

## MEMORY LOST AND REVIVED:

### Zhang Chengzhi's Fictional Works on Educated Youth Sent to the Countryside<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

The experience of life as sent-down youth was often depicted as a poignant life journey in many contemporary Chinese literary works, the memory of which people tend to obliterate. However, in his earlier fictional works, particularly in *Rivers of the North* (1984), Zhang Chengzhi (b. 1948) endeavors to revive that memory by having his protagonists revisit the locations where they were once sent, as a result of which they not only revisit “inhabited space”, but also relive “past time”. Youthful idealism which is closely associated with these geographical peripheries is revived and the memory of life as sent-down youth once again occupies a central position in the life of his protagonists, providing strength and meaning for their current life. Zhang narrates his autobiographical protagonist’s long journey to revisit the countryside as a “rite of passage”, endowing past time and inhabited space with semi-religious grandeur. In this way, earlier works written by Zhang anticipate his later conversion to Jahriyya, raising important questions on the relationship between memory and narration, Maoism and Islamism, and fiction and historiography. Zhang’s fictional works describe the confrontation of the city and the countryside, of intellect and instinct, and of civilization and ignorance, indicating an attempt to reverse the enlightenment thinking upheld by May Fourth intellectuals. His association of the country with idealism anticipates his later connection of the most impoverished geographical peripheries with religious sublimity in *History of the Soul* (1991).

#### Keyword

Zhang Chengzhi, sent-down youth, cultural memory, *Rivers of the North*, *History of the Soul*

**About the author**

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For many Chinese urban intellectuals born in the 1940s and 1950s, the experience of receiving “education” in the rural areas remains one of their most indelible memories. It is estimated that between 1968 and 1979, over 30 million middle and high school graduates were sent to the countryside. When Mao Zedong called on urban youth to “learn from impoverished farmers,” it was in fact his strategy to disperse the large number of unemployed youth who took part in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as young Red Guards (Xie 6). Torn from their native urban environment and thrown into the most remote and impoverished rural regions, at a time when many of them barely finished junior middle school, or at most high school, these young people were to undergo a phase in their life in which the stark difference between the city and the countryside, poverty and affluence, ignorance and gentility were to be hurled at them, an experience which would carve into their later world view. Afterwards, this historical event—together with the nation-wide parade of the Red Guards and their smashing of icons—has been viewed negatively and as part of the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. To many former “sent-down youth,” the memory of life in the countryside, as well as that of the Cultural Revolution before their rustication, is one of remorse, humiliation, and suffering, both physical and mental. As a result, the collective memory of life as “xiangxiang zhiqing” 下乡知青 (sent-down youth) has become marginalized in the daily life of contemporary Chinese.

In post-Mao literature, however, the Cultural Revolution as well as the experience of rustication always loom large. Various literary trends including “shanghen wenxue” 伤痕文学 (scar literature), “fanshi wenxue” 反思文学 (reflection literature), and “xungen wenxue” 寻根文学 (root-seeking literature) address the experience from different perspectives, either exposing the cruelty and trauma caused by the Cultural Revolution, or trying to seek the cultural roots of China in geographically remote regions in an attempt to address the rupture caused by the Cultural Revolution. Among these literary trends is what is often referred to as “zhiqing wenxue” 知青文学 (sent-down youth literature), which carries over “through such phases as ‘Scar Literature,’ ‘Reform Literature,’ ‘Search-for Roots,’ the ‘Misty Poets’ and ‘Neo-Realism’” (Yang 319). Authors of “sent-down youth literature” include Zhang Chengzhi 张承志 (1948), Shi Tiesheng 史铁生 (1951-2010), Zhang Kangkang 张抗抗 (b. 1950) and many others. In their fictional narratives, the experience as “sent-down youth” assumes the central role, and obtains a new place in the identity formation of protagonists.

Among these writers, Zhang Chengzhi is a unique and most intriguing existence. An ethnic Hui writer born in Beijing, Zhang has been known as the person who coined the term “*hong weibing*” 红卫兵 (the Red Guard).<sup>2</sup> He has been one of the most ardent supporters of Mao even to this day, and at the same time, his conversion to the Jahriyya sect of Islamism since 1984 has made him a most controversial

figure in contemporary Chinese literature.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these multi-layered facets of his work, Zhang is considered by David Derwei Wang as the “number one writer in contemporary Sinophone literature”, being a minority Sinophone writer,<sup>4</sup> and is hailed by Wang Meng 王蒙 (b. 1934) as a writer with “real idealism” (4). Yet on this important and complex writer, a lot more research needs to be done to unveil the narrative and thematic features of his earlier works, in the process of which we get a glimpse into his later religious conviction, as well as the scope of his works in uncovering the link between memory and narration, between fiction and historiography, and between Maoism and Islamism.

In this article, I mainly examine Zhang’s earlier fictional works, i.e., those written before his discovery of and conversion to Jahriyya, in particular, his novella *Beifang de he* 北方的河 (Rivers of the North) (1984). I probe the way memory of the experience of rustication is reflected in these earlier works. I argue that memory plays a crucial role in Zhang’s fictional works, in which youthful idealism is often most closely associated with geographical peripheries which are impoverished and culturally under-developed, such as the Mongolian pasture in *Hei junma* 黑骏马 (The Black Steed) (1981), Shaanxi villages and Xinjiang borderlands in *Rivers of the North*. It is in these places and at those half-forgotten, poignant times that the protagonists spend their youthful and idealistic years. As they leave those places to seek knowledge, civilization and success, they lose their memory of those places and times, together with the innocence, passion and enthusiasm that they symbolize. The protagonists eventually come to terms with their past and present, usually by revisiting those places and reviving their memories. Such memories, originally situated at the periphery of the life of those former educated youth, ultimately become the most essential memory of their life, providing strength and meaning for their current life.

In the following passages, I first provide a discussion of the relationship between memory and identity formation, drawing on Jan Assman’s arguments about the temporal as well as the spatial dimensions of memory, and his conceptions of cultural memory. Next I contextualise my research of Zhang within wider discussions of “sent-down youth literature”, situating his works in the larger discursive environment of post-Mao literature. Then a close reading of *Rivers of the North* is presented in which I delineate the ways in which Zhang endows the memory of life as sent-down youth with regained meaning in his fictional narratives that recall the generation’s faith in the revolutionary cause, their hope for a better future for their nation, their excitement at seeing the vast nation during the National Parade, their coming-of-age in impoverished rural areas, and ultimately, their different life choices. I argue that the way Zhang manages to bring such memories from the periphery of his protagonists’ consciousness to the center is by narrating their experience as “rites of passage”, in Paul Connerton’s term. Finally, I reflect on Zhang’s attitudes

towards the city and the country by situating his position both within the Chinese intellectual history since the May Fourth, and within his personal journey in the pursuit of meaning and ideal.

