

## Mo Yan's *Radish*: Between the Real and the Surreal

Xiaoyue Li

*Huazhong University of Science and Technology*

Xuefang Feng

*Huazhong University of Science and Technology*

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**Xiaoyue Li and Xuefang Feng,**  
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**Abstract:** In their article "Mo Yan's *Radish*: Between the Real and the Surreal" Xiaoyue Li and Xuefang Feng argue that *Radish*, a novella written by Nobel Prize winner Mo Yan skillfully combines realism with surrealism, the flexible swing between which is made possible by the choice of children's perspective, and the effect is too significant to be ignored. Their analysis concludes that the transparent golden radish symbolizes humanity, the lack of which projects the protagonist's sufferings, and that the surrealist description of the radish reveals the magic function of humanity in brightening up life in times of miseries.

## Xiaoyue LI and Xuefang FENG

### Mo Yan's *Radish*: Between the Real and the Surreal

Mo Yan shot to fame when he was awarded Nobel Prize of Literature in 2012, but actually his contributions were recognized by his contemporaries when *Radish* was published in the second issue of *Chinese Writer* in 1985. Some critics thought highly of the novel. Zaifu Liu, for instance, argues that "the work is terrific and really touching" ("Endless Mo Yan" 4) and believes the hero, Hei-hai, is an "unprecedented figure in China's literary world" ("Endless Mo Yan" 4). Moreover, the setting of *Radish*—Gaomi Township—has since proven foundational to Mo Yan's creative vision over the years. Gaomi Township, as Howard Goldblatt explains, is "a metaphor for China's fate" (*Books World* 261). Most of Mo Yan's novels are set in Gaomi, serving the author in a manner similar to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. Gaomi Township provides the setting for both wild, imaginative adventures and historical recreations. His Gaomi literature kingdom is known for a lot of impressive figures with rich implications and local characters, from "my" grandpa, Yu Zhanao and "my" grandma, Dai Jiulian in *红高粱 (Red Sorghum)* (1986), a righteous yet wild anti-Japanese hero and an anti-traditional excellent woman with courage to pursue true love and made sacrifices in combating Japanese aggressors to Shangguan Lu in *丰乳肥臀 (Big Breast and Wide Hips)* (1996), a powerful maternal figure leading her family to endure all kinds of hardship in the war-torn and destitute place despite her own suffering of being forced to give birth to a male heir for her sterile husband; from Luo Xiaotong in *四十一炮 (Pow)* (2003), a mentally sick kid with malformed values and strong desire for meat to Hei-hai in *透明的红萝卜 (Radish)*, a silent child who still survived tenaciously after going through a series of hardships. In Mo Yan's novels, it is always not hard to find the traces of children or wonderful descriptions from the perspective of children. Wenying Zhang states that in Mo Yan's works, "children are almost indispensable" (孩子几乎是不可缺少的 "Children's Pure World" [70]). In children's young and pure mind, the first impression is always new and strong. Moreover, what they perceive is the adult world in which they prematurely intervene. There are life and death they do not understand yet. However, the worse they understand, the stronger the temptation of perception would be.

*Radish* was published in the mid-1980s when modernism was embraced by China's literary world. The trend of writing in this period was not to reproduce life, but to go deep into the psychological state of the characters and demonstrate the repression and distortions brought to them by miserable lives. During this period, Chinese writers imitated various forms of Western modernism, including surrealism, expressionism, stream of consciousness, magic realism, and black humor. For example, Mo Yan acknowledges William Faulkner's impact on his work, but he does not simply imitate Faulkner. In the view of M. Thomas Inge, Mo Yan's style is "convoluted, as in the flow of stream of consciousness. Mo Yan's imagery is rich and threatens to drown the reader in its profuseness, and the text reflects a surrealist vision that uses concrete details from the exterior world at the same time that it leads us into the inner reality of emotional confusion and anxiety" ("Mo Yan" 18). Robert Con Davis-Undiano further argues, "The western active appreciation of Mo Yan signals a western openness to Chinese literature and a deepening engagement with Chinese culture" ("A Westerner's Reflection" 21).

