

Maoist Aesthetics in Western Left-wing Thought

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Abstract: In their article "Maoist Aesthetics in Western Left-wing Thought," Jun Zeng and Siying Duan discuss a terrain of knowledge called "Maoist aesthetics," which is the creative misreading of Mao's "On Contradiction," the theory and practice of "Cultural Revolution" and other revolutionary literature and arts of Mao's time by Western Left intellectuals. Scholars and academic communities inspired by Maoism include Bertolt Brecht, Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Louis Pierre Althusser, the Chinese period of Tel Quel, Fredric Jameson, Arif Dirlik, and Contemporary Radical Left intellectuals such as Alain Badiou and Slavoj Zizek. Comparative study of the mutual influence of (Western) Maoist Aesthetics and (Chinese) Mao's thinking on literature, as well as the research of (Western) Maoism's return to China, can contribute to the rediscovery of the multi-dimensional voices and complexity of the theoretical thinking around Mao Zedong, and thus reveal unique but neglected voices.

Jun ZENG and Siying DUAN

Maoist Aesthetics in Western Left-wing Thought

The twentieth century witnessed the divergence and proliferation of various kinds of Marxisms. Among them, Chinese Marxist aesthetics originated from Soviet-style Marxism and then evolved into a distinctive mode of thinking, which in turn influenced the Western Left in the 1960s. Maoist Aesthetics, the aesthetic dimension of Western Maoism, is not a mirror image of Mao Zedong's (毛泽东) thinking on literature and arts, but an integral part of Western Maoism. Since the problem of Western Marxism vis-à-vis "true" Marxism has remained unresolved in China for decades, Mao's thinking on literature and arts and (Western) Maoist aesthetics have been viewed as unrelated and even opposed to each other in China. After the Reform and Opening-Up (1978 onwards), Maoist aesthetics returned to China as a brand of Western Marxism and Critical Theory. Now both Mao's thinking on literature and arts and Maoist aesthetics find their places in China, though they are incompatible with each other. What I intend to do in this paper, therefore, is begin a "cognitive mapping," as it were, of Western Maoist aesthetics embedded in Western Marxism. Since Mao's thinking is the shared theoretical root of both Mao's thinking on literature and arts and Maoist aesthetics, I hope to find new ways for a productive conversation between these two strains of thought by moving beyond the dichotomies of Western Marxism/"true" Marxism, (Chinese) Mao Zedong Thought/(Western) Maoism.

Maoist aesthetics, as the aesthetic dimension of Western Maoism, is not necessarily irrelevant to the study of Mao's thinking on literature and arts, since both take Mao's thinking as their theoretical resource. Hence by focusing on Mao Zedong, the "contemporaneity" of Mao's thinking on literature and arts (as part of Chinese Marxist aesthetics) and Maoist aesthetics (as part of Western Marxist aesthetics) can be seen as the connection between these two areas of study. In spite of the cultural differences between East and West, or the ideological distinction between socialism and capitalism, both Chinese Marxist aesthetics and Western Marxist aesthetics actively engaged in and offered constructive solutions to the recovery and reconstruction of political, economic, military, social, and cultural orders after World War II. This "contemporaneity" provided a solid foundation for Western Marxists to actively embrace Mao's thinking coming from the East, to get inspiration from the Chinese socialist revolution, and to start a remote dialogue with Chinese Mao Zedong Thought and Chinese revolution, as their Western Contemporaries.

From the perspective of the International Communist Movement, Western Marxists have already retreated from the battlefield of "social revolution" into the study room of "revolution on paper." China became the forerunner of political and socialist revolution after its initial appearance in Europe and Russian-Soviet Union. From the perspective of Chinese Mao Zedong Thought, Western Maoism is nothing but an imagination of Mao's thinking taken out of the context. Since the 1950s, most Western Maoist thought has been criticized as "bourgeoisie literary and artistic theories" in China. From the Western Marxists' point of view, Maoism has only a limited impact on Left-wing thought in Europe and the U.S. Meanwhile, the international diffusion of Maoism was mainly focused on Asian, African and Latin American areas rather than developed countries in Europe and North America. This is why Chinese Marxist aesthetics and Western Marxist aesthetics have failed to start a conversation despite their longstanding coexistence.

