-centric discourses
and the construction of subjectivities of individuals who are potentially considered responsible
for “inciting subversion of state power” or simply “subversion of state power.” The use of this
*mise-en-abyme* device by Sa, the protagonist Ayamei’s journals, the journals of a protester,
within the novel by a peripheral protester, inscribes the protesters’ larger and individual stories
within the outsider discourse Sa creates. In another instance, revealed through Lieutenant Zhao’s
reading of Ayamei’s journals, the reader learns of Ayamei’s fears of being re-educated as her
parents were during the Cultural Revolution for not crying like her classmates upon learning of
Chairman Mao’s death. She fears that not showing real affection for Mao will have her sent
away, and she tries to make herself cry, ultimately raising tears not for sadness about Mao’s
death but because of the persecution she feels she could face for not crying or for not producing
genuine tears. Ayamei’s journal dated September 9, 1976, states:

> Mes larmes ne viennent pas, en revanche mon front se couvre de sueur. Je suis
plus en plus angoissée. Je me vois déjà en prison, on vient m’interroger. Je suis
accusée d’être une contre-révolutionnaire et je vais passer ma vie dans le désert.
Des larmes commencent à couler sur mes joues et je commence enfin à pleurer à chaudes larmes. (Sa, Porte 62)

It is a life spent in prison, her grandmother dying in her absence, never seeing her parents, from whom she’d never been separated for more than a month because of persecution for not crying and even for laughing when an instructor fainted upon news of Mao’s death. In the forest, where she ultimately finds solace in nature and her final hiding place of the novel, Sa seeks not so much to be liberated from her flight as from the hostility that comes from outside of herself, but even more deeply from the internal anguish, hatred, and—at times—her own suicidal ideations, all of which are associated with the flight from terror and oppression (96).

Sa repeatedly contrasts the images of darkness and hiding with that of birds and flight in nature, which is viewed positively as a form of release. In entering the forest, hoping to be there for a period before she can return to Wang’s home, she feels she has entered “un univers obscur,” one of confusion and questions about where she will sleep, what she will eat, where the forest ends and the sea begins, and where she will go. In school, a flock of pigeons was a distraction while someone was reading from Mao’s Little Red Book, the collection of quotes from Mao first published in 1964, a distraction that would result in Ayamei being punished. The school and Lieutenant Zhao’s description of Ayamei’s room use images of incarceration, condemnation, and behavior censorship’, while the images of birds and nature emphasize peace, freedom and release. Min, who had been harshly criticized by teachers and parents, evokes the theme first in telling a story to his class about a young girl, killed by a monster, after having saved her twin brother, who then dies of heartbreak. “Quelques jours après sa mort,” Min says, “sons corps se métamorphose en oiseau et vole, d’arbre en arbre, en appelant sa sœur” (Sa, Porte 66). At the moment of Min’s death at the lake bordered by cliffs, the birds fall silent, Sa writes,
“Sa main détachée de la mienne. Son corps s’est envolé. Le vent gonflait ses vêtements, ses mains battaient l’air, ses cheveux se dressaient. Comme une étoile filante, il est tombé dans les eaux tourbillonnantes” (84). Finally, when Ayamei is in the forest, hiding from Lieutenant Zhao and the PLA troops, Ayamei is befriended by a mute adolescent who has a special relationship with the birds of the forest. The young man who helps her to hide, shows her the abandoned temple where she can sleep, and helps to feed her, is nature personified, the supporting influence contrasted with the humans she encountered before entering the forest and of whom she had to remain wary until knowing whether they would help or hinder her flight. “Il est méfiant comme un animal sauvage et ne voit les habitants du hameau que lorsqu’il a faim,” Ayamei narrates.

“Sinon, dès qu’il rencontre quelqu’un, il se sauve en courant. Il réprouve les humains mais chérit les oiseaux. . . . Lorsqu’il est assis au sommet d’un rocher et contemple la mer, les aiseaux viennent se poser sur sa tête et sur ses épaules” (105). The young man provides her with delicious potatoes and represents the positive aspects of life away from human conflict. “Il cueillait des fleurs qu’il tressait en guirlande, il sifflait, poursuivait les papillons et les oiseaux. Comme un animal qui retrouve son territoire, il perdait peu à peu son air méfiant et agressif, il devenait joyeux” (121). In the form of telling a fable to the adolescent—alluding to a comparison between the mute teen and the deceased Min whom Ayamei loved in her own adolescence—she tells the teen about Min, drawing comparisons between them. She talks of a girl, living in solitude, learning to obey, and wanting to be loved. “Un jour, elle a rencontré un garçon qui lui a montré une autre façon de penser et de regarder le monde . . . D’élève obéissante, elle est devenue rebelle. Après avoir été très entourée, elle vit aujourd’hui en solitaire” (141). The mute boy has shown Ayamei, the girl who defines herself as the one who chose life over death, another way, apart from human conflict. Ayamei, through her flight and her journals, also shows
Lieutenant Zhao, who chose the army as a path to advance his station in life and support himself, another way, that of compassion and forgiveness over military might and violence. In this eccentric space, she cannot communicate with him through words, and she carries on a conversation with herself and her echo that he is free to overhear. Nature is free from the language that hemmed her in and which Zhao intends to use against her in reading her journals, but which evokes compassion in him instead.

The peaceful quality of the forest is paralleled and personified in the abandoned temple to which the mute teen has led Ayamei, where she will sleep, and where she encounters the statue of the goddess: Guan-Yin, the Chinese Zen deity of compassion, infinite mercy, and kindness. The reader learns that Ayamei resembles the terra-cotta statue of Guan-Yin, one of the most popular deities to whom cults were dedicated after the publication of several sutras, beginning with the Lotus Sutra in 286 CE Guan-Yin, who is often called the “female Buddha” is, like Ayamei, closely allied with nature and often pictured inside a leaf or on a lotus flower, peacefully sitting atop of a lion, or with a dragon, snail, dolphin, or child. In the temple in Sa’s novel, however, Ayamei notices the goddess’s flowered robe and her unshod left foot resting on the back of a spectacular leopard. Guan-Yin represents feminine power, and as Ayamei seeks to

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169 Guan-Yin (etymologically from the word kuan, meaning earth, and yin, referring to the feminine power that balances the masculine yang) is a Chinese version of the Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva known in Sanskrit as Avalokiteshvara, particularly in India. Avalokiteshvara postponed his own enlightenment until he had helped all others to be liberated from suffering. This deity, wracked with grief caused by witnessing the wickedness in the world, is known as a “supreme savior of suffering” and charged with protecting people from murderers, theft, fire, shipwreck, and dangerous animals (Wang 285; Leeming 166; Andrews). Buddhists often recite a mantra addressing Avalokiteshvara that asks “May I quickly ferry all living beings (to the shore of liberation)” (“Great Compassion”). The male Avalokiteshvara has numerous incarnations—both male and female, as is the case of Guan-Yin—and the Dalai Lama, the modern-day Buddhist spiritual leader in Tibet, is considered one of those incarnations. Chun-Fang Yü has published a detailed study of the transformation, cults, pilgrimage songs, and stories of Guan-in in Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara (Columbia UP, 2001).
avoid punishment from her fatherland, Guan-Yin was persecuted by her father for not wanting to marry and seeking to live, instead, in the temple of the White Bird. She is often strongly allied with nature over the violence that sometimes permeates human civilization. Angered by his attempts to get her to marry, Guan-Yin’s father burned the temple. Later exiled from the Land of the Dead, Guan-Yin returned to earth to a life of solitude. Ayamei fears a similar fate, saying, “Si la situation n’évoluait pas, je serais condamnée à l’exil pour le restant de mes jours” (Sa, Porte 997). Sa’s selection of Guan-Yin pulls the novel away from the emphasis on the violence in the square and Lieutenant Zhao’s pursuit on behalf of the PRC to the notion of compassion, which Zhao embraces without explanation at the end of the novel, sparing Ayamei’s life and allowing her continued flight. Ayamei had an earlier encounter with Guan-Yin in Sa’s novel, at the home of the parents of Wang, the truck driver who first gave her a ride to help her escape from Beijing: she noticed the idol in the corner as Guan-Yin, holding a branch of a weeping willow in one hand and a container of holy water in the other (98). The peace by the sea that Ayamei experienced for twelve days, observing the rising and setting of the sun, the night sky filled with stars, a silence devoid of questions and only broken by happy singing, the ability to write, free her from the horrors of the past and worries about the future momentarily until Zhao and his PLA troops learn of her whereabouts. Both Guan-Yin’s emphasis on compassion, mercy, and nature, and Ayamei’s flight away from the square to the temple serve as an alternative to what Bhabha calls the oppositional ordering of power.