### **MEMORY AND IDENTITY FORMATION: FROM CENTER TO PERIPHERY AND BACK**

Memory plays a crucial role in Zhang's earlier fictional works, therefore I want to discuss some key conceptions in memory studies which serve as the coordinates of my discussions of Zhang's works. Lying at the heart of our existence, memory defines the way we perceive ourselves, hence our own identity. As Maurice Halbwachs points out, "we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated" (47). As suggested by the etymology of the word "identity", the sameness of one's interpretation of his/her situation, or the continual relationship in which one finds himself or herself, constructs one's identity. The relationship between identity and memory is further dissected by Jan Assmann, who proposes the idea of "connective structure", which exists in every culture and binds everyone with people around him/her by constructing a "symbolic universe," that is, "a common area of experience, expectation, and action whose connecting force provides them [i.e. people] with trust and with orientation" (2). At the same time, the connective structure links yesterday with today, by "giving form and presence to influential experiences and memories, incorporating images and tales from another time into the background of the onward moving present, and bringing with it hope and continuity" (Assmann 2). To Assmann, what binds the individual to a group that is the corresponding "we" is "the connective structure of common knowledge and characteristics - first through adherence to the same laws and values, and second through the memory of a shared past" (3). Assmann's assertion incisively explains the formation of identity, which is ultimately the identification of oneself with a group of people. He highlights the importance of memory in such a process.

We can infer from such an assertion that when the memory of a group of people involves shame, pain, and humiliation, these people most likely will have difficulty coming to terms with who they are and where they are heading. By contrast, when the memory contains glory, happiness, and pride, the group of people presumably enjoy a higher level of self-acceptance and more hope for the future. Because of such a high stake that memory possesses, it is often highly maneuvered. People call upon memory to provide a "usable past", that is, "an account of events and actors that can be harnessed for some purpose in the present." Of such purposes, a major one has to do with individual or collective identity claims (Wertsch 31). There

are, of course, various sorts of identity claims as such. One of them is the need to obliterate the sting of defeat and redeem a lost cause (Sherry 97-114). In the case of Zhang Chengzhi, as I hope to demonstrate, his protagonists are in dire need of redeeming the lost cause of revolution, as well as their bygone youth wrongly spent.

Amid all possible manipulations of memory, forgetting is a crucial way to get rid of an unhappy past, whereas forgiving deals with guilt and reconciliation with the past. To Paul Ricoeur, forgetting and forgiveness intersect with each other, because they are both “memory appeased”, and forgiveness can even be considered “a happy forgetting” (412). In terms of Zhang’s protagonists, forgiveness does not only concern being forgiven by others to whom they have done wrong during the Cultural Revolution, but also involves their own forgiving of the suffering imposed on them by their time, that is, letting go of a sense of frustration and grudge against their own past.

Generally speaking, there are two dimensions of memory, the temporal one and the spatial one. Both dimensions are of great relevance to my analysis of Zhang’s fictional works, therefore I will take some time to discuss them before proceeding to further analyses. We often instinctively divide our time into the past, the present, and the future, yet we seldom consider why it is thus divided. Assmann points out that “every substantial break in continuity or tradition can produce the past whenever the break is meant to create a new beginning” (18). The association of “a break” with the making of “the past” is very incisive, as “past” days which are still actively lived and felt are by no means past at all. They are a part of our current experience. Assmann further discusses the connection between the past and the future. He posits that collective memory not only reconstructs the past, but also participates in the experiences of the present and the future (Assmann 28). This is exactly why memory, as well as literary representations of memory, is so important for our current life.

The other dimension of memory is the spatial one. Assmann states that memory is not only rooted with “experienced time”, but is also always rooted in “inhabited space”. He provides the example of the importance of the house to the family, of the village and land to the farmer, and of cities to town-dwellers. Such are all “spatial frames for memories, and even - or especially - during absence, they are what is remembered as home” (Assmann 24). He foregrounds the significance of geographical locations for the preservation of collective memory, stating that they not only provide a setting for the interaction among a group of people, but also provide “points of reference for its memories” (Assmann 25). Indeed, while the temporal dimension of memory is often noticed in our daily conception of the past, the spatial dimension is sometimes overlooked.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is always in a certain

location, a place associated with a time past, that we most vividly relive our past experience, and thereby reviving our memory.

Apart from the temporal and spatial dimensions of memory, another point that Assmann makes which significantly deepens our understanding of Zhang's works is his conception of the notion of "cultural memory", which is also his major contribution to theories of memory. He distinguishes between "communicative memory" and "cultural memory", stating that while the former "comprises memories related to the recent past," the latter "focuses on fixed points in the past," yet it is unable to preserve the past as it was, and it "tends to be condensed into symbolic figures to which memory attaches itself" (Assmann 36-37). Of all the salient features of cultural memory, there are a few that are closely relevant to my discussion of "sent-down youth literature" (Assmann and Czaplicka 130-133). The basic distinction between the two kinds of memories, according to Assmann, is the fundamental difference between daily life and festival celebrations. "The collective identity needs ceremony - something to take it out of the daily routine. To a degree, it is larger than life." Therefore "cultural memory is imbued with an element of the sacred" (Assmann 38). While other scholars of memory, such as Pierre Nora, also notices the close connection between memory and the sacred (9), Assmann further probes the relationship between cultural memory and the sacred by arguing that "the distinction between communicative and cultural memory is linked to the difference between the everyday and the festive, the profane and the sacred, the ephemeral and the lasting, the particular and the general" (43). By identifying the "religious significance" of cultural memory, Assmann points out its intrinsic characteristics. This reminds us of Durkheim's discovery of "collective effervescence" in religious rituals,<sup>6</sup> which is enhanced by collective memory throughout ordinary days, according to Halbwachs (24-25). We will later see its vivid representations in the works of Zhang, who often endows his reminiscence of the past with sacred, almost religious grandeur.

