

## Linking Ancient and Contemporary

Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese Literature

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# Modernity and Subjectivity from the Past to the Present

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**Abstract** Neo-Confucianism has strived to demonstrate that traditional Confucian ideas can be applied to construct a prospective, progressive Chinese modernity. I would like to argue, however, that Confucianism has always and already been the foundational principle throughout the history of the 20th century China by the philosophical and literary practitioners of Chinese modernity. In addition to my re-evaluating of the 'tradition of modernity' in China, I would like to explore the 'tradition of post-modernity' in China, especially the traditions of Daoism and Zen Buddhism. At the center of these different traditions is the concept of subjectivity which defines the characteristics of various cultural and literary trends. My paper will then focus on the subjective positions in these traditions and how the roles of lyrical and narrative subject are played in modern and postmodern literature, in order to probe the inner connections between the past and the present.

**Summary** 1 Reconsidering Confucianism in Chinese Modernity. – 2 Daoism, Chan Buddhism and the Postmodern. – 3 Postmodern Subjectivity in Contemporary Chinese Literature. – 4 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism. Post-Modernity.

## 1 Reconsidering Confucianism in Chinese Modernity

In modern China, the concept of modernity has much to do with enlightenment reason, a socio-cultural idea striving to liberate Chinese people from the old, traditional, mythical and all pre-modern conditions. The historical imagination since the mid- and late 19th century is precisely an Eastern variation of the mode of Western modernity. Chinese modernity adopted the principle of civilization based on Western enlightenment reason, which reached its climax in the May Fourth New Culture Movement, and triggered the huge social changes in Chinese history. But to what extent was it a break from traditional culture and to what extent was it a continuation of it?

To begin with, I would like to borrow a modified dictum from Umberto Eco: «We could say that every age has its own postmodern, just as every age has its own form of modern» (Rosso 1983, p. 2). The concept of modernity is not to be limited to the modern age, since its fundamental idea to «make it new» has been prevalent at all times. «Make it new», Ezra

Pound's motto which crystallizes his modernist spirit, is simply derived from the phrase *riri xin* 日日新 (to become new day by day) in the Confucian classic *Daxue* 大学.

Scholars such as Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995) have observed that Confucian subjectivism, holism and progressivism are quite compatible with the historical teleology of modernity in the strict sense. Mou Zongsan, however, is not critical toward Confucianism, whereas Nietzsche, quoted in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, suggests that «great artists of government (Confucius in China, the Roman Empire, Napoleon, the Papacy, when it was concerned with power and not just with the world) [...] The self-deception of the masses in this respect – for instance, in all democracies – is highly advantageous: making people small and governable is hailed as 'progress'!». <sup>1</sup> Nietzsche regards Confucius as one of the politicians representing the idea of Enlightenment and acutely points out its instrumentalism and deception.

It is interesting that the enlightenment thinkers in 20th century China wanted to jettison Confucian ideas, certainly not as precursor of modern enlightenment, but as representative of rotten tradition. But behind the slogan «Down with the Confucian shop!» there lies a clear teleology, which is not wholly imported. In fact, the Confucian idea of 'Great Unity' (*datong* 大同) has been the intrinsic basis for Chinese modernity. The theory of 'Great Unity', especially that advocated by Kang Youwei, paved the way for the May Fourth Movement. I would like to argue that the utopian conception in the chapter «The Conveyance of Rites» («Liji Liyun» 礼运) in the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 礼记) is based on some kind of rational order (so-called 'order of rites', *li zhi xu* 礼之序). In other words, it is the essence of traditional Chinese culture to set up some kind of rational order as the ultimate goal of society. The advocacy of such rational order was intended to rectify the deterioration of the age and its social function was to enlighten and redeem.