Zhao, in deciding to let Ayamei escape, ultimately becomes part of Ayamei’s ex-centric world, partially rejecting his support of the PLA, as he shows his admiration for her character, which he has explored in interrogating her family and friends and reading her journals. Sa describes his path from life as a peasant child working in the rice fields with his nine siblings in
the south of China to an unquestioning soldier to one who allows a Tiananmen Square revolt leader to go free. Sa depicts the ways in which he’s inculcated in the PLA ideas by the other officers. They tell Zhao:

Tu es un soldat . . . Être un soldat, c’est être un homme dans la plénitude de sa puissance. Un soldat agit selon sa conviction et son idéal. Un soldat doit avoir un physique à toute épreuve, un esprit de fer et une volonté d’acier. Car sa tâche est sacrée: défendre son peuple et la patrie. Il protège leur paix et leur bonheur; il est prêt à donner son sang en cas de guerre. . . . Au prix de leur bonheur individuel, ils ont conquis la liberté dont nous jouissons aujourd’hui, et établi l’État socialiste. Mais notre régime est encore jeune, l’ennemi est toujours là. Le parti nationaliste et les Occidentaux nous épient. Ils cherchent à renverser le Parti communiste, a imposer leur dictature à la Chine et à réduire le peuple en esclavage. (Sa, Porte 24-25)

On the way into Beijing he is not troubled by the clashes with protesters. He does his job. He admits to himself that on the night of the June Fourth uprising, he did not question the need to kill protesters, but he has begun to have doubts about the order to kill Ayamei. “Pourquoi être tourmenté de devoir faire feu sur leur chef?” Zhao asks himself (91). Observing a simple shepherd, some sheep, and a dog, he suddenly envies the shepherd, “un homme solitaire et simple” (91). He is able to recite Ayamei’s journals by heart, intrigued by her writings, by her large view of the world and emotions at such a young age, at what he calls her pure and innocent soul, wondering what path led her to become a criminal. He is already weighing the rights of the individual against the rights of the state, wondering if he could capture her rather than kill her to talk to her, observe her, ask his questions. This unformed plan and its implicit desires create
feelings of guilt for Zhao because he sees himself mixing her own personal interests with those of the Chinese state that he is obligated to serve. These feelings bring him face-to-face with those who have sheltered Ayamei, Wang’s parents, and in particular, Wang’s mother praying in front of the idol and unwilling to be deterred by Zhao’s pronouncement that she is under arrest. Zhao’s decentering, which becomes for these Chinese-Francophone writers the essence of independent thought and revolt, is unusual. Having come from the periphery with a limited education, illiterate until his entry into the army, although a rising member of the PLA, he is decentered by his movement toward the center, toward Beijing and the aftermath of finding the single fascinating female protester whose life and ideas intrigue him more than his duty. Linda Hutcheon writes that it is this move toward difference and heterogeneity, toward discontinuity, to a space of rupture, that defines, in part, postmodernism (59). As Hutcheon points out, Jacques Derrida and others suggest that closure is not only unfeasible but often, as in Zhao’s case, undesirable (59). It is this type of closure that Zhao has been ordered to manufacture in killing Ayamei and which he silently rejects, while continuing his ardent pursuit of her. The center is unmasked for Zhao as merely that “attractive fiction of order and unity” (Hutcheon 60). Zhao is first destabilized geographically, by being sent north from the countryside to Beijing, steeping his journey in history as he passes the Great Wall of China on his way, only to find his destination and subjectivity in relation to Ayamei’s stable identity are ever shifting. The center of the PLA’s search has moved away from Beijing to the periphery, first to the seashore to the home of an older couple and then to the mountainous forest. This destabilizing, decentering shift, Hutcheon suggests, also decents the cultural values and notions, similarly transferring them from the center to the periphery, from the dominant culture to the local cultures, which Sa
describes with fishermen, hunters, and truckers as secondary characters, and from the PLA to the life of the protester, whose life the PLA lieutenant finds so captivating.

Ex-central Subjectivities: Through the Other’s Eyes

Both Gao and Sa allow the reader to view fictionalized accounts of protesters post-revolt experiences through their eyes, as Gao and Sa expand the literary technique often called “double-voicing” into a heteroglossia or polyglossia, to use linguistic terms from Mikhail Bakhtin. Such terms open one’s subjectivity to otherness and ultimately internal and external differences and fissures in that subjectivity appear, notions that are particularly prevalent in Gao’s avant-garde play La Fuite but also in Sa’s popular novel, as well. As Ayamei’s mother says in Sa’s novel, she wished that she, like Zhao, had read the intimate journals of her daughter. “Mais j’aurai aimé le faire uniquement pour mieux la comprendre,” the mother tells Zhao, “pour voir le monde à travers ses yeux” (Sa, Porte 54). While Gao’s avant-garde aesthetic excels at presenting the Tiananmen Square uprising and lives of those involved through multiple, often contradictory lenses, Sa’s novel shows the transformation of one woman into a leader of the revolt and one PLA officer into a sympathizer. Both Gao and Sa point to the “folie de la jeunesse” in the midst of the pro-democracy ideas, the suicidal aspects of the prolonged sit-ins, hunger strikes, and confrontations with armed PLA soldiers and tanks (Sa, Porte 17). Gao’s play vocalizes harsh criticism for the protesters through the world of the cynical but frightened middle-aged man, while Sa’s novel offers little such questioning, creating an archetypical heroine in Ayamei, and turning the antagonist Zhao into a hero when he allows Ayamei to go free without killing or capturing her in the final line of the novel. Both Gao and Sa illustrate the violence, fears, and
threats of execution that drove all four protagonists—the young man, young woman, and the middle-aged man in Gao’s play, and Ayamei, the protagonist of Sa’s novel—into hiding. They depict ordinary people, students, writers, truck drivers, fishermen, hunters, and family members affected by the protests. “Tu ne sais pas ce qui s’est passé là-bas?” the truck driver Wang asks Ayamei, not far from the protests. “L’armée a tiré, il y a eu plein de morts. Il ne faut surtout pas y aller” (16). When Ayamei naively asks about the government forcibly evacuating the protesters from the square, Wang replies, “Les étudiants ont pu sortir de la place? Je croyais que la plupart étaient morts, écrasés par les chars” (16). Gao’s characters huddle in a warehouse, covered in bodily substances, competing for the touch of the young woman and competing with their ideas about the Tiananmen Square protests themselves, the young man voicing support for the ideals, the search for freedom and agency, and the middle-aged man pointing to the reality of a poorly executed plan in an enormous city plaza without plans for retreat.

However, Gao’s La Fuite and Sa’s Porte de la Paix céleste stand in contrast. Gao’s genre—and his work as an avant-garde playwright—position him to push the boundaries of subjectivity in a way that Sa in her contemporary novel does not. Gao uses this double—one could say triple—voicing to create a model of cultural memory that is at odds both with China’s nationalistic, peace-keeping narrative, not surprising given Gao’s status as a writer in exile. However, he also voices the unpopular criticism of the youthful protesters, which Belinda Kong calls Gao’s “cardinal role in shaping his theories of writerly individualism and existential flight,” a controversial position that Kong suggests points to the erasure of the political and moral superiority of the protesters and of writers in exile, including Gao himself. The claustrophobic nature of the setting, as well as the entrenched conflict of the three protagonists in the warehouse, mounts in a way that allows Gao to elevate the fullness of their personal and political conflicts,
showing that there is not one ex-trinsic subjectivity, but several, which are in perpetual conflict in the cauldron of the leaky warehouse. Gao’s tense play contrasts with Sa’s. While portraying the violence of the crackdown in more graphic detail, her novel quickly turns to fantastical flight, almost allegorical in nature, in which Ayamei will triumph and a positive outcome, even going so far as to shift the thinking of a PLA officer without any words exchanged or physical contact, with the physical and psychological distance shrinking between them. Both Ayamei and her pursuer Zhao, ultimately, have the ex-centric subjectivity that has been called “alien and critical” and “always altering its focus,” engaging in an ongoing critique of the center (Hutcheon 69). At times that critique is that of Ayamei against an educational system that punished outsiders, such as her first love, at other times restrictive governmental forces. While united by the theme of flight, the ex-trinsic subjectivities of Gao and Sa and their protagonists develop along different trajectories both in form and in content.