For a long time, the Chinese study of Mao's thinking on literature and arts has mainly been carried out within the academic circle of Chinese Marxist aesthetics and literary and artistic theory. The core research goal is to build a systematic theory of Mao's thinking on literature and arts by distilling it from diverse resources. In a narrow sense, Mao's thinking on literature and arts is simply a revolutionary leader and Romantic poet's views on literary and artistic issues. It is worth noting that the thoughts and views on literary and artistic issues that come from Mao Zedong as a revolutionary leader are different from those that come from him as a poet. Although both groups of ideas were written or stated by Mao Zedong, the former represents collective wisdom, as Mao as a leader was speaking on behalf of the Party and State; while the latter shows a personal touch, with Mao expressing his own aesthetic preferences and tastes in the arts as a poet. This difference defines the extension and border of Mao's thinking on literature and arts, although the two cannot be truly separated from each other. Moreover, there has long been an aesthetic tension between the orientation towards workers, peasants, and soldiers of the Party and State's policy on Literature and Arts as a guidance of value, and Mao's own aesthetic preference for Chinese Classical poetry and art. In a general sense, Mao's thinking on literature and the arts refers to the principles, policies, and trends of literary and artistic creation during Chinese socialist revolution and construction led by the Chinese Communist Party as represented by Mao. This

connotation of Mao's thinking on literature and arts has gone beyond the personal realm of Mao, pointing to the time of Mao as a whole. One of the exemplifications of this understanding is the *Complete Book of Mao Zedong's Thinking on Literature and Art* edited by Li Zhun (李准) and Ding Zhenhai (丁振海). Thus, the study of Mao's thinking on literature and arts is not just an issue of literary genre or writing techniques, but should first be considered a study of the thoughts of the Chinese Communist Party on literature and arts as guided by Marxism, which went through a significant transformation when the Chinese Communist Party experienced the transition from revolution to ruling. Other than the connotations discussed above, Mao's thinking on literature and arts has also entered the domain of the research and teaching of literary and artistic theory after the founding of New China. This study of Mao's thinking on literature and arts has been constructed intellectually, logically, and systematically, producing relevant textbooks and monographs. The main contribution of these academic outcomes is the systematizing of Mao's thinking on literature and arts under the framework of Sinicized Marxism.

To view both Chinese Marxism and Western Marxism from a perspective of the whole Marxist history is an academic attempt to assimilate "noise" into a "symphony." For example, the English writer Dave Laing has devoted a chapter of his book *The Marxist Theory of Art: Marxist Theory and Contemporary Capitalism* to the theme of "Socialism and realism in China." In this chapter, he elaborates on the complexity within Chinese Marxist aesthetics with three sections, "Lu Hsun and the Garrets of Shanghai," "Mao and the Revolutionary Bases," and "Cultural Struggle within Socialism Post-War Developments." Yugoslavian scholar Predrag Vranicki has also used two chapters of his book *History of Marxism* to systematically depict the history of Chinese revolution and the major philosophical ideas and political theories of the Chinese Communist Party from the revolutionary period to the preliminary stage of New China. Leszek Kolakowski from Poland makes comments on Mao's theory in Chapter 13, the last chapter of his book *Main Currents of Marxism Volume 3*. He names Mao Zedong's thoughts "the peasant Marxism" and suggests that "Maoism in its final shape is a radical farmer Utopia in which Marxist phraseology is much in evidence but whose dominant values seem completely alien to Marxism" (494-95) and thus puts Maoism in a oppositional position in relation to Marxism and Soviet Marxism. The fourth volume of *History of Marxist Aesthetics, History of Chinese Marxist Aesthetics*, edited by Wang Shanzhong (王善忠), depicts the development history of Chinese Marxist Aesthetics starting from the expression of aesthetic concepts of modern Chinese peasants, explains how it then developed from the foundation of Liang Qichao (梁启超) and Wang Guowei's (王国维) enlightenment aesthetics, and reviews the diffusion of Marxist aesthetics in China and the development of Chinese Left-wing revolutionary aesthetics. After focusing on the formation of Mao's literary and artistic ideas as well as his aesthetic views, the book finally ends with Cai Yi's (蔡仪) aesthetic thoughts. This scholarly project shows numerous theoretical difficulties when integrating Mao's thinking on literature and arts into the development history of both Chinese and Western Marxist aesthetics.