Other than Nietzsche, many Western scholars have examined the connection between Confucianism and enlightenment. American sinologist H. G. Creel believes that Confucianism and enlightenment are fairly similar (Creel 1949, p. 254). Voltaire highly appreciates Confucian ideas, which seem to be one of the theoretical sources of the French enlightenment movement. In his *The Philosophical Dictionary*, Voltaire admires and praises Chinese Confucianism, which to him has neither absurd legends nor dogmas despising reason and nature (Voltaire 1765, p. 154). In his *An Essay on Universal History, and the Manners and Spirit of Nations*, Voltaire, refuting various criticisms of Chinese politics and religion, and believing

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1 Friedrich Nietzsche (1904, p. 235) quoted in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (1972, p. 44).

that Confucian ethics is as pure and strict as that of Epictetus, calls the age of Confucian law the happiest and most admirable age (Voltaire 1759, p. 25). Voltaire's play *The Orphan of China*, subtitled «The Morals of Confucius in Five Acts», is a general praise of Chinese morality, politics and law. His interest in Confucianism indicates the hidden link between Confucian culture and rationalistic modernity.

Xu Maoyong compares Lu Xun of the May Fourth era to Voltaire of the Age of Enlightenment (a comparison widely used afterwards), without realizing the contradiction between the Confucian complex of Voltaire and the anti-Confucian spirit of Lu Xun. Nevertheless, does not the inheritance of western enlightenment by the May Fourth intellectuals seem to return inherently to the system which they attempt to overturn? Levenson believes that the May Fourth thinkers emotionally rely on Chinese tradition. I would like to argue that the tradition that the May Fourth movement strives to destroy lurks within the system it aims to construct.

Some passages of Chen Duxiu's «1916» («Yijiu yiliu nian» 一九一六年), for example, are nearly modern translations of *The Book of Changes*. He observes that human history is «a series of transitions of the new and the old, like the passing of water or the movement of arrow, continuous all the time and changing all the time» 新陈代谢, 如水之逝, 如矢之行, 时时相续, 时时变异 (Chen Duxiu 1934, p. 41). This is very much like the teaching in «Commentary on *The Book of Changes*»: «They change and move without staying (in one place), flowing about into any one of the six places of the hexagram. They ascend and descend, ever inconstant» 变动不居, 周流六虚, 上下无常, 刚柔相易, 不可为典要, 唯变所适 (Legge 1963, p. 399). Even the word *geming* 革命 is derived from the «Commentary on *The Book of Changes*» (through Japanese translation of the Western word 'revolution').

To borrow the language of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we might say that the issue of Chinese modernity lies in the fact that tradition is already modernity and modernity returns to tradition. The latest studies on Confucianism tend to acknowledge the link between Confucian tradition and modernity. Yang Guorong, for example, states that «the Confucian rationalism and the rational demand in the recent and modern ages have doubtless similarities» (Yang Guorong 1994, p. 370). At the very least, the modern yearning for social redemption is deeply rooted in Confucianism. The desire to change Confucian tradition is derived from the historical mission and social concern (which conventional literati always have in mind), directly influenced by Mencius's determination that «he considered the Empire his responsibility» 自任以天下之重 (Lau 1970, p. 150) and «Who would be in the world except me?» 方今天下, 舍我其谁 (Su Shi 2006, p. 185), as well as Zengzi's suggestion that «The true knight of the Way must perforce be both broad-shouldered and stout of heart; his burden is heavy and he has far to go» 士不可以不弘毅, 任重而

道远 (Waley 1938, p. 134). For Confucianism, the individual subject must find his meaning only in his social identity.

The dominant trend in modern Chinese literature since the May Fourth movement is that it is subject to social function. It is more than obvious that May Fourth literature is highly laden with social orientation. Lu Xun's short story, «A Madman's Diary», the first literary masterpiece in modern Chinese literature, is universally accepted as a castigation of the socio-historical threat to individual life, which is enlarged to allegorize the national destiny of the time. The paranoid protagonist of this story, speaking as the first-person narrator, has been understood to be a messenger or a prophet who proclaims the evil of the old society and calls for redemption. As a paradigmatic work of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's «A Madman's Diary» is intended to modernize Chinese culture by establishing a socially-oriented subject with highly historical consciousness that fiercely criticizes the old Confucian tradition. But this rational subject is deeply rooted in the Confucian literati tradition, in which the intellectual must be a historical subject who takes the responsibility for saving the nation from its crisis.