Both Gao and Sa typify what Rosie Braidotti in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Material Theory of Becoming*, shows to be an in-between position that needs further opening and exploration. Braidotti, citing the influences of Gilles Deleuze, “encourages us not to think in terms of within/without, but rather as levels of expression and sustainability of unfamiliar forces, drives, yearnings or sensations; a sort of spiritual and sensory stretching of our boundaries; an immanent sort of happening” (147). The ex-centric subjectivities of Francophone-Chinese writers embodies and embeds, to use Braidotti’s terms, not only an engagement with the complexities of transnational lives—the tremendous suffering as shown in Gao and Sa’s works on the brutal Tiananmen Square massacre—but the construction of a scaffolding by which others can understand these disparate experiences related to the square, to China, and to other authoritarian regimes that employ violence, as Michael Berry astutely discusses in *A History of*
Pain, repeatedly against their own people. The subjectivities explored by Gao and Sa differ from media-based views in more intimate portrayals of both heroic and antiheroic characters. Furthermore, Gao and Sa, and other writers of Tiananmen fiction, those explored well in Belinda Kong’s Tiananmen Fictions: Outside the Square, occupy a “middle ground and perform a double task: not only are they overturning an oppressive government’s historical erasure, they are simultaneously confronting a saturated consciousness of an international community for whom the massacre is an already overwritten or overimagined episode” replete with snapshots and video clips of tanks charging down Chang’an Avenue and the Tank Man challenging their forward progress (Kong 241). To neatly categorize such writers or their texts and their multiple ex-centric subjectivities would be essentializing; just as one cannot easily separate the strands of history, politics, and art, one cannot easily categorize the writers who present depictions of those in hiding following the 1989 massacre of still unspecified proportions in Tiananmen Square.
Conclusion

At the end of this dissertation, I come to the conclusion that studying what might be called the Francophone-Chinese subjectivity in the works of François Cheng, Gao Xingjian, Dai Sijie, and Shan Sa is fraught with problems. The literary landscape, even that encompassing just the four authors studied here, is replete with difference, variation, permutations, and nonconformity between the authors’ biographies, situations of voluntary exile for some and political asylum for another, their numerous texts, and the abundance of descriptive labels and identifications attached to them, all of which reveal only half-truths or selectively emphasize details of their histories. Simply calling the writers Chinese due to the circumstances of their births can at times elicit objections. In an essay titled “Can One Say No to Chineseness?” Ien Ang thus writes about the limits of the diasporic paradigm, which is often applied to overseas Chinese writers:

“Chineseness” here is the marker of that status, imparting an externally imposed identity given meaning, literally, by a practice of discrimination. It is the dominant culture’s classificatory practice, operating as a territorializing power

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170 The lexicon to describe those of Chinese birth who do not live in China continues to evolve both in French, as shown in this study, and also in Chinese. Gungwu Wang points out that the Chinese term huaqiao, translated as “overseas Chinese,” has a particularly complex lineage, and a relatively new term, wenhua Zhongguo, has also come to designate “cultural China” (132; Tu, “Cultural China” 156). The term huaqiao, dating from the decade before the founding of the Republic in 1912, often referred to Chinese citizens living abroad temporarily, only later encompassing a broader group of individuals that would include Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa. The Taiwanese embraced the term because it brought benefits concerning admission to well-regarded universities, Wang states. Depending on who is included and the word used, the number of overseas Chinese ranges from 25 million, not including Taiwan and Hong Kong-Macau, to 36 million to over 50 million (G. Wang 132; Tu, “Cultural China” 148). The term huaren, for short, or haiwai huaren, while literally meaning “overseas Chinese” is also used by the PRC (and in Taiwan and Hong Kong) to refer to those who are “ethnically Chinese” (Tu, “Cultural China” 156).
highly effective in marginalizing the other, that shapes the meaning of
Chineseness here as a curse . . . (57-58)

Ang refers in this case to another overseas Chinese writer,\textsuperscript{171} one who has crossed borders similar to those that are integral to this study, and in her writing Ang captures the ensuing negotiation and interrogation of an individual’s subjectivity. Ang herself lived in locales that were home to an overseas Chinese minority where she also had to understand the construction of such subjectivity “in a particular diasporic itinerary informed by the historical connections,” which included European influences, and as one who experienced Chineseness as “a discursive construct—rather than as something natural . . . a matter of subjective experience . . . not just a question of theory” (59-60). Like the authors studied here, Ang came to terms with a transnational subjectivity that she says is complicated both by the expansiveness of the diasporic paradigm, its burgeoning rhetoric and the construction of related subjectivities, and the “intricate empirical multifariousness and historical complexity” of China itself, the facts of China’s history and relations with the West (58). Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and others have long shown how the ways in which one speaks, writes, or the lexicon one uses are tied to the discursive framework and practices of the culture(s), society(ies), and historical period(s) in which they are situated, and that those frameworks have for too long been too narrowly constructed. Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa have this diasporic viewpoint, which Ang calls a “necessarily unstable” subjectivity, and they have similarly acknowledged a perspective, as seen throughout this dissertation, that encompasses disparate elements formed primarily in the cauldrons of Chinese

\textsuperscript{171} Ang is referring here to William Yang (b. 1943) and the autobiographical account in which Yang questions and interrogates his Chineseness. Ang writes on this issue further in her book \textit{On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West}, offering a critique of what she calls a “global Chineseness” (2005).
and European culture, cultures which they have inhabited, and in sometimes difficult exilic conditions.

However, the emphasis throughout this study has been on the illumination of junctures and fissures encountered while negotiating cultural difference in the texts of these four writers. As Azade Seyhan (2001) states in *Writing Outside the Nation*, “Once we accept the loss of stable communities and the inevitability of exile, then the interdependency of linguistic and cultural experiences both at the local and global level becomes self-evident” (9). That so-called acceptance has been rightly contested, and faced with a global refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016 like none seen since World War II, societies and individuals continue to contest the painful inevitability of exile and instability—if not interdependency. Readers notice the vast array of cultural and textual influences within a substantial body of work—novels, plays, poems, theoretical works, films, and paintings—produced by these authors whose commonality rests in their Chinese birth, their French residency, the preponderance of texts written in the language of their adopted homeland, and their literary acclaim. While it may be impossible for these writers to eliminate the East and West dichotomy, Sten Pultz Moslund suggests that the critical reengagement with existing literary discourses as shown in this dissertation may allow a writer “not to fuse these poles in a transcendentally balanced third space but to make them enter into an asymmetric dialectic in which each side of the binary is contaminated by the other” (14). My close textual analysis—informed by Homi Bhabha’s ambitious and at times ambiguous conceptualization of a productive Third Space, Gayatri Spivak’s notions of borders and borderlessness, Rosi Braidotti’s work on nomadic subjectivities, and Julia Kristeva’s coining of the term “intertextuality”—has demonstrated this dialectical inter-reliance in the ongoing construction of a dialogue among disparate elements that exploit literal and figurative borders.
and often transform the elements of long-held binaries. Each of these writers in his or her own way has cultivated a narrative practice—often inclined toward counternarration, contestation, errance, and flight—and articulated elements of new transnational subjectivities in the fissures between national cultures in ways that call forth the multiple dimensions of their experiences and imaginations, set aside the guise of an absolute subjectivity based on the nation-state, and subverted emphases on a singular culture in favor of a decentered subjectivity, constructed by all four writers in those peripheral spaces of growing importance in the Chinese literary sphere.

In this dissertation, I have shown how the writings of Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa can be conceptualized using the notion of an enunciative transnational Third Space, introduced by Bhabha in The Location of Culture. Bhabha’s theories have encountered significant consideration, expansion, addition of greater specificity, and at times necessary challenges, in ways that I have included here, to enrich the understanding of these transnational writers. Edward W. Soja, Benita Parry, Julia Lossau, Karin Ikas, Gerhard Wagner, Frank Schulze-Engler, and others have published works that acknowledge the emergence of different subjectivities beyond those elucidated by Bhabha. The scope of this expansion in consideration of Third Space theory is indeed broad and interdisciplinary, calling on the work of scholars in the multiple fields of literature, cultural studies, geography, history, postcolonial studies, and the social sciences. This dissertation shows some of the ways in which, in advancing counternarratives, theorists move beyond a perceived celebration of the migrant experience that dangerously discounts the adversity of those who suffer in exile. They consider instead issues of justice and human rights, drawing attention to the need to embrace multiple subjectivities found in the works of writers, such as Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa, who articulate rather than extol narratives rife with hardship and persecution along with experiences of pleasure. Soja, for example, writes:
Thirdspace is a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other; where one can be Marxist and post-Marxist, materialist and idealist, structuralist and humanist, disciplined and transdisciplinary at the same time. Thirdspace is rooted in just such a recombinational and radically open perspective. (“Thirdspace” 50)

Difference becomes a powerful modality of social construction, and exilic or emergent voices, such as those studied here, can be viewed through this lens. I have concluded that for the writers studied here, the most applicable theories are those that gravitate away from rigid constructions of subjectivities, and, to borrow from Julia Lossau and Donna Haraway, that simply allow existing ones to be held in tension and at times to be transformed with fluidity, that transgress the limitations of tightly bound narratives. They seem preferable to me to those that center on hybridity, a term I have intentionally steered away from to avoid its emphasis on unification, grafting of disparate subjectivities into one through amalgamation, assimilation, and merger. 172