#### LITERATURE OF THE "SENT-DOWN YOUTH"

The equivalent term of "sent-down youth" in Chinese is "*zhishi qingnian*" 知识青年, which literally means "literate youth," or "educated youth". It was already in common use before the Cultural Revolution took place. In the 1950s, the Chinese state took control not only of the national economy, but also of institutionalized education. As a result, the education and employment of young people were closely intertwined with national political and economical situations (Xie 4-5). At that time, economic depression resulted in a large number of middle school graduates being unable to find employment in the city, and that is when "the nation thought

of the countryside” (Ding 5). The state then dissuaded middle school graduates who were originally from the countryside to find employment in the city, and eventually also encouraged graduates who were originally from urban households to go to rural areas to work. It is conceivable that the latter policy would have been hard to carry out, given the poor living condition of the rural areas in China at the time. It was, however, quite thoroughly implemented due to Mao Zedong’s forceful measures. In December 1968, Mao made his significant pronouncement which changed the life of millions of Chinese people: “It is vital for literate youth to go to the countryside, to be re-educated by impoverished, and lower-middle peasants” (462). As a result, millions of middle and high school graduates from urban households either willingly or unwillingly relocated to the countryside of China. Most of them undertook heavy agricultural labour only to gain minimal wages (Xie 6). The hardship of rural life was beyond the wildest imagination of many literate youth.<sup>7</sup> It was later revealed that the vast majority of young people were unwilling to go to the countryside, and most of them suffered badly from miserable living conditions and hard labour (Xie 7).

Such experiences later found their expression in sent-down youth literature,<sup>8</sup> which forms the larger part of the “root-seeking literature” that prospered in the 1980s. Writers of sent-down youth literature often reveal an unyielding sense of mission. This is because these writers were often themselves once sent-down youth who “grew up in the Communist euphoria” and used to be “imbued with a sense of importance and purpose”, but whose ideals were shattered by the Cultural Revolution, as well as by the sufferings imposed on them as sent-down youth (Rong 87). Many of them felt superfluous and psychologically lost after they returned to the cities. As a result, they felt a strong and urgent need to find meaning in their Cultural Revolution years (Rong 87). This is when many of them turned to remote countryside with a nostalgic gaze at their past idealism and zeal, to seek meaning and value long lost. For instance, writers like Ah Cheng 阿城 (1949) and Han Shaogong 韩少功 (1953) “used the Cultural Revolution, in particular the experience of sent-down youths, to explore modern China’s cultural heritage” (Berry 255). This attitude has not always been thus. In fact, in the late 1970s, most writers who were former sent-down youth looked back at their olden days in horror. They either avoided mentioning it or wrote about it in stark negation. The reason why the root-seeking trend appeared in the 1980s is that as Deng Xiaoping called for open-up and reform of China, a new cultural fever gradually emerged which had a “strong utopian bent”, and it “offered the *zhiqing* writers a second chance to return to the mainstream, thus reasserting their presence in society.” Consequently, they wrote about “the positive influence life in the countryside had had on their moral development and maturation” as a way to turn their “peripheralized experience into the center of the cultural exploration” (Rong 88). The literary achievements

of these writers are considered by critics such as Li Tuo as a “revolution in literary paradigms” (Li I).

Generally speaking, literature of “sent-down youth” can center both on protagonists born in rural areas who return to the countryside after completing schooling in the city, and on those of urban origins. The latter surpasses the former both in number and in influence. It is also the main concern of this article. Writers of literature of sent-down youth were sometimes divided into two groups by scholars according to their educational background. “The earlier three grades” (*lao san jie* 老三届) refers to junior middle school and high school students who graduated in 1966, 1967 and 1968. They began middle school education before the start of the Cultural Revolution, and therefore received relatively complete middle school education. Many of them took part in the Cultural Revolution, and formed the main body of the Red Guards in various middle schools (Xie 13). Writers who were of “the earlier three grades” were usually born between 1940s and 1950s. They include Zhang Chengzhi, Liang Xiaosheng 梁晓声 (b. 1949), Zhang Kangkang, and others. These writers’ works reveal a fascination with politics and its implications for our lives. Their reflections on life, the society, and history are often more profound and clear-headed than younger writers (Xie 21). In contrast, younger writers such as Wang Anyi 王安忆 (b. 1954), Tie Ning 铁凝 (b. 1957), and Chi Li 池莉 (b. 1957) who did not participate in the Cultural Revolution were able to distance themselves from the ideology and political zeal of the 1960s. Their works were often more peaceful, and less burdened with explorations of politics. It is, however, in the most poignant self-torture and self-denial of the works of the older writers that we find the most touching humanity. Zhang Chengzhi, for one, moves his readers with unrelenting efforts at finding out the meaning of those darkened days.

### REVIVING MEMORIES OF “SENT-DOWN YOUTH”: FROM PERIPHERY TO THE CENTER

*Rivers of the North* is one of Zhang Chengzhi’s most important novellas. It was first published in 1984 in the famous literary journal *Shi yue* 十月 (October), just 2 years after the publication of *The Black Steed*, another important novella written by Zhang, which was published in the same journal. *Rivers of the North* tells the story of a former Red Guard, a protagonist in his thirties, who goes on a trip back to Shaanxi Province where he was once a sent-down young man. In the dedication of the novella, Zhang writes:

I believe that a just and thorough knowledge will sum everything up for us; only then will the significance of the struggles, ponderings, impressions and choices unique to

our generation become clear. But at that time we will also regret our past immaturity, errors, and limitations, and feel even more keenly the impossibility of living our lives over again. This could be the foundation of a profound pessimism, but given the vastness of our country and the scope of its history, in the end the future is always bright. Within this matrix there is sure to be a certain bloodline, a certain native climate and a certain creative power that will ensure the descent of lively, healthy babies to be born on earth, and the sobs of the sickly and weak will be drowned out by their happy cries. From this point of view, the outlook again becomes optimistic.<sup>9</sup>

From the dedication we can already sense a strong commitment to reflecting the experience of a Red Guard, as well as the destiny of that generation of people. In the novella, Zhang expresses, through the I-narrator who is the protagonist, his remorse and sorrow at his and others' wrong-doing during the Cultural Revolution, yet he at the same time tries to voice their feeling of being wronged by their own time, as well as remembering their lost youthful idealism. Memory stands as the very focal core of this novella and it is for its championing of memory that this novella becomes so thought-provoking. The following passages will analyze this novella in terms of the way it grapples with memory and forgetfulness, the relationship between place and memory, and the way memory of the life as sent-down youth assumed a festive, even sacred tenor.