When Western Marxist aestheticians influenced by Maoism are considered the "Western Contemporaries" of Chinese Maoist aestheticians, a comparative study between the two can be conducted to examine the issues of how they have developed their theory and practice facing the same or at least similar problems during the same timeframe, how they exchanged their academic thoughts and then made contributions to the shaping of multidimensional Maoist aesthetics, which has both similarities and distinctions among its factions. Combing the history of Western Left-wing thought, especially concepts impacted by Maoism through the core texts of Mao's thinking, we can distill the key issues of Maoist aesthetics and then roughly draw an academic chart of "Maoist aesthetics in Western Left-wing thought" as such:

Time	Country	Theorist	Core text	Key issues
1954	Germany	Bertolt Brecht	"On Contradiction"	Dialectical theatre
1955	France	Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir	"Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" *	New China
1962	France	Louis Pierre Althusser	"On Contradiction"	Overdetermination
1968-1974	France	Philippe Sollers	Mao's poems; "On Contradiction"	Dialectics
1970	France	Jean-Paul Sartre	"Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" *	Maoism; the Cultural Revolution and May 1968 events
1970	Germany	Herbert Marcuse	Living theater	Revolution and arts
1974	France	Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey	"Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art"	Literature and the form of ideology
1975-	France	Alain Badiou	"On Contradiction"; Cultural Revolution	Dialectic thinking
1977	United Kingdom	Raymond Henry Williams	Mao's thinking on literature and arts	The relation between writers and the people
1980s	U.S.	Fredric Jameson	"On Contradiction"	Political unconsciousness
1990s-	U.S.	Arif Dirlik	<i>Selected works of Mao Tse-Tung</i>	Chinese Marxism; Post-revolution
2000s	Slovenia	Slavoj Zizek	"On Contradiction" and "On Practice"	The limitation of Maoist dialectics; the Marxist Lord of Misrule

*While there is strong evidence that these theorists were influenced by "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," there is no direct citation.

The formation of Western Maoist aesthetics was initiated in the 1950s. Historically speaking, Bertolt Brecht from Germany is one of the most important Western Left-wing scholars who learned early on Mao Zedong and Chinese revolution. Possibly influenced by the worldwide sensation caused by the publication of Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*, Brecht wrote a short poem about Mao Zedong during his exile in Denmark in 1937. On 1 April 1952, Mao Zedong's "On Contradiction," written in 1937, was published in *People's Daily*. Two years later, this article was translated into German and immediately aroused Brecht's interest. In 1955, when asked by a magazine "what is the best book in 1954?" Brecht answered, "Mao Zedong's essay 'On Contradiction' impressed me most among all the books I've read last year" (Zhang, "Bertolt Brecht"). Brecht's study of Mao's dialectic thinking in "On Contradiction" enhanced his understanding of drama creation. He deemphasized his early theory of "Defamiliarization" and kept strengthening dialectic thinking intentionally in his later works on drama theories and even changed the name of his creative practice of theatre from "epic theatre" to "dialectical theatre." In the following year, French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and feminist Simone de Beauvoir came to Beijing for the national day celebration at the invitation of the Chinese government. After this visit, Sartre published "My Impressions of the New China" ("Mes impressions sur la Chine Nouvelle" [*People's Daily*] 2 November, 1955) and "The China I Saw" ("La Chine que j'ai vue" [*France-Observateur*], 1, 8 December, 1955) and Beauvoir wrote *The Long March: an Account of Modern China*. Based on their observation of Chinese cultural tradition, the history of the May Fourth Movement and educational levels in the early days of New China, they put forward their opinions on the issues of the necessity of cultural popularization, the possibility of writing system reform, and the practicality of ideological transformation of writers. Beauvoir suggests in her book that an increase in the public educational level is a prerequisite for China's prosperity. These works caused a sensation and heated discussion in French academia. Two critical events can be seen as landmarks that allowed Mao Zedong to attract Western Left intellectuals' attention. One is the founding of New China in 1949, when an ancient Asian country became a socialist country. The other is the translation of Mao's works, among which "On Contradiction" became the key text that most profoundly impacted Western Left intellectuals.