Beyond consideration of the native and transnational so-called Chineseness of these four writers, I have chosen theorists who have critiqued the Eurocentricity that dominated the intellectual world for millennia and drawn on the ideas of “normalized” knowledge and nation-states as disciplinary powers, which also affects the aforementioned transcultural writers’ narratives. In outlining Bhabha’s theory of the Third Space, which I’ve used here to situate the narratives of these four authors, one can conclude that one of its central elements, which is expanded by others, is that it is not enough to merely honor fragmentation or the deconstruction of “grand narratives,” including the Eurocentrism that these Francophone-Chinese writers consider directly

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and indirectly in their works, whether in Dai’s use of Balzac or Gao’s experimental expansion on Western modernism and avant-garde theater. Rather, writers must find ways to simultaneously acknowledge and respond to the limitations of such ethnocentric notions, seeing them as boundaries or starting lines that open onto a range of dissonant voices and histories, a new literary space where these voices are freer—or at least less forcibly bound by national and cultural discourses—to create new meaning. Rather than using this contact zone between cultures to reinforce and strengthen boundaries, this space emerges as the site of narratives that engage in a productive process of reconceptualization, the type of work undertaken by Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa. Alluding to an imagined, rather than literal, space, Edward W. Soja has said that such an approach “urges spatial thinkers to set aside the demands to make an either/or choice and contemplate instead the possibility of a both/and also logic, one that not only permits but encourages a creative combination of postmodernist and modernist perspectives . . .” (“Thirdspace” 50). Furthermore, I conclude that it is accurate to say that critical omissions hamper Bhabha’s legacy of Third Space theory. He leaves his notion ambiguous, laden with “fleeting allusions” and “improbable juxtapositions” (Parry 56-57); however, its value rests in the ways in which he rethinks culture with an emphasis on the heterogeneity of subjectivities, and their not-insignificant separation from their ties to cultures and nations. His notions are viewed critically because they are seen as a callous celebration of what, for many of the millions of displaced people and inhabitants of former colonies, can entail a profound loss of home or culture and identity. To be seen as celebrating the migrant minimizes suffering, and the avoidance of nuanced discussion of class, gender, and racial biases shows Bhabha at times to be a “privileged postcolonial,” who is “prone to denigrate affiliations to class, ethnicity, and emergent nation-states” and can overlook the resistance of exploited people as well as laborers
Such criticisms are valid, and those who have taken Bhabha’s notions further aid in the understanding of authors whose flights, suffering, and fears experienced in their homeland, in transit, and abroad are not insignificant despite their intellectual and privileged status as international literary figures. One may conclude that the fact that Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa are not such laborers, having found success and acceptance in Europe, does not make the criticism less valid. However, the process of “unhoming,” or leaving one’s home if not remaining in a homeless or nationless state that is present to a significant extent in fiction today is integral to their own legacies (Bhabha, “The World” 445).

In this study and through its theoretical and literary considerations, I have found a predominant valorization of the unresolved tension that exists in transnational subjectivities, in threads of culture rather than entire cultures, in individual agency and artistic creation, in contestation and conflict, and in the awareness of instability and difference—not to be confused with a valorization of that instability, which is not present. One can best visualize many of these elements that permeate the works of the Francophone-Chinese writers again in one of Gao’s earliest plays, L’Autre rive (1986), in which the actors, connected by a rope, drag each other and other times drive each other. To expand on the discussion of this play found in Chapter Three of this dissertation, I conclude here that the play focuses on eliciting confusion about who is revolving around whom, who is causing the rotation, whether the actors are acting with agency or being controlled by the others, who is dominant and has control, a confusion that carries beyond the game as metaphor into a profoundly sobering moment in which mob-mentality turns into a struggle for domination that results in a woman’s murder. Actors on the stage become ensnared, entangled, dominated by others and lose their agency, the true danger Gao illuminates throughout his works. The actors in L’Autre rive separate, alternating intimacy and exclusion,
congregation and fragmentation. However, the emphasis is on the point of connection and interdependency; when one is being pulled, the other is also being held back, as Gao says, unable to escape each other, and the impossibility of escape from the connection of differently constructed subjectivities permeates his other works, such as his Tiananmen Square-inspired play *La Fuite*. The imagery that goes beyond the binary tug-of-war metaphor toward exploration of problems of interconnectedness, tension, and instability between cultures and individuals pervades Francophone-Chinese literary works beyond Gao’s works with their extreme and controversial emphasis on maintaining one’s individualism in the face of these overpowering global and local influences. These forces include the simultaneous pull of Europe and China for Cheng’s protagonist Tianyi in *Le Dit de Tianyi* (1998); the fated, fatal love affair between a Japanese soldier and Chinese girl during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) in Sa’s novel *La Joueuse de go* (2001); and the tension created by possession of banned Western books in rural China during the Cultural Revolution in Dai’s *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (2000). Furthermore, Gao excels at conveying the theme of multiple, interconnected perspectives in the work for which he is most regarded, his voluminous novel, *La Montagne de l’âme* (1990 in Chinese, 1995 in French), which explores the ways in which the self is easily forgotten and subsumed under the pull of many external forces, categorical imperatives, concerns of others, and historical pressures. The protagonist designated as “I” is the focus of Gao’s semiautobiographical novel, which at its heart explores the search for and construction of the self beneath the layers of external forces. One who enters the narrative becomes “you,” regarded from the vantage of the self. Or the “you” is “I” viewed from the other’s perspective. The “he” is found in abundance as the other, and the crowd of others with their crowd mentalities subsumes the “I” and “you,” pushing them into a secondary position. The self that is easily forgotten is
resurrected by the narrator—as by all four authors studied in this dissertation. I conclude that Gao does not resolve the tension in crossing the borders of these disparate perspectives but allows them to exist simultaneously within the constructed subjectivity of the self. “Je peux seulement écrire un livre sur ‘moi,’ sans m’occuper de savoir s’il paraîtra,” Gao writes (417). The strains inherent in the consciousness of otherness allow one to value the individual’s experience of otherness, even as these writers explore long-festering sites of exclusion and resistance.

I conclude that each of these authors put forth a call for individuals to both challenge and resist the forces that deny their agency and to assume their agency—the capacity to act and to find a site of enunciation—wherever and whenever they can, whether it is in a hidden warehouse as in Gao’s Tiananmen Square play La Fuite (1992) or in the journal writing depicted in Cheng’s Le Dit de Tianyi and Sa’s Porte de la Paix céleste (1997) or in the hidden readings of Balzac and others spoken aloud and inscribed on the inside of a sheepskin jacket in Dai’s Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise. To do so is to find different modes of communication and voices, from the poetry of Cheng and novels of Dai and Sa to the avant-garde experimentalism of Gao explored in Chapter Three. The challenge of assuming agency is depicted in societies often marked by pressure to conform, by conflict and oppression, and by differences of education and class that reach far beyond the censorship in China that is frequently referenced by Gao, Dai, and others who have chosen to pursue their literary trajectory outside of Mainland China. However, I would conclude that this dissertation is not an attempt to valorize Europe, despite strains in the works of all four writers that do value their European experience. Dai’s novels—Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise and Le Complexe de Di—go beyond the superficial valorization of Western works to point out class struggles, class consciousness, issues of poverty, gender issues and
stereotypes, emphasis on heteronormative sexualities, and other issues that trouble the West beneath notions of liberty and equality. Agency is difficult, dangerous, and at times destructive for the authors’ protagonists to assume in the many cultures depicted in their works—in Sa’s tale of the Empress Wu (624-705) during the Tang dynasty (618-907) in her novel Impératrice (2003); in the imprisonment of the protagonist’s lover Tumchooq in Japan in Dai’s Par une nuit où la lune ne s’est pas levée (2007); and in the struggles of lovers from different classes in Cheng’s L’Éternité n’est pas de trop (2002); or in the deaths of two lovers from two nations at war in Sa’s La Joueuse de go (2001). The tensions explored throughout this study are highlighted in the friction between silence and voice in many of the four authors’ works. The commonality at the heart of this study is that Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa have found their voice(s) in French and publication not just in France but throughout Asia, too, as described in the Introduction to this dissertation, attracted by the freedom to write their works, cultivate their intellectual and academic ties, and reside in a nation that does not impede their ability to publish. Many other writers and artists in exile from China—and also dissidents residing in Mainland China—have done the same, publishing books through overseas publishing houses or articles and essays on the Internet, and have portrayed this tension between agency and oppression, voice and silence in their works as well. Another overseas Chinese writer, Ha Jin, who has written novels such as Waiting (2000), War Trash (2005), and A Map of Betrayal (2014), has described this search for a voice, choosing to write in English to survive in his adopted home, initially writing about China and then about other subjects, including noteworthy depictions of the difficult Chinese immigrant experience. Jin had found himself in the United States when the Tiananmen Square massacre occurred in 1989, a tragedy that he said he knew would permanently change his life. Having served for more than five years as a PLA soldier, he says that he saw the principle of
serving and protecting betrayed by “the gunfire, the carnage, and the bald-faced lies afterward . . . As a result, a part of my reference frame collapsed” (Jin, “Exiled to English” 118). Instead, he opted to follow in the tradition of those expatriate writers who “found their destinies in their adopted language” (120). Jin writes:

What I attempted to do was just follow the path they had opened . . . This desire to enter a new territory—to arrive somewhere—is in part related to my choice of writing in English. Writers of my situation exist in a margin between two languages and two cultures, so we have to become our own monuments—if we do not produce a body of significant works, we cannot claim our existence in either language. We can easily be diminished and even crushed by the forces projected from the centers. Just the isolation alone is potent enough to erase most of us.