The story begins with the I-narrator on a truck on his way to the Shaanxi village where he once visited as a Red Guard. Zhang Chengzhi makes adept use of free indirect speech, allowing readers to glimpse into the inner world of the narrator. The feeling provoked by this trip for the narrator is at first one of glee. He murmurs to himself in imitation of Northern Shaanxi accent and he feels at home among his fellow travelers on the truck, all of whom are "peasants: simple, prosperous, lovable peasants with minds of their own" (106). The reason for his glee soon reveals itself when he notices a woman standing in a corner of the truck: "This girl is just like me, a young Beijinger sent to work in the countryside" (107). He recognizes this instantly because "students from Beijing who had been sent to work in the countryside could tell one another at a glance" (107). Such a recognition reflects one of Assmann's central assertions: it is shared memory of the past that links people together to form a group. For Zhang's protagonists, obviously, the shared memory of life as sent-down youth allows them to recognize each other at first glance. As we will soon find out, this protagonist is more than Zhang's alter ego as he in fact represents his entire generation of sent-down youth.

As it happens, memory lies at the center of this novella. As the protagonist travels further into the heart of the village, the memory of his former life as a Red Guard in the Cultural Revolution surfaces. When the truck stops so that passengers can get some lunch, the small town near the river meets his eyes:

As soon as he descended from the truck he felt spots before his eyes. The dizzying sunlight beat straight down on this small town situated on a piece of high, level ground near the river. I seem to have no memory of it at all, he said to himself, surprised. He couldn't remember what scenery and buildings there had been in this town at that time. I was so anxious, my heart was racing; I didn't know where the truck had brought me. Sighing, he walked down a small lane, remembering. In order to avoid letting anyone know he had not bought a ticket, he had tried to guess what direction they were going by referring to a slender volume: *Atlas for Exchanging Revolutionary Experience...*(112)<sup>10</sup>

“Exchanging Revolutionary Experience” (geming chuanlian 革命串联) is a specific term used during the Cultural Revolution, referring to the nation-wide parade of middle school and college students, workers, and other participants of the Revolution. It was supported by the state which issued an official announcement on September 5th, 1966, to call on students all over the nation to travel nationwide in order to exchange revolutionary experience. In fact, as early as July 1966, the movement was already observed in various places of the country. Students from outside Beijing traveled to the capital city to learn from experienced “cultural revolutionists” and to be received in audience by Chairman Mao. Students from Beijing traveled to other provinces to help spread the ideas of the Cultural Revolution. Because the movement is supported by the state, participants in it traveled, dined, and lodged at no expenses of their own. Therefore, for many, the movement was not exactly one of revolutionary experience, but a rare opportunity to see the vast nation, and for free. It thus even assumed a carnival atmosphere.<sup>11</sup>

In association with memory, forgetting is another theme of this novella. Despite the excitement associated with his past adventure, the protagonist laments his forgetfulness, because he does not seem to recall this town at all. As he later confesses, more than ten years has passed since he last visited this place during the parade. Why has he forgot all about the past? Assmann's discussion of the mechanism of remembrance and forgetting may help us see the cause of his forgetfulness. He argues that while the subject of memory “is and always was the individual who nevertheless depends on the ‘frame’ to organize this memory” (Assmann 22). “If persons - and societies - are only able to remember what can be reconstructed as a past within the referential framework of their own present, then they will forget things that no longer have such a referential framework” (Assmann 22-23). The keyword here is “frame” and by that Assmann refers to the concept of social frameworks introduced by Halbwachs and E. Goffman. As Halbwachs points out, people acquire their memories in society, and it is in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories (38). The reason why Zhang's protagonist no longer remembers his own past as a Red Guard is that the years of Cultural Revolution has been very scarcely mentioned in the contemporary Chinese society,

where people deplore the madness and immense wrongdoing of the time and choose to avoid facing it. Under such circumstance, the memory of the Cultural Revolution, together with life as a Red Guard and as a sent-down young man, has no referential framework in current life. Hence it was lost, although we will see later that Zhang finds ways to bring it back into the framework of current life and thereby revives it from oblivion.

The spatial dimension of memory is foregrounded when forgetfulness is overcome by the protagonist revisiting an “inhabited space”. As the protagonist climbs onto the truck again and probes further into the mountainous regions, his memory is eventually brought back to him. He remembers the mountain road with tribulation, and his delight reaches its peak when he sees the Yellow River. This is because the yellow river has always been his dream river, a place symbolizing his motherland, thus carrying his profound love for his nation. He remembers his first encounter with the yellow river during the parade:

He had not lost this memory. He had kept it safe these ten years and more. He recalled clearly how as a young buck, still wet behind the ears, he had stood, eyes staring and jaw slack, completely awestruck, on the summit of this mountain and stared at the vast, powerful river which split the continent, separating the world of loess from the world of boulders. Now he understood: it was precisely this memory which had created in him without his knowledge the desire to return here, and which had pushed him, step by step, towards the kingdom of geography. (120)<sup>12</sup>

Now memory associated with “inhabited space” is revived by seeing the place once more, that is, seeing the yellow river once more. What is also revived is the protagonist’s feeling of pride for his own vast nation, a feeling which he must have felt more than ten years ago when he first saw his motherland in its fullness. Just as Michael Berry posits in his monograph *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (2008), “of all the atrocities considered in this study, the Cultural Revolution – especially the rustification of the educated youths – is the only one that has inspired memories of trauma and pain alongside often equally powerful feelings of nostalgia and passion.”<sup>13</sup> This is no doubt a most intriguing phenomenon, one that is even more so in the case of Zhang, as I will discuss later. What the protagonist has felt so far is recollections of feelings of nostalgia and passion, which is soon replaced by feelings of shame and guilt when the female journalist reveals to him what her family went through during the Cultural Revolution. The woman’s father used to work in the janitor’s office of a middle school. During the Cultural Revolution, some students said he had been a Kuomintang soldier before Liberation, hence “one of the leftover dregs and evil remnants of the old society” (134).<sup>14</sup> They beat him to death in 1966, when she was only twelve years old. This instantly overcame the protagonist with awe, who confesses that he was himself a

Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution. He asked her to scorn him, which she refused. She goes on to tell him how her mother had been ill with glaucoma, and that any shock might make her lose her sight. So she alone went to the janitor's room and washed the blood off her father's body. At this point the protagonist can no longer bear to hear her out and he begs her to stop telling him that. "He really couldn't conceive how this ebony-eyed, slight girl could endure such a profound trial" (135).<sup>15</sup> Later, when he is swimming across the yellow river, he recalls the woman's story. He remembers that he was so excited when he swam across the river more than ten years ago that he yelled "Hurrah!". But now the memory of youthful glee is stained with the woman's suffering: "But you did not know that elsewhere a twelve-year-old girl was wiping the blood from her father's body with a towel" (137).<sup>16</sup> He then utters a monologue,

I am grateful to you, girl reporter; you gave me some valuable criticism, and at the same time showed faith in me. Despite everything, you could understand me. Yes, it's true: At that time I was an honest-to-goodness Red Guard, but I never beat anyone, much less that janitor father of yours. However, I am willing to assume my share of responsibility. I will never forget your story. He felt serious and subdued, but at the same time he felt his heart had become richer. (137)<sup>17</sup>

While the atrocity committed by the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution has been widely deplored and condemned, Zhang obviously feels a need to voice the thoughts of those more innocent Red Guards who did not commit any crime, such as the likes of his protagonist. Even those who did commit crimes during the Revolution, according to Zhang's perspective, need to be allowed to face up to their past and to be allowed to tell their version of the story. In terms of his detailed depiction of the psychological condition of the Red Guards, Zhang's fictional works stand out from other works of similar themes (Xu 218). Despite their participation in those insane prosecutions of innocent intellectuals, there were reasons for their actions: blind faith in the national leader, and youthful, easily-manipulated idealism. It was necessary to let all these factors surface, so that, as the dedication of this novella states, a fair judgment of this generation of people can be reached. The protagonist's later reflection makes it more explicit:

Back then you worshipped your life of bravery and freedom, and you thirsted to experience the proverbial "beating of one thousand five hundred kilometres of waves". You truly believed you were being completely remoulded, growing fast and strong; you looked eagerly forward to the great revolutionary task that was to be yours. You were resolute and self-confident; using your own standards, you divided humanity into portions and then loved or hated each group with equal ferocity. That there might be other possibilities did not occur to you at all; you never imagined there might be a twelve-year-old girl who would revise your history lessons for you. (145)<sup>18</sup>

Zhang, himself a Beijinger and a former Red Guard, was one of few who were brave enough to write about the true feelings of participants of the Cultural Revolution, particularly since he wrote decades after the event, not having to do so to please the government. By the time he wrote this novella, viz. in the 1980s, “history lessons” have long been revised. Yet he described the process of revision, of painful awakening of the protagonist, in such detail, so that not only the process of revision is revealed, but also the intricate mechanism of the formation of that very history is laid out in front of his readers, for them to judge for themselves.

If the experience as Red Guard is one of inflicting pains to other people, then the experience as sent-down youth is one of suffering. Just like other works of “*zhiqing*” literature which are “generically a kind of ‘*shanghen wenxue*’ (scar literature)”, Zhang writes about “thwarted aspirations and grim realities” (Lau 25). Later in this novella, Zhang describes the physical and mental trauma brought onto their generation by the event. The protagonist recalls a girl named Haitao 海涛 who was even prettier than the female journalist beside him. Haitao was his girlfriend when they were both sent-down youth in a village, but she betrayed their love because she wanted to leave the borderland and go back to the city. Her decision aroused great anger among her fellow sent-down youth, not only because they despised her betrayal of love for the sake of personal prosperity, but also because they felt themselves denied such an opportunity to leave the borderland. Such life choices seem quite common among people of that generation, as the same thing happened to Xu Huabei 徐华北, a close friend and fellow sent-down youth of the protagonist. When Xu was a sent-down young man in the remote borderland of Xinjiang, one day, he abruptly left his community to seek new means of life, leaving behind his close friends, his girlfriend who was so beaten that she almost lost her wits, at the same time, he left behind all his past ideals and convictions in the Revolution.

By delineating Xu’s drastic change of character during the few years in the borderland, Zhang presents his readers not with a single case study, but with a universal circumstance, a generation that lost “both their education and their youth” as a result of “Mao’s project to ‘continue the revolution’” (Berry 268). Obviously, Xu used to be a gentle soul, modest, gifted, and idealistic. When he first went to the borderland, he would protest righteously to the commune Party secretary “because he had not organized a celebratory parade upon receiving Chairman Mao’s newest directive” (209).<sup>19</sup> However, all this idealism was soon worn away by the cruel reality of rural life, as the protagonist reflects how they all became so shabby and demoralized in later years. Eventually, as the movement of sending young people to the countryside ended, each young man and woman took a different path. A small number of them remained in the countryside for their life, while most people

returned to the cities. However, although some people, like the protagonist, were able to receive higher education, even postgraduate education, quite a few found themselves unable to pursue their ideal life as a result of the breakage in their formal education. Xu, for one, bemoans the fact that despite his gift in art, he can only find work as a secretary in a food factory, with an unworthy boss.

Such regrets and imperfection in life are attributed as the consequences of the Cultural Revolution. When appreciating a photograph of a broken pottery jar, Xu said, “It’s broken; an irreplaceable piece is missing. Mm, I feel it is precisely the life of our generation”(196).<sup>20</sup> The missing bit is, of course, those darkened years spent in the countryside, depriving them of their education, and their future prosperity. Throughout the novella, such sense of loss prevails. Something is missing. Something is taken away from these people by force: the woman’s father, Xu’s dream career, their youth, as well as their past idealism.

By the end of the novella, however, the trauma inflicted upon these people by their time is soothed eventually as they come to terms with their past. The woman points out to Xu that not only *their* life is imperfect like the broken jar, life itself is always imperfect. At first quite taken by this idea, Xu ultimately admits, albeit hesitantly, that maybe, there is nothing special about their generation after all.<sup>21</sup> In the end, Xu helps the woman to publish her photo by writing a splendid critique of it and publishing his article together with her photo; the woman finds love and understanding from Xu, who symbolically amends her emotional wound of losing her father; and the protagonist himself is able to pursue his beloved postgraduate degree in geography.