It is interesting to note, however, that the protagonist of this story is none other than a madman. That is to say, the madman's voice is essentially unreliable, as all his interpretations of the world and society are misinterpretations. «A Madman's Diary» is thus double-edged in the sense that it establishes an omniscient sociohistorical subject on the one hand and demonstrates a subject with self-undermined, split subjectivity on the other. According to his public statements, Lu Xun is not only anti-Confucian, but also anti-Daoist; however, he is internally a successor to both Confucian and Daoist traditions.

## 2 Daoism, Chan Buddhism and the Postmodern

In any case, the transcendental subject of Chinese modernity is not only Kantian, but also Confucian. We can even say that Confucianism has paved the way for the dominance of Chinese modernity. Thus, other cultural traditions in China, such as Daoism and Chan Buddhism, can well be linked to Chinese post-modernity, which has been lurking ever since the May Fourth Movement and even prevailing over the past few decades. Lu Xun himself is a great admirer of Wei-Jin Dynasty Daoist culture, especially such literati as Ruan Ji and his cohorts who, in Lu Xun's words, are «against the Confucian code» 反抗旧礼教 (Lu Xun 1948, p. 498). Surprisingly, Lu Xun even praises the literature of that time simply because it was the «age of self-conscious literature» 文学的自觉时代, which is to be understood as «art for art's sake» (1948, p. 491).

In any case, «A Madman's Diary» is clearly influenced by the Daoist tradition of *kuang* 狂. Zhuangzi is himself more or less a 'madman' often

demonstrating eccentric behavior, such as knocking on his plate and singing at the time of his wife's death. Insisting on the non-identity of language, «He expounded them in odd and outlandish terms, in brash and bombastic language, in unbound and unbordered phrases, abandoning himself to the times without partisanship, not looking at things from one angle only» 以谬悠之说, 荒唐之言, 无端崖之辞, 时恣纵而不倦, 不奇见之也 (Watson 1968, p. 296). In the *Zhuangzi*, the concept *changkuang* 猖狂, 'demented drifting' (1968, p. 80) or 'uncouth [and] uncaring' (1968, p. 188), appears several times to indicate a kind of spirit free of rational shackles. If a madman is a typical split subject, Lu Xun's madman is explicitly a paranoid who comprehends society in an absolutist way, but implicitly a schizophrenic whose voice is full of conflicts.

Such a split subject with self-suspicious identity is certainly not Confucian but Zhuangzian. As Youru Wang has observed, «Zhuangzi dismantles the identity of the self as a thinking subject. The identity of the thinking subject presupposes two things: (1) the identity of thought, or of a conceptual system, (2) the identity of subject as opposed to its other, the object of thought. Zhuangzi points out: «Without other there is no I; without I no choice between alternatives» (Wang Youru 2000, p. 353). Zhuangzi's dialectical conception of subjectivity amounts however to desubjectification, as the subjective position is always a temporary one, ever-changing and dependent upon the Other. As one of Zhuangzi's characters once claims, «I heard it from the son of Aided-by-Ink, and Aided-by-Ink heard it from the grandson of Repeated-Recitation, and the grandson of Repeated-Recitation heard it from Seeing-Brightly, and Seeing-Brightly heard it from Whispered-Agreement, and Whispered-Agreement heard it from Waiting-for-Use, and Waiting-for-Use heard it from Exclaimed-Wonder, and Exclaimed-Wonder heard it from Dark-Obscurity, and Dark-Obscurity heard it from Participation-in-Mystery, and Participation-in-Mystery heard it from Copy-the-Source!» (Watson 1968, p. 47).