Hei-hai, the main character in *Radish*, illustrates Mo Yan's combination of realism and surrealism. In reality, Hei-hai is an honest and silent ten-year-old boy suffering from the bullying and abuse of his step-mother who even sends him to work in a flood gate construction site where he endures the oppression from other adults, especially the Director Liu and the young blacksmith. The misfortune he has gone through in childhood makes him feel lonely, insecure, stubborn and unwilling to communicate with others. Hei-hai's life is a hard one. In addition to the abuse he receives from adults in the commune, his mother has died and his father has left for Northwest China. Moreover, food is scarce. Thanks to the help of a kind-hearted girl, Juzi, and her lover, the mason, Hei-hai gradually feels the warmth of the real human world. Juzi offers assistance to Hei-hai on the construction site and is also the first person except Hei-hai's father to give him love and care. In Hei-hai's mind, Juzi is like a mother. But because of the abuse of his stepmother in real life, he begins to doubt the concept of mother and his attachment to Juzi changes into a kind of complicated and hazy love. The handsome young mason has black eyebrows and white teeth and heartily sympathizes with Hei-hai. Guangwei Cheng points out, "the focus of the novel apparently is not on describing this mundane life story. It exaggerates and enlarges the mysterious senses of Hei-hai, and then a Chinese village picture that has been extremely beautiful in hard times is displayed to us by the juvenile" (小说重心显然不想叙述这凡俗的人生故事, 而是对黑孩奇异感官

作魔幻现实主义式的夸张放大，于是一幅辛苦年代被极尽溢美的中国乡村图画经这位少年之妙手搬到我们面前。["Upside-down village" [16]]. Having lived long in an indifferent world, Hei-hai becomes terrified to the real world and starts to seek comfort in a fairy world: the train is a one-eyed monster running at a crouch, faster than a horse and the radish is glittering and transparent, exquisitely limpid. He is endowed with powerful senses of touch, hearing and smell and has strong links with nature, which adds some radiance and spirituality to his impoverished life. He struggles to live and reduce his pain in real life through fabricating an imaginary and pure world for himself.

Hei-hai's experience reflects Mo Yan's own childhood. In 1967 when Mo Yan was 12, he worked in a water conservancy site to support his family. Driven by intolerable hunger, he stole a radish from the production team. He was spotted and escorted to the criticism session. After coming back home, he was beaten hard by his father. The painful childhood memory inspired him in the creation of *Radish*. Mo Yan's tortuous early life in Gaomi Township has been offering him continuous supply of nutrients for his literature creation. Since then, a splendid Gaomi Literature Kingdom has taken shape and built on itself in a series of excellent works eulogizing the perseverance, tenacity and endurance of the locals in tough times.

In *Radish*, Mo Yan endowed Hei-hai with acute sensory system and colorful internal world. This little boy seems to have been looking for something in his fairy tale world. As Harper Lee states in her book *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "People generally see what they look for, and hear what they listen for" (17). What, then, does Hei-hai look for? I'm convinced that reading *Radish* from a child's perspective—the perspective of Hei-hai—helps illustrate Mo Yan's intentions within the novel. This article explores the real and surreal world Hei-hai sees and analyzes Mo Yan's distinct combination of realism and surrealism. The novel is titled *Radish* which is by no means an ordinary radish. Qinghua Zhang believes that "it is a metaphor for sexual abilities that suddenly swelled in the subconscious of adolescent, Hei-hai. This ability later disappeared due to two different advantages (repression and castration) of two adult males—the mason and the blacksmith, leaving unutterable depression and jealousy" (红萝卜是少年“黑孩”潜意识中突然膨胀起来的性能力的隐喻，这能力后来由于两个成年男性——“小石匠”和“小铁匠”的两种不同的优势(压抑和去势)而消失，留下了难言的抑郁和怅惘["limitation of narration" [61]]. *Radish* means something special to Hei-hai and there are many surrealistic descriptions about the transparent radish: "A soft blue-green light suffused the sleek surface of the anvil, on which rested a golden radish. In shape and size it was like a pear, though it had a long tail, every fiber of which was a strand of golden wool. Glittering and transparent, exquisitely limpid, its golden skin revealed a swirling silvery liquid inside" (Mo Yan, *Radish* 588). All other quotes from this work are from the same source). The illusion of this beautiful transparent golden radish appears in front of Hei-hai when he feels the rare happiness in the real world. He stretches out his hands to grasp the radish, but the young smith races up and snatches up the radish before him. So this article also analyzes the symbolic meaning of the radish to Hei-hai, which can be conducive to finding out the links between Hei-hai and the radish.