Such a narrative structure is not without its problems if we scrutinize it using theories of trauma studies. As Dominick LaCapra rightly argues in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), there are complex interaction or mutually interrogative relation between historiography and art (including fiction) (15). The general structure and emplotment of fictional narratives provide significant insights into the author’s understanding and reconstruction of historical events. For instance, works that “treated the Third Reich in a manner that excluded or marginalized the Nazi genocide or even if it addressed the latter in terms of a harmonizing narrative that provided the reader or viewer with an unwarranted sense of spiritual uplift” might be justifiably criticized (LaCapra 14). When Zhang allows his protagonists to come to terms with their past, is he trying to normalize the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution? I would argue that here, there is a clearly discordant divide between the protagonist, viz. the I-narrator that is Zhang’s alter ego and his friends, namely, Xu and the journalist. The protagonist consciously distances himself from the latter, despite the vague attraction the journalist holds for him. It seems that to Zhang, for ordinary people, it may well be a good thing to come to terms with

their past, and to move on with their life. For the protagonist himself, however, the recollections of the past brings for him renewed faith, even the tragic story told by the journalist “enriches” his heart while it leaves him feeling “serious and subdued”. Here, a religious feeling is unveiled, which may help us anticipate Zhang’s later conversion to Jahriyya, a point that takes us to the next section.

### **rites of passage: seeking time lost**

The way protagonists of Zhang’s fictional works manage to return to locations of their past life is significant. Usually, a journey is taken before those locations can be reached. The descriptions of these journeys usually assume a ceremonial, even sacred tenor. The swim across the Yellow River in *Rivers of the North* is a typical example. The scene about the protagonist’s self-posed challenge to swim across the Yellow River is, to many, perhaps the most touching and unforgettable part of the novella. More than a decade ago, during the national parade, the protagonist swam across the Yellow River. This is presumably an allusion to Mao Zedong’s swimming in the Yangtze River in 1956. Mao altogether swam three times in the River and wrote a song-poem about it, which was published in 1957. The swimming and the poem were vigorously propagated during the Cultural Revolution, therefore it can well be assumed that Zhang’s protagonist swam across the Yellow River to pay homage to Mao. At least so for his first visit. When the protagonist, during his second visit to the River, jumps into it with the intention to swim across it, he at first feels young and energetic again, enriched by a sense of empowerment by the River which he likens to his own father. Then he starts to fatigue.

I am tired, he thought with a slight sense of alarm. Last time I didn’t feel tired at all; I remember only ease, relaxation, comfort, liveliness. Now you’re tired only halfway across, and moreover you didn’t walk twenty kilometres beforehand, and in your stomach you have a fine stuffed buckwheat cake, not unripe jujubes. Buddy, you’re getting old. An icy chill suddenly enveloped his heart. More than ten years have flowed past, just like the water of the Yellow River, yet although you are not fully an adult, your flesh is betraying you. Don’t you dare betray my youth! “Damn it, while I live, I won’t let you betray it!” He cursed out loud. (138)<sup>22</sup>

At this very moment when he denies the impact of time on his body, he comes to accept its influence on his mind. “In these ten-odd years, you’ve become a barbarian. But in that time how much have I experienced... I’ve become a barbarian, but I’ve also become civilized. I’ve received a university education in the speciality of Chinese language, I’m going to be a graduate student in geography...” (139).<sup>23</sup>

Although time has cast unmistakable marks on the protagonist, he realizes that he also comes of age through the passage of time.

Just as the protagonist compares the flow of time to the flow of water in the Yellow River, the crossing of the River is symbolic. The Greek saying that man does not step into the same river twice is significant for our understanding of the protagonist's behavior. He wishes to defy time, and though he realizes its impossibility in practice, in spirit he achieves his goal by successfully crossing the river, thus proving to himself and the world that time has not changed him. Although a muscle in his right shoulder is injured during the swim and the pain recurs a couple of times later in the story to remind him of his ageing, overall, the narration asserts that he successfully defies the influence of time both on his body and on his mind.

Moreover, the crossing of the river carries with it even larger implications than the defiance of time. It can be arguably considered a "rite of passage", to use Paul Connerton's term. When discussing the close connection between places and memory, Connerton discusses places as memorials, in which he insightfully brings our attention to the fact that much ceremonial action is "performed by bodies moving in set ways within entire prescribed places," and "that particular form of bodily movement entailed in the crossing of a threshold is an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination and funeral ceremonies," which is commonly referred to as "rites of passage" (13-14). Connerton posits that rites of passage in fact symbolize temporal passages, that is, from one stage of life to another. Therefore, what is ostensibly a movement between places is truly a movement in time. The threshold, then, becomes a "liminal state", a "specific zone in which a crucial transition is effected; to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world" (Connerton 14). The pilgrimage is the most salient example of such rites of passage, in which "the threshold and the liminal state are particularly extensive" (Connerton 14).

Just as the pilgrimage is a long journey to a sacred place, Zhang's protagonists often take such long journeys back to the inhabited space of their past life, which may well be considered pilgrimages or quests. The protagonist in *The Black Steed* returns to his native Mongolian village on horseback. His long, tortuous journey is a typical quest in search of self and lost love. The short story "Da Ban" 大坂 (The Peak) (1982) also delineates a Hemingwayesque hero's long journey home to his dying wife in spite of extremely adverse weather. In *Rivers of the North*, the protagonist revisits the Yellow River, and the remote Shaanxi villages where he stayed in the past, despite the fatigue of long train-rides and truck-rides. In particular, the swimming across the Yellow River may well be regarded as the passing of a threshold, a rite of passage, except that the protagonist is not entering

a new world, but an old world, one in which all the revolutionary ideals still hold true for him. The destination of his journeys, like pilgrimages, are gilded with a sacred hue. The movement in place is also a movement in time, a backward gaze. According to Assmann, the memory of past life in these places can be categorized as “cultural memory,” because of its linkage with the sacred, instead of the daily life.