Therefore, the pressure of survival is a constant presence to us. (120-21)

However, as Jin points out, those voices are sometimes silenced. Gao highlights silence throughout his body of work, at times a place of pain similar to that described by Jin, at other times a place of incomprehensibility and an absence of connection or communication, and at still other times, a place of peace discovered on the margins of tumult.

The most pervasive silence that is touched on throughout this study is that of censorship. Among a group of writers committed to agency and voice, both the difficulty several of these writers have had in being published in China and the narratives within their texts that involve censorship and oppression point to the severity of that human rights issue. China continues to be a country with a long history of silencing unpopular voices, styles, or positions seen as expressing opposition to the CCP. Both Gao in Le Livre d’un homme seul and Dai in Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise, depict the censorship during the Cultural Revolution and threat of
denunciation for possessing banned texts or having one’s own writing scrutinized and found objectionable. Cheng in *Le Dit de Tianyi* and Sa in *Porte de la Paix céleste* allude to both the hardships and silencing in events stretching from the 1960s through the 1980s. Dai’s subsequent novel, *Le Complexe de Di*, illustrates both the questionable possession and difficulty of sharing Western ideas from Freud and Lacan as late as the dawn of the new millennium. However, Dai’s intertextuality, a term coined by Francophone theorist Julia Kristeva, expertly demonstrates the transformative powers of literature, when shared, rather than a strict conveyance of Western ideas *in toto* or absolute acceptance of such notions that have unpredictable outcomes. I conclude that the reader does not fully know if Dai’s particular choice of authors—such as Balzac with notions of class consciousness embedded in *La Comédie humaine* and further explored in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Marxist philosophers such as Georg Lukács and Friedrich Engels (discussed in Chapter Two), and Romain Rolland, lauded in 1915 upon receipt of the Nobel Prize for his “lofty idealism,” “love of truth,” and celebration of the power of the individual—represent a deliberate choice based on the ideals embedded in the novels. Or are they just a matter of the books one had access to, albeit in hiding, during Dai’s own time being re-educated in the Chinese countryside and described in his semiautobiographical novel, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*? Writers from the Chinese diaspora generally succeed in drawing attention to issues of censorship that still exist in China. Eva Pils, writing in *China’s Human Rights Lawyers: Advocacy and Resistance*, says that the Chinese government has many means by which to restrict “the freedom of thought, conscience and expression [which] include administrative censorship and the criminalisation of certain kinds of speech and religious manifestation.” She states:
Crimes used to curb the right to free speech include social order crimes such as “creating a disturbance,” State secret crimes, the crimes of subversion and inciting subversion, the crime of defamation and of obscenity . . . Censorship beneath the level of criminalisation potentially affects all areas of professional, social and political life. (75)

While the state sees such censorship as necessary to promote harmony and “stability preservation” and has blocked judicial complaints against censorship, others, including Pils, see the preoccupation with social and political censorship as “paternalistic” and the practice of suppressing ideas deemed wrong to enforce “correct political thought” as a harmful violation of human rights that encourages many to maintain a “double life” or flee (76). Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa each have numerous portrayals of characters leading that type of double life and those who ultimately flee that oppression support a call for the world, in all its global interconnectedness, to consider its role in such censorship. 173

I have found in this study that Dai’s intertextuality promotes the transmission of counternarratives, multiple narratives that voice opposition to the “grand narratives” or “master narratives,” a term coined by Jean-François Lyotard in 1984 for those narratives that universalize

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173 The formerly imprisoned Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, who currently resides in Germany, drew attention to this interconnectedness and the power of voice in 2015 when Denmark’s LEGO Group toymaker refused to provide him with the ubiquitous plastic bricks, its spokesperson saying “we refrain—on a global level—from actively engaging in or endorsing the use of LEGO bricks in projects or contests of a political agenda” (Ford). Ai accused the company of censorship and discrimination and suggested that LEGO was trying to protect its business interests in China where a new factory is being built, where plans are underway to establish an Asian distribution center in Shanghai, and where a LEGOlhand Park will soon open. China is LEGO’s fastest growing segment of the global market. Individuals donated LEGO bricks, and Ai created portraits of fellow dissidents with the bricks, posting them on Instagram. In January 2016, LEGO reversed its decision and will sell the bricks regardless of intent, only asking that the individuals make clear in any public exhibition that LEGO does not endorse or support the project (“LEGO Changes”).

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and sustain dominant groups to the exclusion of marginalized groups (Stanley 14). One can conclude that these Francophone-Chinese writers indeed create counternarratives, both those that have become more culturally accepted in China and abroad, such as the “scar literature” and “sent-down youth literature” explored in Chapter Two, literature that emerged after the end of China’s Cultural Revolution and portrayed the tribulations and horrors of that time, and the counternarratives that still remain controversial within China and abroad, including those in Gao’s play *La Fuite*, which evokes the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square and provides a voice on stage both to those young pro-democracy demonstrators and to those who found the protesters’ actions naïve and wrong-headed. As Christine A. Stanley writes, counternarratives provide “multiple and conflicting models of understanding social and cultural identities” and challenge those cultures that are seen as “normative and authoritative” (14). The tension between those dominant forces and the more subversive ones are prevalent in many of these literary works, including those concerned with the 1989 Tiananman Square incident, Gao’s play and Shan Sa’s novel *Porte de la Paix céleste*. In much postcolonial theory, the locus of many of Bhabha’s and Spivak’s ideas used in this dissertation, the study of a chronological shift in dominance and colonially-based experiences of power relations are the primary focus of the exploration of literary narratives. However, I would conclude that China’s experiences with Western imperialism were dramatically different and do not fit a strict postcolonial interpretation, which restricts their applicability in viewing the Francophone Second World—those communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and Asia from which writers immigrated—through the limited lens of postcolonial writers. In embracing the creation of counternarratives, Bhabha borrows the words of the controversial Polish-British transnational writer Joseph Conrad that “[t]here is not a place of splendor or a dark corner of the earth that
does not deserve if only a passing glance of wonder and pity” to inform his postcolonial perspective and to broaden the dialogue, despite Conrad’s racist undertones worthy of criticism. Bhabha flips Conrad’s notion on its head and expands it in the following way:

It is when the western nation comes to be seen, in Conrad’s famous phrase, as one of the dark corners of the earth, that we can begin to explore new places from which to write histories of peoples and construct theories of narration. Each time the question of cultural difference emerges as a challenge to relativistic notions of the diversity of culture, it reveals the margins of modernity. (Bhabha, Nation 6)

While the postcolonial lens does not fit precisely, the call for alternative narratives is productively applied to writers such as those considered here who separate themselves, particularly in the case of Gao, from the notion of narrativity as tied to the state apparatus and its ideologies, be they those of China or France or the United States, where sponsors asked him to reconsider and revise his Tiananmen play, La Fuite—an offer he strongly rejected. For that reason, such counternarratives take one to another location, a space of social imaginary. The struggles in the texts I have studied here are not counternarratives against Eurocentrism but against oppressive forces, both those linked to China’s nation-state apparatus and those that are more abstract, such as ideologies, desires, and communal impetuses, forces that can diminish one’s freedom and one’s voice, wherever they are found.