Such a concept of the subject as a void is highly suggestive of Lacan's theory. Eske Møllgaard even more directly relates Zhuangzi to Lacan:

Zhuangzi would agree with Lacan that the ego (the objectified self, the *ji* or the *wo*) is a kind of mental illness, and Zhuangzi has his own therapies such as 'fasting of the heart and mind' (*xinzhai*) and sitting in forgetfulness (*zuowang*), which withdraw cathexis from the objectified self and so make possible the emergence of the real self, or that dimension of existence that cannot be objectified as an identifiable, nameable thing but is the spontaneous force of the Other of the realm of man (*ren*), namely Heaven (*tian*). Furthermore, we find in Zhuangzi something like Lacan's view that the ego is formed through identification with the counterpart as total Gestalt. For the word *ou*, 'counterpart', can be read as *shen*, 'body', or 'oneself' (in person), that is to say, the personal representative

of authentic being in the outer (*wai*) world, the part of the self that can be perceived by others (or perceived by oneself in the mirror). Zhuangzi saw in the Confucian's identification with this completed form in the outside (*wai*) the origin of the objectified self as counterpart (the *wo*, the *ji*, or the *ou*), and Zhuangzi's praise of mutilated persons and his valuation of the incomplete over the complete are aimed at undermining this identification with the whole body (*shen*), or the objectified self inscribed in the realm of man (*ren*). (Møllgaard 2007, p. 129)

For Lacan, the ego is but a false construct, a false whole meant to be disillusioned, subject to being divided by the Other. Zhuangzi, too, proposes downplaying the conception of the self, albeit for different reasons. Zhuangzi considers that «The man who has forgotten self may be said to have entered Heaven» 忘己之人，是之谓入于天 (Watson 1968, p. 89). To both Zhuangzi and Lacan, the ego/self is not the subjective center that consciously controls and manipulates everything, not even himself. On the contrary, the subject always has a traumatic kernel within the symbolic structure.

In fact, Lacan elaborates on Zhuangzi's parable of the dreaming butterfly in his eleventh seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. To Lacan, the butterfly represents the jouissance emerging from the Real to challenge the Symbolic construct of the subject. Therefore, the subject is divided into the meaningful and the meaningless, the latter penetrating the language screen to approach the Thing.

In addition to the butterfly embodying the gaze as the void object *a*, the Dao as the master signifier is itself an emptiness. Zhuangzi's assertion that «The Way gathers in emptiness alone» 唯道集虚 (Watson 1968, p. 25), though with ontological implications, more or less echoes Lacan's observation of the essential nullity of the big Other. Despite their difference (in terms) of the ultimate concerns, for Daoism, the concept of the Dao has a dimension of language as such, containing the connotation of the Other as language in the Lacanian sense. Thus, Zhuangzi's argument that «The Way gathers in emptiness Alone» and «Emptiness is the fasting of the mind» 唯道集虚，虚者，心斋也 (1968, p. 25) links the Dao as the Other and the "heart" as the subject: the empty Other and the empty subject correspond to each other. As for Lacan, the relationship between the Other and the subject «is not the abolition of Otherness or its absorption into the subject, but the coincidence of the lack in the subject with the lack in the Other» (Zupančič 2006, p. 175).

Lacan suggests that «the Other does not exist» and must be understood as castrated, as a void. The essential emptiness of the external image is also a common theme of Zhuangzi, whose vision of the objective world is usually defined by negativity, for example: «Bright Dazzlement stared intently at the other's face and form - all was vacuity and blankness. He

stared all day but could see nothing, listened but could hear no sound, stretched out his hand but grasped nothing» 光曜不得闻而孰视其状貌，窅然空然，终日视之而不见，听之而不闻，搏之而不得也 (Watson 1968, p. 185).