Although Zhang’s later conversion to Jahriyya is not the focus of this article, it would be useful to mention that *Rivers of the North* was published in the same year that Zhang “found Jahriyya.”<sup>24</sup> As he wrote in the revised version of *History of the Soul* (2011), in the winter of 1984, in the depths of mountains of the loess plateau, he found Jahriyya. While it would be safe to assume he had not yet encountered the religion of his life when writing *Rivers of the North*, there are clearly signs in this and other earlier works of his that anticipate his later conversion to religion. Julia Lovell delineates Zhang’s intellectual journey from an atheistic Red Guard, an educated youth, to novelist, devout Muslim, and to a passionate spokesman for the causes of international Islam. She insightfully points out the links Zhang has made between Cultural Revolution Maoism and global Islam, noting that Zhang often strongly endorse collective political activism – “either far-left party politics of the 1960s and 1970s”, or “a religious, political, cultural, and socioeconomic identity among Chinese Muslims”. Zhang also sees the “Red Guard Spirit” as “worship of revolutionary ideals of self-sacrifice, as righteous rebellion against elitism and privilege, and as a drive to integrate with China’s impoverished rural masses” (Lovell 899). This in a way paves the way for his total devotion to Jahriyya, a sect of Islamism that distinguishes itself “by the poverty and marginalization of its adherents, both past and present, and by its ascetic, uncompromising attitude to faith and sacrifice” (Lovell 895). In Zhang’s earlier works such as *Rivers of the North*, we can already see in the narratives of “rites of passage” a semi-religious fervor for revolutionary ideals long lost yet newly regained, which sheds light on his imminent religious conversion.

## RESISTING AND REFLECTING ON ENLIGHTENMENT THOUGHTS

Just as Zhang later writes in *History of the Soul* about the awe he felt when encountering the stark poverty of Jahriyya devotees, in his earlier works he often contrasts the city and the country, intellect and instinct, as well as civilization and ignorance. To him, youth and idealism are often associated with economically and intellectually underdeveloped regions, such as remote borderlands and impoverished countryside. Yet it is usually in these places that his protagonists spend their youthful years, which later turn out to be their most innocent, passionate, and idealistic years. Later, as they leave these places to seek their future in the cities,

in pursuit of knowledge, civilization, and success, they lose their memory of life in these remote places, and at the same time, they lose the innocence, passion and idealism symbolized by these localities. This can be understood as a reaction against and reflection on the enlightenment thoughts of modern and contemporary China, inaugurated and introduced by May Fourth intellectuals. The following passages probe this curious phenomenon.

The protagonist of *Rivers of the North* reveals a noticeable, albeit slight, aversion to civilization even at the beginning of the novella. As soon as he leaves his university to travel to the countryside, he feels relieved.

“He felt quite contented, as he had ever since he left school. Never mind the dust coming in from the back of the truck; no matter how many times he spit it out with a ‘Ptoo!’ he still felt contented. This turbid river, these endless loess caps and this blue, unadorned sky - all of these made him feel highly satisfied.” (106-107)<sup>25</sup>

If his aversion to institutionalized education is still half-hidden in his remarks about the school, then his ambivalent relationship with the afore-mentioned female journalist confirms this attitude. Although the protagonist at one point has a very intimate relationship with the woman, and she is obviously deeply attracted to him, he nevertheless feels a slight resentment towards her. When he first gets to know her, “he felt uncomfortable chatting with her. There was a scent about her that made him feel awkward”. (116)<sup>26</sup> The reason why he feels very uncomfortable chatting with her, and ultimately decides to sever their romantic ties, is that deep down he has a strong and tough soul associated with natural wilderness and natural force, such as the Yellow River, and other rivers of the north, yet she as a typical educated urban female represents refined lifestyle, culture, and urban ways. Their essential difference, in fact, is one between the country and the city.

Although the protagonist was born and raised in the city, it is apparent that years of life as a sent-down young man in the countryside left him with indelible marks, so much so that to him, life in the impoverished countryside, i.e., life of him as a young man living solely for his ideals, is the only life worth living. We see in the novella that his memory of youthful idealism is only found in the countryside where he visited during the national parade, or where he was sent-down as a young man. For instance, he thus describes his first visit to the Yellow River,

You were only twenty years old then, with not even ten yuan in your shirt pocket. After getting off the truck at the small town of Qingyangping you came walking along this dirt road. Not only had you not had any stuffed buckwheat flatcakes to eat; you hadn't had a drop of water to drink since dawn. You walked for so long, passing by row

after row of those old loess caps, asking anyone you met, "I'm going to the Yellow River; how far is it?" ( 117)<sup>27</sup>

Such indefatigable spirit, such wholesome physical and mental state, and such persistent pursuit of one's goal are lost once the protagonist matures and grows out of the influence of the Cultural Revolution. It is obvious that Zhang, who identifies with his protagonist, looks back at those years with nostalgia. In this he accords with many other writers of the "root-seeking literature", such as Han Shaogong who miss "their zeal, idealism, and a sense of personal fulfillment" in the countryside and frontiers (Rong 87). Just like those root-seeking writers who look up to the countryside to regain their youthful ideals, Zhang's protagonist returns to the places of his youth in search of lost meaning and memories. Although ultimately, almost all of them take second leave of the countryside, to live their life in the city, the temporary return to the countryside invigorates them and empowers them, allowing them to incorporate their past experience into their current life, so that they can maintain a stable, positive identity.

We can see here that Zhang positions the countryside in contrast to the city. Whereas the city is associated with civilization, modern education, progress, and hence enlightenment, the countryside is usually associated with poor living standards, lack of knowledge, and backwardness. This has often been the case in Chinese literary portrait of both places of the May Fourth movement. In many literary works of that period, Chinese intellectuals positioned themselves against peasants who represented backwardness, ignorance, and obstinacy. "The typical early May Fourth literary figure was a modernized, urbanized intellectual" (Widmer and Wang xi), to whom peasants and the rural places they inhabit represented an objectified other. In *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant "Other" in Modern Chinese Literature*, Feuerwerker discusses the way modern Chinese intellectuals represented themselves and their peasant others in literary texts.<sup>28</sup> For instance, Lu Xun wrote about ignorant and insular people and customs in rural China. Even May Fourth writers who sympathized with the poor living conditions of the peasants, such as Lao She, Mao Dun, Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong, often "depicted the peasants as victims of an evil social system controlled by a corrupt rural gentry, urban-based absentee landlords, or national and foreign capitalist exploiters" (Duke 45). At best, there is little worth cherishing in rural places.

To Zhang, however, the city becomes a place of decay, where people lose track of their ideals and enthusiasm, and where they become quarrelsome and selfish. It is even the place where youthful vitality is robbed of them. By contrast, in the rural areas, the protagonists find once again their lost youth, their past ideals, and even their vitality. This idea is repeatedly observed in Zhang's fictional narratives.

For instance, in his renowned novella *The Black Steed*, the protagonist finds his lost love, genuine passion, and innocence in the remote Mongolian village which he left to seek knowledge and fortune in the city. By presenting the countryside as such, Zhang attempts to reverse enlightenment thinking hailed by May Fourth intellectuals.