One can conclude that a vast history of literary texts—for lack of a better lexicon, from East and West—influence such transnational writers, and those referents deserve further study than what I have considered in Chapters Two, Three, and Four with allusions to Balzac, Freud, Beckett, Sartre, and the gatha of Huineng. All four of the Francophone-Chinese writers studied call on a vast international opus in their own works to create new narratives, bold
transformations that come out of an unwillingness to let earlier voices be muted. I would conclude that each of the writers aptly plays on Bakhtin’s notion that “[t]here is no utterance without relation to other utterances” (*The Dialogic Principle* 60). Bhabha states that meaning is never simply mimetic, and intertextuality, which Julia Kristeva considered an “intervention of external plurality” assists in the creation of multiple subjectivities (*Interviews* 189). Kristeva calls this the speaking of a “‘subject in process,’ which makes possible my attempt to articulate as precise a logic as possible between identity or unity, the challenge to this identity and even its reduction to zero, the moment of crisis, of emptiness, and then the reconstitution of a new, plural identity” and draws on “fragments of character, or fragments of ideology, or fragments of representation” (190). Chapter Two explores this through the use of Western works by Dai Sijie, showing the transformation of both Ma and Luo, the two young men sent to Phoenix Mountain for “re-education” during the Cultural Revolution, but most powerfully the transformation of the young seamstress whom Ma and Luo admire as she discovers her beauty and her agency through her reading of the European texts and leaves the village to find her future, albeit an uncertain one. Dai’s text echoes George Bernard Shaw’s play *Pygmalion* but provides new signification with the story set in the Cultural Revolution, with the issues of social class resting heavily between the re-educated youth and the almost completely illiterate seamstress, and with the removal of the imperative of marriage and the emphasis on female agency, albeit with a more uncertain and precarious future for the seamstress than the educated male protagonists. Similarly, Dai tackles works by Freud and Lacan and the Oedipus complex in his novel *Le Complexe de Di*. I would assert that Gao advances the use of intertextuality to highlight symbolically the junctures of thought. Gao uses the Sixth Patriarch of Zen Buddhism Huineng’s most famous *gatha*, a short, metered poem derived from Indian literature and Sanskrit but also prevalent in Zen Buddhist
practices, to explore the image of the threshold, where the mirror and the reflected image meet in a dusty liminal space, a space that produces a new, imperfect, and altered image. The self-avowed atheist Gao, certainly a controversial figure in his own right for reasons mentioned above, selected the *gatha* of Huineng, a similarly controversial figure who was criticized as “reactionary” by the Communist Party and advocated for a subjective rather than objective reality, advocating for the “everyman” over the elite in many circumstances. Other writers mentioned in this study reference Eastern and Western texts in their own exploration of subjectivity. Cheng draws on the many Eastern writers in his novels and his scholarly works to show the asynchronous nature of knowledge and the junctures of fields of creative knowledge explored by all four writers studied here. Cheng has collected poetry from the Tang dynasty (618-907) and the Song dynasty (960-1279) and drawn their influences into his own work. He writes:

> Au point que la poésie, en liaison avec la calligraphie et la peinture—appelées en Chine la Triple-Excellence—devient l’expression la plus haute de la spiritualité chinoise. On sait que cette spiritualité s’est nourrie de trois courants de pensée: le taoïsme, le confucianisme et le bouddhisme. À la fois opposés et complémentaires, s’interpénétrant sans cesse, ceux-ci contribuent à féconder la pensée chinoise en la douant d’un regard multiple et en l’empêchant de demeurer univoque et figée. (Cheng, *Entre Source* 12)

Cheng calls on Chinese letters, poetry in particular, to continue to reinvent itself. He says it is reinvented in ways that are assisted through encounters with different poetic and artistic traditions. “La poésie est, nous l’avons dit, appel au secours et recherche de communion,” Cheng wrote in *Entre source et nuage: Voix de poètes dans la Chine d’hier et d’aujourd’hui* (1990).
“Notre cheminement, pour solitaire qu’il soit, est semé de rencontres de partages” (17).

Furthermore, Shan Sa draws on an abundance of Chinese cultural references, including the chess-like game of go and also numerous Japanese texts in her novel *La Joueuse de go* (2001), a Romeo-and-Juliet-themed love story between a Chinese girl and a Japanese soldier set during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Sa uses references to the role of Kyogen, the comedic performers who appear between the two acts of plays in the Japanese Noh theater, as the Japanese captain encourages his men to make jokes about him and he plays the part of the Kyogen. Noh transformed over time into a serious theatrical form that includes song and dance, while the Kyogen interlude focused on comedy and includes “supplementary dialogue or meta-dialogue, often alluding to other tales, including classical texts, such as the Tale of Genji, and further contrasts with the Noh theater by depicting an everyday world as opposed to the Noh’s emphasis on other-worldly realms and dreams (Shirane 1042-43). Sa quotes from *The Golden Island*, a Noh play by Zeami (1363-1444), a Japanese actor and playwright credited with perfecting the theatrical form as it’s known today. The forms are linked and the meaning emerges between the two. Sa also references poems from *The Words of Heiji*, a sixteenth-century Japanese novel, literary sources that provoke the Japanese soldier who is the protagonist to situate himself in between life and death and ask himself who we are. The soldier also cites the *Hagakure*, a code of conduct for samurais, written by Jocho Yamamoto (1659-1719), mentioning the text as a beacon of light that guided the cadet through his adolescent years, preparing himself for a life without love or family, and for his inevitable warrior’s death, a life and death he

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174 Sa’s equanimous treatment of Japanese texts and history is noteworthy in light of the historical enmity and conflict between China and Japan. Sa maintained a long friendship with the painter Balthus and his Japanese wife, the artist Setsuko, and their daughter Harumi, and worked as an assistant to the two painters in Switzerland in the 1990s. From 1994 to 1996, she organized exhibitions of Balthus work in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Beijing, while writing *Porte de la Paix céleste*. 

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inevitably questions. In contrast with Dai’s intertextual use of Western works, Chen’s more scholarly form and Sa’s popular novels rely on the beauty of Chinese literary works from earlier eras to show cultural attachment and ground the ideas of the author and his characters, while Sa uses many Japanese texts to develop her Japanese character, who falls in love with a Chinese girl while he is disguised as a Chinese man.

I would conclude that a subjectivity explored by all four writers—Cheng, Gao, Dai, and Sa—is that of flight, using it to denote the literal exile, the swimmer off shore, the soaring bird, and the rebel in hiding, a notion that is not exactly celebrated but in which the simultaneous experiences of pain, freedom, fear, and loss register on the periphery of a society. Some theorists, such as Julia Lossau and Edward W. Soja, express this transnational subjectivity which one can discern in the works of the Francophone-Chinese writers studied here, in terms drawn from both cultural studies and from geographical or spatial constructs, depicting the narrative spaces as peripheral or ex-centric ones, to use Linda Hutcheon’s term. This ex-centricity percolates through the texts of these writers, replete with images of flight and concealment. Indeed, Sinophone scholars such as David Der-wei Wang, Shu-mei Shih, and Arthur Sze situate Gao specifically at the periphery of the Sinophone world, residing in France and writing in both French and Chinese. Gungwu Wang, a scholar in Singapore who writes extensively on the overseas Chinese and the Sinophone diaspora, calls for a close look at “the context of place and practice” in literature (“Chineseness” 131). The writers do situate themselves in a liminal space in which they—and importantly, their narratives—are transformed by contact with their place of birth, the many places along their route, and their residence in France. For the writers themselves, numerous scholars help to further situate their flourishing ex-centric positionality, which transcends narratives about China to incorporate diverse themes. Wei-ming Tu writes,
“The impression that the overall cultural orientation of Chinese settlers has been shaped predominantly by the magnetic power of the homeland is simplistic” (“Cultural China” 152). While these writers do write about China for a Western audience in some of their works, the picture is more complex with publication throughout Asia, primarily from publishing houses in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and texts that treat motifs unrelated to China, such as Gao’s play *Quatre quatuors pour un week-end*, studied in Chapter Three of this dissertation, and other avant-garde plays. Indeed, some, such as Dai Sijie, have maintained more of what Wang Gungwu calls a “sojourner mentality”—a mentality explored well by François Cheng in *Le Dit de Tianyi* and by Gao in *La Montagne de l’âme*—with Dai maintaining his Chinese citizenship and hoping, at times, to return to China. Others have taken on a full sense of emigration, acquiring French citizenship, as in the case of Cheng, Gao, and Sa, and seeking political asylum, as Gao did. One could add the small number of Chinese natives living and writing in France to the following remarks from Tu Wei-ming. Speaking of the high level of immigration in particular to America and Australia, he writes:

> The exodus of the most brilliant minds from the Mainland, the emigration of Chinese professionals from Hong Kong, the remigration of middle-class Chinese from Southeast Asia . . . suggest that it is neither shameful nor regrettable to alienate oneself voluntarily from a political regime that has become culturally insensitive, publicly unaccountable, and oppressive to basic human rights. The meaning of being Chinese is basically not a political question; it is a human concern . . . (“Cultural China” 155).

Due to the transnational status of living in diaspora, a theme explored in the narrative works of many Chinese authors, Tu suggests that “[w]hile the overseas Chinese . . . may seem forever
peripheral to the meaning of being Chinese, . . . they assume an effective role in creatively constructing a new vision of Chineseness that is more in tune with Chinese history and in sympathetic resonance with Chinese culture,” adding their literary narratives to the rich fabric of provocative interrogation of transnational subjectivity, formed through their own border crossings (“Cultural China” 155). Their presence in the Francophone world and literary corpus enriches that sphere as well.