In 1962, the French version of "On Contradiction" published in *la Pensée* aroused Louis Pierre Althusser's great interest. He wrote "Contradiction and Overdetermination" immediately and "On the Materialist Dialectic: On the Unevenness of Origins" in the following year. The two articles were published in the November issue of *Thoughts* in 1962 and the August issue in 1963 respectively. Thus we can tell that Althusser was studying Mao's works during the period from 1962 to 1963. Althusser discovered that "Mao Tse-tung's pamphlet On Contradiction (1937) contains a whole series of analyses in which the Marxist conception of contradiction appears in a quite un-Hegelian light" (94). He creatively summarized Mao's thinking on "The Principal Contradiction and the Principal Aspect of a Contradiction" with the concept "overdetermination." Furthermore, Althusser discovered the significance of "Cultural Revolution" to modernity as a proletarian cultural revolution that is different from both Stalinist Economism and bourgeois humanitarianism.

Maoism had the most impact on Western Left-wing thought during the period from the 1960s to the early 1970s. Richard Wolin once said that:

Western Maoists like French Proletarian Left-wings (Gauche Proletarienne) prefer the term "Maoism" to "Mao Zedong Thought." "Maoism" is most commonly used in the West as it contains the respect for Mao's thinking. It also covers the connotations of populism, radicalism, voluntarism as well as anti-formalism, or to be more specific, anti-bureaucratism. In Western political thoughts, to some extent, Maoism was formed through the understanding of "Cultural Revolution"; but in academia, the term "Maoism" emphasizes the unity of Mao's thinking: revolutionary war and the importance of peasants ("Internal Maoism").

However, it would be inaccurate to reduce the formation of Maoism in Western political thought to the one-way influence of Mao's thinking and "Cultural Revolution." So what caused the mainstream thought of Western developed capitalist countries to "turn Left" in the 1960s? And why did they "turn Left" to "Maoism"? Which social and cultural thoughts finally triggered the global events of May 1968? All these answers lie in the social issues, political dilemmas and cultural conflicts in the Western world. Furthermore, it is the inherent demand of Western countries that elicited spiritual and emotional resonance with an Asian socialist country. The correlated association of the "Paris Commune" in France and the Cultural Revolution in China that aroused Western Left intellectuals' revolutionary enthusiasm for another "Paris Commune." Perry Anderson wrote in his book, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, that:

...a new gravitational force was exercising a tidal pull on the Western Marxist culture of the late sixties and early seventies. The discredit of Khrushchev's model of reformism in the USSR created the conditions in which Mao's launching of an officially proclaimed 'cultural revolution' in China came to seem a superior form of rupture with the institutional inheritance of Stalinist industrialization and bureaucratization...All this was to be realized through direct popular administration in the spirit of the Paris Commune, and the unleashed energy and enthusiasm of the younger generation. The appeal of this ideological programme was very wide in the West, where it seemed to resonate from the other end of the world common themes of hostility to technocratic consumerism, educational hierarchy and parasitic over-industrialization (72-3).

The representative of Maoist aesthetics during the period surrounding the May 1968 events was *Tel Quel*, a French journal that focused on avant-garde literature and radical thinking. The autumn of 1968 marked the start of the "Maoist" period of *Tel Quel*, which published a collective manifesto termed "the comprehensive theory" (*Theorie d'ensemble* [67-8, 78-9]), seeking a generalized subversion and regarding writing and revolution as sharing a common cause. The chief editor, Philippe Sollers, wrote novels containing Chinese elements and translated Mao Zedong's poems and works. He published three special issues on China, 43 articles in total (20 articles in No.48-49, spring, 1972; 13 in No.50, summer, 1972 and 10 in No.59, autumn, 1974). From 1970 to 1976, *Tel Quel* translated and published two sets of Mao's poems, the "interview on philosophy" and retranslated "On Contradiction," which shows initiative to learn about Mao's thinking at the time. In May 1974, a delegation from *Tel Quel* visited China during the "Condemning Lin Biao (林彪) and Confucius" Movement of the Cultural Revolution. The visit was one of the most significant events since the members of the delegation turned to Left-wing thinking. During the visit, Roland Barthe took detailed notes, which later became the book *Travels in China*, describing and commenting on the state of literature and the arts during the Cultural Revolution. Julia Kristeva wrote her book *Chinese Women*, which became a key text for learning about the image of Chinese women from the perspective of a European woman. The book describes the transition of Chinese women's social status, cultural customs, and thoughts, with thematic interviews including one on the status of literary education in universities during the Cultural Revolution with scholars such as Feng Zhongyun (冯钟芸), who taught in the Department of Chinese language and literature at Peking

University. In addition, Chinese elements can also be found in Kristeva's novel creation with Sollers. After the visit to China, the ideas of *Tel Quel* writers gradually diverged.