Realism was prevalent in Europe in the nineteenth century. *Scarlet and Black* (1830) by Stendhal; *The Human Comedy* (1841) by Balzac; *Boule de Suif* (1880) by Maupassant; and *Oliver Twist* (1838) by Dickens are magnum opuses of realism. These authors reveal the moral truth of society and how it distorts and destroys the younger generation. These novels also highlight the antagonism between young people and society through the protagonists' experiences. The protagonists have two choices: to conform or to be crushed. Realist novels intend to reflect reality from multiple angles, from the most real and common daily life to the fate of a person; from the great social and historical changes to the emotional world and psychological secrets of the heroes involved in the social whirlpool. On the contrary, surrealists regard the surreal and super-sensible dreams and illusion as the source of literary and artistic creation. They reckon that only the unconscious world beyond reality can get rid of all the shackles and reveal the objective facts in the most authentic way. As a literary and artistic school originated in France, surrealism was warmly embraced by the European literature and art circles from the 1920s to the 1930s. According to André Breton's interpretation, "surrealism" means "purely spiritual unconsciousness" (Manifestoes 26) which is not subject to any control, and can avoid any consideration of aesthetics. Surrealists advocate the real unity between external reality (material reality and real world) and inner reality (psychological reality and dream world) and believe that dream can be used to solve the main problems of life in the harsh world. Therefore the surrealists respect dream and consider it the best way to create magic. Dreams can give full play to imagination because it is exempt from the control of logic, consciousness, time and space. A surreal literature book *Connected Container* written by Breton interlinked the dream and reality and achieved the surreal magical effect.

The influence of modernism is obvious in *Radish* as it not only abounds with skillful use of rhetoric devices such as metaphor, irony, and overstatement, but also vividly embellishes the psychological world of Hei-hai through imagination and dream. The flexible conversion between realism and surrealism not only creates a sense of mystery but also highlights the suffering of Hei-hai and the power of life. Every time when Hei-hai indulges in the happy fairy tale world, he is awakened by sharp words from the adult world. The fairy tale world and the adult world appear and confront alternately. When readers feel amazed at the fantastic scene in Hei-hai's eyes and minds, all of a sudden, some harsh sounds and actions from the real world pull them back to reality. They seem to have entered into the inner world of Hei-hai when reading the novel, shuttling between illusion and reality. Such a frequent conversion between these two worlds gives readers more authentic feeling about Hei-hai's hardships and arouses great sympathy and admiration for this child who bears huge physical and mental pressure but never gives up hope for life.

He heard music like birdsong and the chirps of autumn insects from the jute field. The retreating mist seemed to thunder as it caromed off jute leaves and both deep red and light green stalks. The sound of grasshoppers rubbing legs against fore wings was like a train crossing an iron bridge. He'd once seen a train in a dream, a one-eyed monster running at a crouch, faster than a horse. The train had just stood up in his dream when he was awakened by a swat from his stepmother's hearth broom." (Mo Yan, *Radish* 134)

The sounds of birds, insects, retreating mist and grasshoppers seem to be amplified in Hei-hai's ears. It is nature's chorus which can only be heard and appreciated by this magic boy. A sound like a crossing train triggers a dream about train. He has never seen a train with his own eyes before, but he imagines it as a one-eye monster running faster than horses. He could imagine more, but the swat from his stepmother pulls him back to reality.