It would be easy to conclude from the long list of prizes and prestigious posts awarded to the four Francophone-Chinese writers studied here that success comes easily; however, that is not the case for most individuals in exile. Certainly, all four of these authors have found literary success and experienced professional and social acceptance in Europe, and have spoken of the sense of liberation that is not guaranteed for all who live in exile. In fact, in the stories of recent refugee arrivals on European shores and elsewhere, that is most often not the case. Writing on diaspora and transnationalism, Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini, state that Chinese transnationalism involves complex relation involving many nation-states, capitalism, ethnicity, class, identity, politics, and ethnics, which could not be fully addressed in this dissertation but which deserve further study with regard to China and other countries of origin of those who now live in exile, if they are fortunate to have arrived safely on new shores. I conclude, using Ong and Nonini’s words, that “there is nothing intrinsically liberating about diasporic cultures” (325). Even such self-celebration that is advocated or undertaken may come with burdens ranging

175 The artist Ai Weiwei, whose conflict with Lego was mentioned earlier in this Conclusion, created a five-column art installation at Berlin’s Konzerthaus, the central concert hall, which displayed 14,000 lifejackets from refugees who had traveled from Turkey to Greece, crossing the Mediterranean Sea to arrive on the island of Lesbos, visually illuminating the dangers many face in fleeing their homelands and oppression. Ai has stated that he hopes the installation will draw attention to the issue, as well as the hundreds who have lost their lives making the same journey (Sierzputowski).
beyond the purely economic and social ones to coping with the myth of “Chinese exceptionalism” or xenophobia, as Ong and Nonini point out. Belinda Kong also captures the dangerous “distress and rescue” mythology with failed so-called dissidents being welcomed into the folds of Western democracies “effectively effacing difference in the name of dissidence” (38). The flip side of the coin of liberation both within Asia and beyond is replete with narratives of the plight of factory workers and sweatshop laborers, female sex workers, and individuals living in debased conditions and being subjected to “coercive working conditions” (Ong and Nonini 326). Readers may wonder, after Dai’s rural seamstress has fled her remote village in his novel *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* what type of future Dai envisioned for his protagonist, whether she would have landed work as a factory girl or worse. Many stories—both Dai’s and those Kong describes from the Western media—end before that story unfolds. Nonetheless, possibilities remain in the unachieved promises, whose traces remain in the term “transnationalism,” promises ripe with the possibilities of “negotiating democracies that cut across gender, class, racial, ethnic, and national divisions” (Ong and Nonini 330).

I would conclude that each of the writers inhabits and depicts this transnational ex-centrism differently, but in a way that challenges the hegemony of the center. Supplementing the notion expressed by David Der-wei Wang that the margins are no longer marginal for Chinese writers, Linda Hutcheon, in “Decentering the Postmodern: The Ex-centric” suggests that the center is not a true center, that that idea of centrism has become a “truism” and has become instead “a fiction of order and unity that postmodern art and theory continue to exploit and subvert” (60). The existence of the plethora of diasporic writers and their texts indeed support this notion despite the growing emphasis on borders in response to the 2015-2016 refugee crisis. Journalist Brendon Hong writes of the protests that occur frequently in China in ex-centric
spaces—municipalities ranging from Shaoxing, Yanjiao, Baoji, Huazhou, and Jingling in November 2015 to Wuhan, Changde, and Dalian in January 2016—rather than in Tiananmen Square. “Across China, small-scale protests, with dozens or a few hundred people in attendance, take place frequently,” Hong writes. “They may not have the staying power of last year’s Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, or the intensity of the anti-Japan riots from three years ago, but they happen just about every day, and they’re not about to go away.” Furthermore, the fictional literary texts of the ex-centric spaces takes many forms, be they institutional or otherwise, Hutcheon states. Cheng adds to this position and describes the dialogic nature of this ex-centricity in Le Dialogue, and explores its roots in Asian thought in the Taoist notion of the Yin, the Yang, and the Middle Way, as well as the spaciousness of that in-between space that he designates as “entre” and in the intervening breath of the Middle Way, which draws its power from the original void and is at once transformative, fecund, and evanescent. In his novel Le Dit de Tianyi, Cheng has captured the many ex-centric spaces of the transnational wanderer in the form of his protagonist Tianyi, whose travels between China and Europe and back again span from the 1930s through 1968 at the time of the Cultural Revolution. The title of his work evokes the speech act that is crucial in Bhabha’s conception of a Third Space, as one of enunciation of difference and multiple subjectivities. In the closing chapter of Cheng’s novel, the narrator returns after the long memoir to state that “[p]uisque, lui, Tianyi avait appris la vie par un corps d’emprunt, l’heure est venue pour lui de l’apprendre par lui-même” (442). Cheng points to the element of Tianyi’s story of going to France and returning to much suffering that involves a subjectivity of waiting. “En attendant,” the narrator states, “il suffit au témoin qui n’a plus rien, à perdre, toutes larmes ravalées, de ne pas lâcher la plume, de ne pas interrompre le cours du fleuve” (443). Cheng’s narrator questions the reality, citing the mixture of happenings with
dreams, longings, hopes, and dreads, particularly those where the three protagonists meet with their own differing subjectivities. He also captures the agency of his protagonists, who have been buffeted by the forces of others and of history, in writing that the breath will return, much like the river, where it wishes and when it wishes. The ex-centric subjectivity sees forces other than the dominant ones at play and questions both the dominant and peripheral. However, much like Gao’s controversial characters in *La Fuite* who both interrogate the power and violence of the CCP and the naïveté of the pro-democracy students at Tiananmen Square, this author who embraces individualism, would disagree with Azade Seyhan, who writes in *Writing Outside the Nation*, that “any minor literature is inescapably the expression of a collectivity in all its agreements and conflicts” (28). The ex-centric spaces created do not form a collective, but a diversity of voices, authors, and perspectives. Ex-centric spaces do imply a sense of exile, to varying degrees both coerced and chosen. As Seyhan writes, such writers do the following:

> Writers of exile often endeavor to reclaim and preserve cultural legacies destroyed and erased in their own countries by oppressive regimes. Intellectual goods are smuggled across borders and transplanted in foreign soil. However, their reinscription often takes the form of a negotiation between groups in exile.

(28)

One must be clear: The writers studied in this dissertation do not comprise a coherent community, although they tackle common themes, and it is essential to see their voices as part of the “un-homeliness” that Bhabha describes in *The Location of Culture* without going to the extent to which Bhabha—and Gao perhaps to an even greater extent—praises the ex-centric or migrant’s position of unbelonging, which can limit agency, connection, and the mechanisms available to be a force of change. In considering ex-centricity, one must remain mindful of the
real problems that critics of Bhabha have pointed out that come with the reading of transnational literature. One of those critics, Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, points out the danger of “celebrating the condition of migrancy and the ‘exhuberance of immigration’” while summarizing the words of Bharanti Mukherjee who “has bemoaned the loss of authenticity and the tendency toward stereotyping in the expatriates’ vision of their native countries” (308). Both critics, Mukherjee and Schmidt-Haberkamp, advocate for “thick description,” for not being seduced by the exotic. At times, the authors, their protagonists, and the readers fall prey to that seduction, further emphasizing the need for the distanced, ex-centric subjectivities. One might add that Mukherjee and Schmidt-Haberkamp advocate an analysis that, while touching on points that are often prone to stereotyping such as discussion of censorship in China or the violence of the 1989 uprising, go beyond the surface for a deeper analysis that shows the conflicts and the unpredictable transformations that Gao and Dai capture so well in their work.