Encouraged by May 1968 events, Jean-Paul Sartre accepted the invitation from a French Maoist organization to serve as chief editor of their newspaper which was inclined towards Maoism and advocated the idea of "intervention" in literary and artistic theories. On the one hand, Sartre supported the political action of the French Maoist community. On the other hand, he remained cautious in his thinking and repeatedly emphasized that he was not a "Maoist philosopher" and was very aware of the contradictions and absurdities of the Cultural Revolution in China (*Jean-Paul Sartre* 324, 367). Michel Foucault, although hardly a Maoist, distilled his theory of "'micro-physics' of power" from his discussion with the French Maoist community.

Although both came from a German academic tradition and Frankfurt School background, and both went into exile in the U.S. in the 1930s, Herbert Marcuse and Karl August Wittfogel occupy distinct positions towards Maoism. This indicates the complexities of the ideological spectrum in the field of critical thinking. Even when living in the U.S., Marcuse remained a proponent of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. In his article "Counterrevolution and Revolt," Marcuse provides new insights on the modernist trend in art from the late 19th century to the 20th century from the perspective of Cultural Revolution. He believes that the revolution in art and aesthetics suggests the political potential of art as a form of radicalism. The article was published in 1972, based on his speeches at Princeton University and New York's New School for Social Research in 1970. The article overturns capitalist art tradition and aesthetic principles and praises the "power of the negative" of proletarian art. Living theater in the period of Chinese literary and artistic revolution, as a demonstration of this "power of the negative," earned high marks from Marcuse, who states, "there, the theater did not take place in a 'universe of play'; it was part of a revolution in actual process, and established, as an episode, the identity between the players and the fighters: unity of the space of the play and the space of the revolution" (113). In opposition to Marcuse, Karl August Wittfogel maintains a clear right-wing position. When Benjamin Schwartz introduced Maoism in the 1950s, Wittfogel engaged in several arguments with him on the issue of "the originality of Maoism." According to Wittfogel, the concept "does not exhibit any originality, 'Maoist' or otherwise" ("The Historical Position" 464), and thus he considered Maoism a "legend" ("the Legend" 73-5). But as a historian, Wittfogel did not pay much attention to aesthetics, literature, and the arts, so he is not the focus of study of Maoist aesthetics.

Mao's *Selected Works* and *On Literature and Art* were first translated and prepared for overseas publication from within China. Raymond Henry Williams, the spiritual leader of the Birmingham School in the United Kingdom, cites the 1960 version of *On Literature and Art* translated in China in his book *Marxism and Literature*. In chapter 9, "Alignment and Commitment," he quotes three paragraphs from "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People (27 Feb. 1957)" and "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art." According to Williams, "what is theoretically most interesting in Mao's argument, alongside previously familiar positions, is emphasis on the transformation of social relations between writers and the people... 'Commitment' is a move by a hitherto separated, socially and politically distanced, or alienated writing" (*Marxism* 103). Williams' quotations noted here may not be at the crux of the particular concern of his book, but their uniqueness is obvious when placed within the "cognitive mapping" of Maoist aesthetics. Firstly, the texts Williams cites were selected, translated, and published overseas by Chinese experts, and this contributes to his accurate understanding of the essence of Mao's thinking on literature and arts and its international influence. Secondly, what concerns Williams most is no longer "dialectics" or "Cultural Revolution," but "Alignment and Commitment," a crucial component of Marxist literary theories. Thirdly, Williams gets to the core of Mao's unique way of dealing with the issue of "Alignment and Commitment" in literary works, which involves "transforming the social relations between writers and the people."