A strange sound drifted over from the river, thin and faint, like nibbling fishes, now near, now far. Straining to capture it with both eyes and ears, he saw a bright gassy cloud rising over the river, which seemed to capture the oscillating hum within. His cheeks grew ruddy and an affecting smile gathered at the corners of his mouth. He had long forgotten where he was sitting and what he was doing, as if the arm that moved up and down belonged to someone else. (Mo Yan, *Radish* 194)

An affecting smile only appears when Hei-hai indulges in his imaginary world. But still, he is forced to come back to the real world because of the pain of smashing on his finger. He is not screaming or shouting like a normal child of ten; instead, he just utters a sound, something between a moan and a sigh. The pain from Hei-hai's fingers, though slight to him, still pulls him back to cold reality.

In surrealism, dream and illusion are effective tools to convey desires, the dominant force in the material reality, and psychological reality. In the real world, Hei-hai is longing for care. All wonderful things in his created fantasy world express his desires, especially the transparent radish. However, everything beautiful in the illusory world exists briefly and is eventually interrupted and broken by the brutal reality. The constant crisscrossing of real and surreal spaces creates a mysterious figure, and increases our understanding of Hei-hai's suffering and perseverance in the real world.

In *Radish*, Mo Yan adopts a realistic writing method to describe the suffering and hardships Hei-hai has gone through in the real world. Hei-hai's constant struggle shows that he is tenacious and strong-willed. At the beginning of the novel, there is a brief description of Hei-hai:

A boy of ten or so stood in a corner. He was barefoot and stripped to the waist, wearing only a pair of long, baggy, green striped white shorts that were stained by grass and dried blood. The shorts ended at his knees, above calves shiny with scars. He had a big head and a skinny neck that seemed in danger of snapping from the load it carried." (Mo Yan, *Radish* 35)

Standing alone in a corner conveys a sense of loneliness and isolation and the boy's ragged clothes show that he is poorly cared for by his family. The shiny scars on the calves demonstrate suffering and abuse. His big head and skinny neck speak of malnutrition. The overall impression is one of tragedy.

Hei-hai suffers from material scarcity and abuse from his family, especially his step-mother. This abuse, however, is not limited to his family; the entire adult world, particularly a young blacksmith, preys on the boy. The blacksmith constantly curses at the boy, forcing him to pick up hot chisels and steal food—most notably sweet potatoes and radishes. Again, this description is rooted in Mo Yan's memories of his own childhood. Born in the era of material deprivation, Mo Yan once said the deepest memory left by that era is hunger. In order to have a full meal, Hei-hai works as a laborer at the floodgate and bears the burden of the family—a heavy weight for a ten-year-old boy. Severe

malnutrition leads to his skinny body. When his father leaves, Hei-hai feels insecure; he has lost the only person in the family who cares about him. The novel rarely talks about Hei-hai's father, nor does it pay much attention to the feelings of loss that might be expected in a boy as young as Hei-hai.

The novel's silence regarding Hei-hai's father may suggest that the boy does not care. However, this is not the case. At the end of the novel, Hei-hai is caught digging up half of the radishes, and the brigade commander asks Hei-hai "What's your father's name?" (Mo Yan, *Radish* 853) Two lines of tears rolled down Hei-hai's face. Hei-hai has already suffered much: his finger has been smashed by a hammer and his hand has been scalded by a hot chisel. He is a tough boy. But this question brings tears. It touches the weakest place of Hei-hai's heart. He wishes his father were there taking care of him and accompanying him in those hard times. The novel contrasts Hei-hai's appearance before his father leaves to his current look: "He'd been younger then, of, course, and had had a lot more meat on his bones. His father hadn't left for the north-east and his stepmother hadn't started drinking." (Mo Yan, *Radish* 95). Before his father leaves, the family can be seen as a normal one and Hei-hai looks healthier despite food scarcity. However, the family falls apart after his father leaves. His stepmother becomes an alcoholic. Every time she gets drunk, she begins to beat, pinch and bite Hei-hai.