Such «a type of thinking with deconstructive significance developed by Zhuangzi» (Ye Haiyan 1997, p. 25) is also the philosophical foundation for the Chinese to accept Buddhism at a later age. For Buddhism, too, «all things or phenomena are attained according to conditions. This is called the origin of conditions. Due to the origin of conditions, it is impossible for things or phenomena to have stable, unchanging quality or essence. This is the void of essence» (Wu Rujun 1993, p. 90). Like Zhuangzi, Buddhism recognizes that «the self [...] stands in essential relation to all of reality. One learns by forgetting, that is, in a stripping off of all conscious egoity from the self» (Dumoulin 1979, p. 23). The dismantling of the ego in Buddhism is correspondent to Lacan's assertion that the ego is but a false totality doomed to be shattered.

The Lacanian, postmodern subject that offers a different mode of understanding of the self and the world is also dependent on the Other. Furthermore, the subject is a desiring one and is thus forever a vacant space or position awaiting fulfillment. If the modern subject relies on his own self-consciousness, the postmodern subject is contingent not only on the symbolic Other, but also on the traumatic *object a* that triggers desire. But this postmodern subject, as I have attempted to show so far, corresponds to the Daoist-Buddhist conception of the self, especially when embodied in literary writing.

To be sure, the void of the Dao that Zhuangzi theorizes on the metaphysical level is demonstrated as lack within language and logic, or the Symbolic, on the physical level. In other words, if Zhuangzi's philosophical speculation centers on such concepts as nothingness or emptiness, his literary allegories and fables are full of fissures of irony and enjoyment of displacement. Parables such as «It's not a timber tree - there's nothing it can be used for. That's how it got to be that old» 不材之木也，无所可用，故能若是之寿 (Watson 1968, p. 30) must be read as allegory of the symbolic Other having lost its ultimate order. «Every day they bored another hole, and on the seventh day Hundun died» 日凿一窍，七日而浑沌死 (Watson 1968, p. 59) illustrates the failure of symbolizing: here, Zhuangzi does not maintain an extremely negative attitude toward the efficacy of the Symbolic Other, for the Real of Hundun (literally, Chaos) not only fails to be incorporated into the Symbolic but, on the contrary, becomes immolation during the symbolizing process. Even such a statement as «You're not I, so how do you know that I don't know what fish enjoy?» 子非我，安知我不知鱼之乐 (Watson 1968, p. 138) is intended to undermine the rational logic «A is B, so A does not know B». However, Zhuangzi does not provide any positive or affirmative conclusion, but reaches the negative goal by means of questioning («how do you know [...]»). This rhetorical question is not simply an affirmation

through the double negative, but an emptying of the original logic without leading to an absolutely correct conclusion. In other words, the collapse of the Symbolic order is exactly what Zhuangzi aims at. The metaphysical conceptions of «nothingness» and «emptiness» are established on the basis of negativity or even self-reflectivity of language. What Zhuangzi calls «diaogui» refers to paradox within language, i.e. «Words like these will be labeled the Supreme Swindle» 是其言也，其名为吊诡 (1968, p. 17), indicating that the linguistic Other is not intact but rather full of various kinds of inexplicable contradictions.

### 3 Postmodern Subjectivity in Contemporary Chinese Literature

Successors to Lu Xun, post-Mao avant-garde writers in particular, clearly demonstrate such a postmodern subjectivity. The subjective voices in Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine*, «Joy», Yu Hua's «1986» and «The April 3 Incident», Can Xue's *Yellow Mud Street* and «The Hut on the Mountain», and most of Xu Xiaohu's short stories, more explicitly occupy a position of self-invalidation. The narrator in Yu Hua's «The April 3 Incident», for example, proves to be a paranoid voice that stumbles at every suspicion about the surrounding threats. The protagonist of Yu Hua's «1986», too, is an insane character whose voice embodies transgressive jouissance. Such a self-undermined, self-canceling subject is, if not Lacanian and Zhuangzian in the strictest sense, at least a postmodern space in which traditional Chinese thought plays a role as significant as contemporary Western philosophy.