Fredric Jameson also has a close relationship with China. He quoted Mao Zedong's "On Contradiction" (13-53) in his book *Marxism and Form* in 1971. His book *The Ideology of Theories: Selected Works from 1971 to 1986* presents his works from the 1970s and 1980s, among which are many articles that comment on Mao's works and Maoism. His article "Periodizing the 60s" can be seen as showing what has become known as the "Mao Zedong complex." The expression "Mao Zedong complex" was introduced by Xie Shaobo. In his article "The Maoist Complex in Fredric Jameson," Xie carefully examines the citation, discussion, and evaluation of Mao's thinking and Maoism in Jameson's texts. He concluded that many thoughts or even personal elements of Mao have greatly affected Jameson, which is exemplified more in his way of thinking and writing style of his Political Unconscious rather than through direct citation. Even now, Jameson still has an attachment to Maoism. In a recent interview, he clearly expressed that "Maoism marks the persistent existence of communism," "Maoism means the innovation

of communism," and "Maoism is still a model of real revolution. It is different from the Soviet revolution. I think certain moments of Maoism are still important" (Yan, "Maoism").

Arif Dirlik, another US-American Left-wing scholar and a Sinologist, devoted himself to the study of the modern history of China. He once stated that Karl Marx, Mao Zedong, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky are the three most crucial figures who influenced his academic study ("A Short Biography"). As the writer of the entry "Mao Zedong and 'Chinese Marxism'" in *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy*, he gave a comprehensive introduction to Maoism under the concepts of Mao Zedong Thought and Chinese Marxism which exceeds the context of Maoism for the first time. He suggested that the formation of Mao's thinking was based on the struggle against colonial domination and the emergence of self-consciousness in the Third World. Thus Chinese Marxism is in a sense equal to Mao's Marxism. This is why Dirlik's introduction to Mao Zedong is focused on "Making Marxism Chinese" (expressed as "the Sinification of Marxism" in his "Global Capitalism and the Condition of Postcoloniality"), "On Contradiction" and "On Practice," and Guerrilla Socialism/Vernacular Marxism ("Mao" 536-62). Furthermore, he also carried out a study of China from the mid and late 1970s to the 1980s in a post-revolution discourse in the academic background of the Post-Mao Era, which usually points to 1976 to 1989, the 15 years after Mao's death.

In the 1970s, divergence appeared among the students of Althusser. Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière established their respective theories and then they merged into European Left-wing thought in the 1990s. These scholars closely combined the issues of aesthetics and politics, culture and society, art and revolution, and took inspiration more directly from Chinese thought and reality. Two other students of Althusser, Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, also read about Mao's works in the 1970s. In 1974, they addressed the issue of the relationship between literature and the form of ideology within Mao's opinions from "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in their co-authored article "On Literature as an Ideological Form." Badiou wrote a good number of works based on Maoism in the 1970s, including two works criticizing Althusser, *Theory of Contradiction* (1975) and *Of Ideology* (1976). In the 1980s, he tried to figure out the subject of Maoist revolutionary practice using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis theory in his book *Theory of the Subject* (1982), forming a unique "Lacanian-Maoism" subject theory. He also regards Mao's poems and Cultural Revolution as "Events," which rupture the appearance of normality and thus reveal the reality of the world. Rancière pays special attention to the political dimension of literature, the arts, and aesthetics. From the politics of aesthetics to the aesthetics of politics, the question of "how art can be political" has always been one of Rancière's major concerns. Inspired by the mobilization of the working class during Chinese revolution and lamenting that Althusser and others did not take to the streets during the May 1968 events, Rancière turned to the study of workers' movements and labor issues. He accepted Mao's belief in the power of the masses and believed that ordinary workers can create and appreciate literature and artwork. He also commented on the movie *La Chinoise* (The Chinese Woman) directed by Jean-Luc Godard.