In conclusion, exploration of the creative space in which diverse voices emerge must draw attention beyond this narrow group of four Francophone-Chinese writers residing and writing in France to Chinese-born writers working in other languages, in ex-centric spaces within China and abroad, and to those in the visual arts who metaphorically tackle similar boundary-crossing endeavors. Belinda Kong writes of Gao’s La Fuite, but also points to other writers, such as Ha Jin, whom Kong terms a writer of “political rather than cultural Chineseness and a critic of totalitarian power, but one whose vision is saturated with an aesthetic of diasporic witnessing and trauma” (86). Jin’s rising fame in the United States came in the decade between the two noteworthy Chinese Nobel Prizes, Gao’s receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000 and Liu Xiaobo’s receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, and Kong paints Jin in contrast to Gao. Jin’s work, unlike Gao’s, falls more neatly into what Kong says Western readers and institutions
unreasonably expect from such Chinese transnational writers: an enthusiastic willingness to criticize the CCP and the Chinese government and to embrace Western liberal establishments. “[U]nlike most academics,” Jin said in one interview, “I do believe in universals and that there is truth that transcends borders and times” (qtd. in Zhou 274; Kong 91). Other writers, such as Anchee Minn, who lives in California but maintains a second home in Shanghai, came to prominence in 1994, and has published two memoirs, including *Red Azalea*, which details her experiences during the Cultural Revolution and her nascent distrust of Maoism, along with six historical novels. Minn has said that her books are attempts to re-record parts of history that have been falsely told. “If my own history is recorded falsely, how about other people?” she has asked (“Anchee Min”). Nubb describes her lastest book, *The Cooked Seed: A Memoir* as “a universal story, about moving forward until you find a path—or find you’ve been blazing one all along” (“The Cooked Seed”). The experimentalism in form that Gao sets forth—at time using referents, such as Chinese mythological characters, Eastern and Western traditions of dance and opera, Buddhist and Daoist historical figures, and Western playwrights such as Beckett and Brecht—opens the door to the many other works of literature by writers who straddle this transcultural, transnational territory and bring it to the stage and into book form. Those, like Gao, who bring it to the theater, have been considered by Bonnie Marranca in *Interculturalism & Performance* (1991) for the boundaries between spectacle, actor, and spectator that they blur, as well as for their border-crossing content. Marranca writes that some playwrights tend toward “formal experimentation and abstraction,” while others “declare themselves for a politically-engaged, popular theatre” (14). Both types, Marranca states, often take for granted the social commitment of their works. Like Gao, Marranca sees that “[i]f interculturalism as a critical enterprise is to embrace more eclectic themes, European modernism should certainly be a point of departure,”
citing the long link between intercultural theater and the experimental, avant-garde movements, along with literary modernism (21). Considering notions of borrowing from tradition and experimentalism, the poet Lo Fu (b. 1928), born in Hunan and immigrating to Taiwan and then to Canada, captured the themes of intersection and flight well in his poem “Beyond the Fog”:

[The egret] spreads its wings and the universe follows, drifting upward

Dawn is a song, short and bright

Igniting itself in the fog

If the horizon line rises to bind you

It can only bind your wings, not your flight (11-15)

The poem imagines an egret reading Andre Gide’s *Les Nourritures Terrestres* (1895) in a rice paddy, circling a fixed point, wondering if it should pass into the fog or beyond the fog. The themes of spatiality, their limitations, and the unlimited flight of the imagination resonate there.

Lo has written, too, of the tension between tradition and literary innovation, which the four Francophone writers, particularly Gao, also address. Lo writes, “Literary tradition can only renew itself through innovation and not be clinging or returning to the past” (Sze 87). Having been accused of neoclassicism for his “early experiments with Western modernism,” Lo says that “[i]nnovation is my ultimate goal, the essence of what I am striving for” (91-93). Where transnational Chinese novelists, poets, playwrights, and those in the visual arts take this flight remains to be seen.

Beyond the scope of this study, it is worth future consideration of the ways in which all four writers also work in the visual and fine arts—Cheng as a calligrapher; Gao through ink painting and film; Dai in film; and Sa in painting and calligraphy. The art scene experienced a loosening of restrictions after the Cultural Revolution. Artists such as Ai Weiwei have faced
persecution and arrest before leaving China for other nations, such as Germany in Ai’s case. Most recently, on a rainy day in March 2016, Ai setup a white grand piano in a field on the Greek-Macedonian border populated by refugees whose route of entry had been barred by authorities. Citing it as an act of protest, Ai invited a Syrian refugee named Nour Al Khzam, on her way to join family in Germany, to play. Her performance, Ai said, “tells the world . . . art will overcome war” (“Syrian Refugee”).\(^{176}\) Ai’s act linked that of those displaced from China with the stories of other displaced people, many still en route or trapped in administrative limbo. Other artists have explored similar notions of the forces at work in the world, particularly at the state level, in the world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The artist Xu Bing (b. 1955) was interested in propaganda from the age of eleven onward. His father, chair of history at Beijing University, was persecuted as a political reactionary, and Xu was sent to a rural area for “re-education,” becoming one of the first students after the Central Academy of Fine Arts reopened in Beijing following the Cultural Revolution. Xu moved to the United States in 1990, but later returned to China, being named an honorary professor of CAFA in 2003 and vice president of CAFA in 2007. He is known for his installation, *A Case Study of Transference*, which exhibits videos of live pigs covered in text and mating at the Han Mo Arts Center and outdoors, to draw the “disjuncture between human culture and animal nature” (Erickson 85). By showing the indoor and outdoor animal videos on opposite walls, he “conveys the message that cultural influence goes both ways” (87). Another exhibit, called *Where Does the Dust Itself Collect?* includes words and dust gathered from the streets of New York after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Recently, another artist, Xu Yong, still residing in China, decided to

\(^{176}\) The video of Ai Weiwei bringing the piano to the Idomeni refugee camp and Nour Al Khzam playing it, can be viewed here: http://www.nbcnews.com/video/chinese-artist-ai-weiwei-brings-piano-for-syrian-refugee-to-play-643131459539
publish a book of photos—negative images printed from the twenty-six year old film—of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Bookstores in Mainland China are not selling the book *Negatives*, and even the artist had difficulty getting copies of the book, printed in Bönen, Germany, by the publisher Verlag Kettler for sale in Europe and the United States, and said to be published by New Century Press in Hong Kong for Asian distribution.\(^{177}\) Perry Link, a China expert at the University of California-Riverside, said, “The artist seems to be saying: ‘Here’s the reality that no one looks at squarely but that everyone knows is there’” (Jacobs). Gérard A. Goodrow, writing in Xu’s *Negatives*, compares the premise of the book, the reality of undoctored negatives, rather than a print once removed, to Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) in which the image on the other side of the glass is “frightening,” “topsy-turvy,” with even “the concept of reality called into question,” and yet the strange logic is thereby uncovered (Y. Xu). With Xu’s book, one needs only the invert-colors feature of an iPhone or other Apple product to reveal the true colors of the image, which shows the protesters, their signs, the square, the Goddess of Liberty, and only the final one showing a tank rolling into the square. Goodrow comments on the way Xu is demonstrating objectivity and subjectivity, the “filtered image of reality, seen and experienced by the very human photographer at a particular moment in time” (Y. Xu). The images were displayed at the Gimhae Arts Center’s Asian Independent Art exhibition site in South Korea in December 2014.

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\(^{177}\) Bao Pu, the publisher of New Century Press, wrote an opinion piece in the *South China Morning Post* in 2014, challenging the arrest by mainland Chinese authorities of fellow Hong Kong publisher Yiu Man-tin, allegedly to stop Yiu from publishing *Chinese Godfather: Xi Jinping* about China’s current president. After the disappearance of five Hong Kong publishers in recent months, the author of that book announced in January 2016 that publication of the book had been suspended. “[T]he difficulty of publishing political books in Hong Kong is already in the international spotlight [with] people in the industry . . . feeling great fear and pressure; they want to stay out of trouble so that they won’t be the next one [to disappear]” (Flood).
All of these writers and artists have embraced what Edward W. Soja calls “radical subjectivities” (*Thirdspace* 88). The construction of these subjectivities is different for each of the four writers, hence the starting point that essentializing Franco-Chineseness presents many dilemmas. To explore the writings of these authors is to enter a productive, intervening space in which narratives and subjectivities are constantly created and transformed. Cheng’s valorization of Chinese literature and culture while valuing his Frenchness stands out. His subjectivity echoes the words of some of the poets he has translated, such as Du Fu’s (712-770) “Sur le Jiang et la Han, l’exilé rêve du retour / — Un lettré démuni perdu au cœur de l’univers” (Cheng, *L’Écriture* 223). The generative power of the in-between space depicts both the struggles of living in exile and in diaspora along with the simultaneous valorization and interrogation of the many schools of thought and cultures that make up China and France. The writers bear witness to the beauties and the horrors of existence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One could envision the Third Space in which two other subjectivities are mobilized to be like the “I” and “you” pronouns that Gao uses to create the unnamed protagonists subjectivities in his novel *La Montagne de l’âme*. Gao writes:

> Au cours de mon voyage, les heurs et malheurs de la vie se résumaient à la route; j’étais plongé dans mon imagination, avec comme écho ton voyage intérieur; quel est le plus important des deux voyages? Lequel est le plus réel? (422)

For these writers, both voyages are the most real and the tension and negotiation between the two provides sites for articulation. Whether it takes the form of engagement with Chinese literature and history or French novels and psychoanalysts of the past, Leo Ou-fan Lee describes the “double edge vis-à-vis the centers” of the two societies that contribute to one’s social imaginary even while existing in a state of exile (161). Leo writes that it was the “perceived need for
intellectual engagement” that saved him from experiencing the feeling of being “lost” between two continents (161). What Leo calls a “double frame” and a “true peripheral perspective” can produce a new discourse, providing simultaneously both a “homeless discourse” of exile, akin to that described by Chinese scholar Liu Xiaofeng in Switzerland, and a “homed discourse” emerging from multiple homes (Leo 161). To let one’s gaze linger on a text by one of these four writers is to give attention to this minor literature of displacement, the forces and narratives that shape contemporary transnational literary landscapes.
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