His father's absence leaves Hei-hai open to mockery and physical abuse, particularly from his alcoholic stepmother. Domestic violence from Hei-hai's stepmother hurts him both physically and mentally, intensifying his sense of loneliness and insecurity and leading to his introverted personality. Facing all the difficulties in life, Hei-hai gradually becomes indifferent to them as if he cannot feel the pain. Meanwhile, the misery of life and the indifference and bullying from some adult neighbors make him feel insecure and terrified to the real world. He consciously isolates himself from everything in the outside world. Here are some descriptions about the mockery from the local village officials: When the production team leader's gaze falls on Hei-hai standing in a corner, he says: "I see you're still with us, Hei-hai, you little shit! I thought you'd gone down to meet the king of Hell." (Mo Yan, *Radish* 44). The director Liu thundered to Hei-hai: "If I catch you loafing on the job, I'll cut your ear off as a snack to go with my drink" (Mo Yan, *Radish* 157). But when the director looks at the bare back of Hei-hai, the kindness of humanity buried in the deep heart is triggered and he could not help but care about him although in an insufficient way. He asks Hei-hai to tell his stepmother to give him a shirt and calls him poor little beggar, which shows that although the leader says some vicious words to Hei-hai, he still feels sympathy for him. In fact, Mo Yan provides several descriptions of people's hidden concern about Hei-hai. When Hei-hai smashed his finger with a hammer, "the other women stopped what they were doing to cast misty looks their way. Silence lay over the rock pile. The women's faces wore dreary looks, like barren soil in which nothing grew. After a long moment of indecision they went back to work, as if waking from a dream, the monotonous sound of metal on stone creating an aura of resignation" (Mo Yan, *Radish* 208). The change from movement to silence and to movement again reflects the pity those women show for Hei-hai. However, in such tough times, they are not capable of assisting this child to change his miserable life. The only thing they can do is utter a helpless sigh in their heart. Similarly, the old blacksmith seems indifferent but still tells Hei-hai how to pump the bellows. Mo Yan is trying to create a world that seems cruel and dark but where there is still warmth of humanity featuring the kindness and direct care to Hei-hai from the beautiful girl, Juzi and the handsome young mason, sympathy from the team leader and those women laborers and the assistance from the old blacksmith.

Silent as Hei-hai is, he would still respond to the kindness from others with his flexible ears and black eyes. He first feels the goodwill from the mason when the mason asks him whether he is cold. Living in the family with no care and love for a long time, Hei-hai is in difficulty distinguishing whether it is care for him. And the long-term isolation deprives him of his ability to communicate with others. He doesn't know how to respond but gapes at him. He wiggles his ears like a bunny rabbit and gazes at her smooth, round chin when Juzi asks about the scars on his back. He acknowledges her attention with an occasional glance. His ears flap like fans when Juzi brings him two corn buns and he keeps his eyes on her as he bites into the buns and chews. Here is another description which shows the important places of Juzi and the mason in Hei-hai's heart: "Everyone at the worksite was calling him Hei-hai- Dark BOY and he ignored them all, wouldn't even look them in the eye. Only when Juzi or the mason spoke to him would he respond with his eyes" (Mo Yan, *Radish* 243). After all, Hei-hai is a child of only ten who desires care and love. The presence of Juzi and the mason and their care for him bring light to Hei-hai's dark life.

There clearly exist two different worlds in Mo Yan's *Radish*: the realistic world and the surreal world. *Radish* is realistic, including childhood memories, home life, the distress and conflict brought to people by change of the times; and it is also surreal because of the mysterious and legendary colors of the characters. The realistic content and illusory aspect are fused and intertwined, making the novel unpredictable, unrestrained and flowing when a child hero reveals the world he sees and perceives to the readers. In the works of Mo Yan, children are almost indispensable figures. As their life vitality is