To summarize the Western Left intellectuals' attitudes towards Mao's thinking and Chinese revolution as romantic imagination out of well-intentioned misunderstanding in the earliest period, restrained silence in the 1970s with dwindling passion after the May 1968 events and deepened understanding of the drawbacks of the Cultural Revolution, then we might also point to a crucial transition following the "End of History" and the "Disillusion of Utopia" of the 1990s. This transition is evident in Slavoj Žižek, one of the core Western Left intellectuals, who turned to the critical reflection of the dialectic thinking from "On Contradiction" and "On Practice," the representative theories of Maoism, and expressed opposition to the "two stages of 30 years" of contemporary China. Žižek wrote in Slovenian in his early years, and became an academic star in the English-speaking world with his *The Sublime Object of Ideology* published in 1989. However, Žižek had not paid attention to Mao Zedong and China until he wrote *The Ticklish Subject* in 1999. After that, he "rediscovered" and came to value Lenin's revolutionary legacy and furthered his understanding of revolution. From 2001 to 2002, Slavoj Žižek wrote *Repeating Lenin* (Zagreb: Arkzin D.O.O.) and edited *Revolution at the Gates: Žižek on Lenin, the 1917 Writings* (London: Verso, 2002). In 2017, he published *Lenin 2017: Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through* (VersoBooks, 2017). During his "Lenin Period," Žižek not only talked more about Cultural Revolution and relevant issues, but more importantly, he also changed Western Left intellectuals' general attitude towards contemporary China. In his most important evaluation of Mao, he declared Mao the "Marxist Lord of Misrule" ("introduction") in the prefaces to the 2007 versions of "On Contradiction" and "On Practice" and analyzed the limitations of Mao's dialectic thinking in his essay titled "Revolutionary Terror from Robespierre to Mao Zedong" in his book *Defend the Lost Cause* published in 2008. In the 2011 special issue "The Chinese Perspective on Žižek and Žižek's Perspective on China" of *Positions*, Žižek engaged in an intense confrontation with Liu Kang and a group of Chinese scholars, including Zhang Yiwu (张颐武) and Yang Huilin (杨慧林). In this confrontation, Žižek rested his hope on

Badiou's "eternal" Idea of Communism. Zizek's evaluation of Mao marked a watershed moment for Western Maoist Aesthetics: if Mao's thinking had long been a positive form of motivation for Western Left-wing thoughts, and Western Left intellectuals also treated Mao's thinking and Chinese issues with sympathetic understanding, seeing them as inspiration from another country or even spiritual support, then this moment represented a turning point. Western Maoist Aesthetics is experiencing a transition, having moved from its early empathetic period, to the silence in the 1970s, the estrangement in the 1980s, and finally the questioning that has been occurring since the 1990s. This transition deserves our close attention.

The problem of Western Marxism vis-à-vis "true" Marxism has remained unresolved in Chinese Marxist study for decades. A similar problem exists with Western Maoism vis-à-vis "true" Maoism. These comparisons are reasonable in the sense that they pursue an objective and accurate understanding of Marxism and Maoism, avoiding possible misreadings or even distortions. Nevertheless, they have also limited the development of Marxism and Maoist study. I thus seek a way for scholars to maintain vitality and tension in thinking rather than feeling that they must adhere to either doctrinism or revisionism.

Although developed from different backgrounds, Chinese Mao's thinking on literature and arts and Western Maoist Aesthetics share the same theoretical resource of Mao's works and thinking. After the 1980s, Maoist Aesthetics made its way into the academic circle of Chinese literary theory along with the translation and introduction of Western Marxism, and exerted influence on the discourse of Chinese literary theory from different historical periods. Influential theories include Bertolt Brecht's theory of theatre, Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of "intervention," Louis Pierre Althusser's dialectic thinking, Herbert Marcuse's aesthetics of emancipation, Raymond Henry Williams' Marxist literary theories, Fredric Jameson's political unconsciousness, Arif Dirlik's post-revolution and other radical left-wing ideas that have been introduced in droves in recent years. However, the relationship of these ideas with Mao's thinking has been neglected. At the same time, Chinese Marxist aesthetics has long been equated to Maoism in the view of Western Marxists. There are lots of misunderstandings and distortion in this view, not to mention that it neglects the complexity of Chinese Marxist aesthetics. All these problems point to the importance of the study of both Chinese and Western Marxist Aesthetics under the principle of "contemporaneity." As Liu Kang explains:

I find the vision of Chinese aesthetic Marxism original, not only because of the conceptual framework that it offers, but also because its own discerning positions and agenda constitute a crucially different voice that may demystify the current preoccupation of difference and otherness in cultural studies. It is ironic, therefore, that this distinct voice, arising from and self-consciously critical of the radical legacy that has helped nurture the contemporary 'politics of otherness,' has remained ignored by the practitioners of that radical cultural politics ("Aesthetics" 9).

Parallel comparative study and inquiry into the mutual influence of (Western) Maoist Aesthetics and (Chinese) Mao's thinking on literature, as well as research on (Western) Maoism's return to China, can contribute to the rediscovery of the multi-dimensional voices and complexity of the theoretical thinking around Mao Zedong, and thus reveal unique but neglected voices.

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