In the field of contemporary poetry, especially in the works of Ouyang Jianghe, Zang Di, and so on, we can see most clearly how a Zhuangzian subject enjoys his postmodern freedom (*xiaoyao* in Zhuangzi's sense). An admirer of Zhuangzi, Zang Di asserts that «from the perspective of the history of poetry, Zhuangzi is still the greatest living contemporary poet writing prose poetry» (Zang Di 2012, p. 206). Like Zhuangzi, Ouyang Jianghe tends to use paradoxes in his poems to illustrate a lyrical subject doomed to be breached:

Without his knife, we would not have grown our heads  
(Ouyang Jianghe 2013, p. 22)

Except those bones, no one has been a beauty.  
(p. 47)

You have read me from a letter not yet written.  
(p. 168)

The paradoxical voice of the lyrical subject reflects the essential fissure within the Other of language, as the desire of the subject carries out the desire of the Other. In Zang Di's poetry, the self-undermining nature of language appears even more complicated:

Peacocks do not perform peacock dances.  
But we don't concede and assert that  
not a single peacock can evade  
our sight.  
(Zang Di 2008, p. 41)

Standing steadily on a rolling stone,  
he is pushing a still stone.  
(Zang Di 2000, p. 146)

Yes, just because there is  
a little box left aside,  
I become aware that your box  
once closed so many things out.  
(Zang Di 2002, p. 118)

In «Peacock Dance Association», the gap between peacock and peacock dance, or between nature and culture, is highlighted: this gap embodies the traumatic Real that the Symbolic cannot integrate into its order. «A User's Manual» shows how the dialectics of stillness and mobility can be understood in an almost impossible situation in which the subject is susceptible to failure. In «A Little Box» (Zang Di 2002), a deserted, marginalized box functions only to remind one of a different box that rejects and discards others. In any case, the signifier «box» becomes a sliding one that fails or refuses to stick to a single signified.

The sliding or even inconsistent nature of the signifiers in Zang Di's poetry often creates playful or comical effect, as the examples above indicate. In Zhuangzi's parables, we can find ample examples of comical passages related to wit, sarcasm, or simply joy. The «Debate at the Dam of the Hao River» («Hao Ling zhi bian» 濠梁之辩) discussed above is a typical story intended to show the inconsistency of the logical Symbolic. And the joyous actions in front of the dead, i.e. «singing in the very presence of the corpse» 临尸而歌 (Watson 1968, p. 49) «pounding on a tub and singing [when his wife dies]» 鼓盆而歌 (p. 140) – display the traumatic jouissance of the Real unable to be integrated into the Symbolic law, challenging the Symbolic authority of the Rites. From this point, we can infer that, in Zhuangzi, void or nothingness is not an ontological substance, but somewhat approaches the Lacanian «Thing», the core of traumatic jouissance, with pleasure and pain (or yin and yang) mixed up.

Likewise, in Chan Buddhism, «awakening is often accompanied by laughter» (Faure 1991, p. 46) and Chan is to be understood as «nonsensical Chan» (Wu Rujun 1993, p. 87), in order to annihilate mundane illusions. Chan Buddhism intends to expose the false identity of the ego as vigorously as Lacan does. For Lacan, as for Chan Buddhism, the illusively whole ego must be overcome and give way to its split subjectivity. Thus, the incongruity and failure of the intact ego cannot but often lead to comical effects. As Conrad Hyers observes:

Humor is therefore not only a permissible but an especially appropriate way of getting at what in Buddhism generally has consistently been identified as the fundamental folly of ignorance, desire, and illusion of self. If the ego, for instance, is understood to be one of the elements of the human problem, then humor corresponds to the realization of the comedy of the substantial ego, the refusal to take the ego seriously or absolutely in its pretension of being the one secure point of reference and consciousness – as in Descartes' philosophy where, when all else is in doubt, one retreats to the seemingly impregnable refuge of the substantial ego: *cogito ergo sum*. There is no small irony in the fact that what is taken as the most fundamental axiom of Cartesian thought is the fundamental illusion of Buddhist thought. In Zen in particular it is through humor that the ego is revealed as being only the mask that the actor puts on, or holds in front of his face (as in Greek drama, and the original meaning of *persona* as «mask»), hiding his true identity, a mask which is both a tragic mask from the standpoint of ignorance and suffering, and a comic mask from the standpoint of enlightenment and liberation. (Hyers 1974, p. 119)

Lacan is well-known for his rewriting of the Cartesian axiom *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) with his own formula «I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think» (Lacan 1977, p. 126). It would be interesting, then, to compare the comical nature in Buddhism with the following statement about the mocking-comic by Žižek, who persists in Lacan's post-Cartesian stance:

In the discourse of the Master, the subject's identity is guaranteed by S1, by the Master-Signifier (his symbolic title-mandate), fidelity to which defines the subject's ethical dignity. Identification with the Master-Signifier leads to the tragic mode of existence: the subject endeavors to sustain his fidelity to the Master-Signifier – say, to the mission which gives meaning and consistency to his life – to the end, and his attempt ultimately fails because of the remainder that resists the Master-Signifier. In contrast, there is the slippery-shifting subject who lacks any stable support in the Master-Signifier, and whose consistency is sustained by

the relationship to the pure remainder/trash/excess, to some 'undignified', inherently comic, little bit of the Real; such an identification with the leftover, of course, introduces the mocking-comic mode of existence, the parodic process of the constant subversion of all firm symbolic identifications. (Žižek 2000, pp. 42-43)

Comicality also means the invalidity of the Other as the master signifier. The divided Other is transformed into *jouissance*, namely, the enjoyment of object *a*, while grave tragedy is replaced by light comedy. In postmodern literature, the Lacanian «linguistricks», i.e., the playful operation of language, destabilize the authoritative order of the Other of language. The carnival of language in postmodern literature embraces the traumatic *jouissance* that the Symbolic strives to repress. By identifying with the inner symptom and yielding to «*jouis-sens*» (enjoy-meant), the lack within subjectivity contains hilarity of freedom (*xiaoyao*). This approaches the psychoanalytic treatment of the subject on the one hand and, to a certain extent, echoes Zhuangzi's recognition of and pursuit for the Dao, on the other.

#### 4 Conclusion

The New Culture Movement in the May Fourth era strives to demonstrate its iconoclastic spirit and shatter the dominant Confucian ideology, but nonetheless retains the fundamental mindset inherited from Confucianism. The socially-concerned, redemptive impulse in mainstream May Fourth literary works reveal the inherent convention as opposed to the public proclamation. Chinese modernity as an enlightenment project is solidly based on the literati's traditional heroic stance of social obligation and self-sufficient subjectivity. In a sense, then, the post-Mao literary trend can be characterized as postmodern because the concept of subjectivity is redefined as self-divided, self-undermined or self-problematized. But this Lacanian occurrence stems from the Chinese traditions of Daoism and Chan Buddhism, both of which recognize paradoxes and illusions within the Other of language and thus advocate non-identified subjectivity.

When commenting on Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, composed for classical Chinese poems, Adorno suggests a highly Daoist spiritual realm with love for and sensitivity to eternal and ethereal Nature in a dialectical vision: «The song on the pavilion, which ends like a transparent mirage, calls to mind the Chinese tale of the painter who vanishes into his picture, a trifling and inextinguishable pledge. Diminution, disappearance is the guise of death, in which music still preserves the vanishing» (Adorno 1992, p. 150). We can perhaps understand this vanishing as the departure of modernity into its own impossibility, that is, into a postmodern status that rests on the disintegration of both subjectivity and the big Other alike.

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