severely suppressed, their sensory system is extremely developed with sharp and abnormal sense organs. Wenyang Zhang states that "these little boys are not yet mature both physically and mentally and they are not qualified to enjoy the rights of adults, but must first bear the pain of survival, hunger and panic which contain vitality" (这些小男孩无论是生理上还是心理上都尚未成熟,他们没有资格享受成人的权利,却必须首先承受生存的痛苦、饥饿与恐慌对生命力的遏制["Children's perspective"[70]). They become little elves in the harsh environment and show their tenacity in a variety of ways. Juvenile Jing Gangzhuang has a magical sense of smell, Hei-hai has a strong sense of hearing and Wang Shijin is endowed with unprecedented red ears. All of their distinctive traits and what they have seen, heard and felt have created a surreal world within their tough lives. Lijun Wang argues that "In the narrative text constructed from the perspective of children, the narrator is usually undertaken by a child and enters the narrative system with a child's way of thinking and behavior" (在从孩子视角构建的叙事中,叙事者通常由孩子承担,他们用孩子的思想和行为进入叙事体系["Children's Perspective" [99]). Narrative from children's perspective tends to be more real and is often filled with fantasy colors. Children can give full play to their imagination and create fantasies.

In *Radish*, Mo Yan chooses to tell the story from the perspective of the hero, Hei-hai and shows us the inner world of this child and his shift at psychological level. As a child, Hei-hai watches everything around him with a child's eyes. The music of birds and insects in the deep autumn, the strange sound over the river like nibbling fishes, the glittering, golden and transparent radish are seen and felt by Hei-hai, taking on a magnificent artistic aspect. Mo Yan is skilled at describing feelings and thinks highly of the feelings and psychology of his characters. Hei-hai becomes silent and closes his heart to the indifferent real world after long enduring the abuse from his stepmother and the adult world. But he is endowed with acute sensory abilities and has a close connection with nature which brings him comfort. Hei-hai's suffering in the real world and his struggle to find dignity and happiness in his imaginary world are conveyed through a close description of Hei-hai's feelings. "That dark-skinned boy with the superhuman ability to suffer and a superhuman degree of sensitivity represents the soul of my entire fictional output. Not one of all the fictional characters I've created since then is as close to my soul as he is" ("Storytellers: Nobel lecture" 13), said Mo Yan at 2012 Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech.

After dropping out of elementary school, Mo Yan became a cattle-and sheep-herder on a nearby grassy riverbank. He was all by himself and terribly lonely. Sometimes he lay on the grass and watched clouds float lazily, which gave rise to all sorts of fanciful images. To stave off loneliness, Mo Yan began to have a dialogue with everything around him, the cow and the sheep, the birds flying in the sky and the plants and flowers. Undoubtedly, he got no response from them; the birds ignored him and so did the trees. But the experience built an intimate bond between Mo Yan and nature and stimulated his imagination. As Jerry Xie proposes, the most concentrated articulation of this "swing" occurs in the insistence of the narrator's "imagination" as the all-encompassing consciousness of a world suspended in the fluidity of an uncertain in-between-ness of "reality" fusing with "illusion" ("The Ideology" 701). Through Hei-hai's perspective, Mo Yan reproduces this childhood experience through combination of reality and imagination. And only reading the novel from children's perspective can readers fully appreciate its beauty and miracle of Hei-hai's internal world.

As is mentioned above, the novella is derived from the Mo Yan's childhood memory of being punished for stealing a radish. So he titles the novel *Radish*. But in the novel, Mo Yan seems to have endowed the radish more profound meanings. It is a golden, glittering, transparent and exquisitely limpid radish with a long tail every fiber of which is a strand of golden wool. "Mo deploys the system of absurdity as a force of a desire for affinities of affinities: hazy and unreal, back and forth, one side to the other, mixed feelings, over and over, losing my resolve," Jerry Xie says, "this is what we hear in our powerful historical novel" ("Hearing" 271). Why an ordinary radish is described as such a magic one? What makes Hei-hai produce such an illusion? And what's the special link between the transparent radish and Hei-hai? The radish first appears when Juzi, the mason and the young blacksmith sit together under the bridge enjoying pleasant fullness after a late-night snack. A plaintive and brooding melody comes out of the mouth of the old blacksmith. But at this deep night, hunger and coldness are all gone and two young people—Juzi and the mason—are there with him, creating the warm and secure environment the boy longs for. People tend to generate some fantastic illusions at wonderful moments. Thus, the golden radish appears, which serves both to illustrate Hei-hai's subjective state and to advance the plot. The color gold is significant. As the color of the sun, it represents warmth and happiness. The transparent golden radish is the most authentic response of Hei-hai. The temporary happiness makes Hei-hai believe he can tightly grasp it and from then on live a better life, one in which he is loved and never cold or hungry. He reaches out his scarred and burned hand to catch the radish, but when he gets inches away

from it, the young blacksmith races up and snatches up the radish and then threw it into the river, producing a golden rainbow in front of Hei-hai's eyes. The disappearing of the radish seems to be a sign of the end of Hei-hai's short happiness. The next day, the old blacksmith leaves. This departure, together with the loss of the radish, causes Hei-hai to become absent-minded and upset. When he hears Juzi and the mason dating in the jute field, a strange feeling crashes over him. Juzi, a special girl to Hei-hai. As the first girl to care for him, she has fed him and protected him from the young blacksmith. She triggers a strong desire in Hei-hai for love and care. He feels warm about her. He even keeps a token—a handkerchief she gave to him to bind up a wound. However, such a warm feeling seems to be an indication that the care from Juzi will be deprived soon. And that proves to be true. Once Juzi and the mason fall in love with each other, they appear to forget Hei-hai and stop going to the bridge to see him, which disappoints him a lot. He wants to see that golden and transparent radish again after he is forced to steal radish. But it seems wrapped in a dark red cloth, tattered and ugly. No matter how hard he works, the magic radish never shows up. He becomes jealous of the mason, like a child robbed of a toy, and helps the young blacksmith against the mason with a complicated feeling when they fight with each other. But to Hei-hai's surprise, Juzi is hurt on her right eye by the rocks flung by the young blacksmith during this fight. Under the situation, Hei-hai is terrified and squats down in the darkest corner, his teeth chattering.

The mason and Juzi never return after the fight. Hei-hai comes to the radish field and tries his best to find one like that hidden in the river, glittering, transparent and emitting a golden halo. He fails even though he digs up half of the radish field. That magic golden radish just disappears along with the vanishing of Juzi and the mason, the only two who care about him. The temporary happiness is coming to an end and what will come next is the endless suffering. It can be concluded that the golden and transparent radish is a symbol of humanity, which brightens up Hei-hai's life when he is warmed by the concern of others. That's the very reason why the same magic radish can no longer be found among the entire field of radishes when those who care and love him are gone.

The life styles and living conditions of the ordinary people in literary Gaomi Township actually epitomize those of Chinese in the same period, as was encountered by the author in childhood. Radish celebrates Hei-hai's indomitable vitality in the face of material shortage and emotional abuse. Facing difficulties, Hei-hai fabricates a fairy tale world to transcend the reality of misery, comfort himself and heal his physical and mental wound. The beauty and wonder of the imagined world is the best solution to getting rid of the pain and isolation from the real world, and his salvation can only be achieved with the special perspective and extraordinary senses. The shifts between realism and surrealism convey both Hei-hai's suffering and his surprising strength. The transparent, glittering, golden radish symbolizes Hei-hai's desire for humanity in his surroundings which is attractive but always beyond reach.

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#### **Authors' Profiles:**

Xiaoyue Li is a graduate student majoring in translation and Interpreting at Huazhong University of Science and Technology in China. Her latest publication is "The Cultural Connotation and Translation Strategies of Chinese Dish Names", *Foreign Language Education* (2016). Email: <[390504532@qq.com](mailto:390504532@qq.com)>

Xuefang Feng teaches Chinese language and culture at Huazhong University of Science and Technology in China. Her research interests include language and culture comparison. Her latest publications include "An Investigation into the Language Use and Cultural Identification of Chinese Immigrants in New Zealand", *English Square* (2015). Email: <[fengxf@hust.edu.cn](mailto:fengxf@hust.edu.cn)>