Although the sent-down movements could be considered to reflect Mao's own reaction against the enlightenment ideas of the May Fourth, by having educated youth learn from impoverished peasants, thus in a way idealizing the countryside, the profound link between May Fourth thoughts and the radical idealism of the Cultural Revolution has also been noted by some scholars. For instance, Rana Mitter points out that the Mao's use of the term "Cultural Revolution" reveals his intention to follow the lead of the May Fourth Movement, and the Cultural Revolution itself was "a distorted interpretation of the values of the New Culture Movement." Mitter claims that, "the mindset that inspired Mao, who had been in the thick of May Fourth and shaped by it in many ways, bears many indelible marks of the earlier era' (230). The most salient common features of the May Fourth and the Cultural Revolution are the celebration of youth, of iconoclasm, and of violence.<sup>29</sup> The underlying momentum of these tendencies is enlightenment thought, as well as some aspects of European Romanticism.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, in Zhang's fictional works, what appears like a mere derivative of Maoist idealization of the countryside is truly a reaction against the mindset of the Cultural Revolution. This is particularly true when it comes to Zhang's determined aversion to chastising people based on their birth, which is reflected by his protagonist's repentance to the journalist on behalf of his generation of Red Guards. In this sense, Zhang does reflect on the Cultural Revolution, thus in a way distancing himself from Mao's thoughts. What further distances Zhang from Maoist thinking is of course his eventual conversion to religion, which in a way forms the antithesis to May Fourth/Maoist enlightenment thinking. In *History of the Soul*, Zhang makes it very clear that religion could be the way forward to reflect on the problems raised by the 1960s. He writes,

What I longed for are the reflection on and criticism of the 60s, as well as our inheritance of that epoch; what our generation of people so tragically searched for, at the cost of our youth and life, that is, the way forward, could be among them.<sup>31</sup>

The word "them" refers to devotees of Jahriyya, those impoverished peasants inhabiting remote geographical peripheries of China. As he tells the tales of those former sent-down youth returning to those geographical peripheries to seek lost revolutionary causes in his earlier works, the countryside becomes sacred places where idealism and truth prevail. Such an association anticipates his later,

full-blown assertion that it is in the most impoverished geographical peripheries that we find the most sublime religion, hence the meaning of human existence.

## CONCLUSION

Zhang's earlier fictional works provide us with important insights into the role memory plays in their narrative structures, hence its thematic significance. By probing the temporal and spatial dimensions of memory as reflected in *Rivers of the North*, and by bringing in the concept of cultural memory, I hope to have shed light on the close link between memory and identity formation of Zhang's protagonists. In the process of seeking out what is lost in their life, the characters in the story are able to come to terms with their own past, a past in which life was incised by political events, a memory which links them with one another while it at the same time distinguishes them from one another. As J. R. Gillis posits, "the core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering" (3). By the end of Zhang's story, when the protagonist and his friends manage to incorporate memory of the past into their current social framework, they bring back the past into the present, hence achieving a sense of sameness over time and space, providing themselves with an identity. It in turn enables them to deal with their future more confidently. Indeed, the root-seeking of writers such as Zhang "indicates a historical endeavor, assessing what is happening now in the light of what happened in the past" (Wang 2). It "not only redeemed to some extent the writers' *zhiqing* experience, but it also provided them with a point of entry into the future. Their generation was not to be passed over as unfortunate victims of the past; it still had a role to perform in post-Mao China" (Rong 89). This is the cue to understand literature of sent-down youth, in which writers deal with memory of their past life so that not only that memory is redeemed from the periphery, but also their own position in current social life is brought once again back to the center.

If we situate Zhang in the history of China's literary discourses about the country and the city, two discoveries become apparent. The first one is the way he shares the tendency of quite a few writers of root-seeking literature who celebrate "illiterate heroes and heroines", returning to "the rural origins that the earlier modernizers had ignored" (Widmer and Wang xi), a tendency that traces back to Shen Congwen's depiction of "the triumph of 'healthy,' untrammled country love over Confucian restrictions" (Kinkley 86). Yet Zhang distinguishes himself from Shen by embedding values and meanings in *remembered* times and places. For Shen, the yearning for the country happens here and now, yet for Zhang and his largely autobiographical protagonists, the country is the final destination of a long

quest, one that can only to be reached by effort. The meanings and values inherit in the countryside can only be unveiled once memory of the place is revived. Here we perceive an ongoing dialectic in the relationship between memory of the past/countryside and present life: what happened in the past in what was the marginal periphery of the country has turned into memories that were hurriedly buried for a sense of shame, but claim their place in the present of those directly involved, so that they can make sense of their experience. Once back into the “center”, the periphery re-emerges through writing and is no longer marginal but a constituent part of a process of legitimization of the center as it was experienced by a traumatized generation.

The second discovery is the profound way in which Zhang differs from both his predecessors like Shen, and from his contemporary writers of sent-down youth literature. If Shen uncovers the pastoral in remote Hunan regions, and writers of sent-down youth literature try to find meaning in absurdity and cruelty by focusing variously on culture, tradition, love, and other mundane pursuits, Zhang finds faith and idealism verging on religion in memories revived. These earlier works anticipate his imminent conversion to Jahriyya, raising important questions about fiction and historiography, Maoism and Islamism, religion and enlightenment, and the country and the city. Like Lovell rightly states, Zhang is a writer who defies easy categorization (911). As controversial as he is and has been, he invites serious thinking about various facets of his literary expressions, as well as his political and religious thoughts.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of *Kritika Kultura* for their extremely insightful and useful suggestions. I also want to thank Marc Matten and Valentina Punzi for their useful feedback on an earlier version of this article.
2. e wrote about his invention of the term “*hong xiaobing*” 红小兵 (young Red Guard) which was used by his fellow students at the Middle School attached to Qinghua University. Later the more prevalent term was “*hong weibing*”. See Zhang Chengzhi. *The Red Guard era* (Koueihei nojidai), trans. Kojima Shinji and Tadokoro Takehiko, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992, pp. 40-54.
3. See Zhang Chengzhi. *The History of the Soul: Unveil the Mystery of Jahriyya*. Taipei: Storm and Stress Publishing, 1997. For discussions of Zhang’s conversion to Jahriyya, see Anthony Garnaut. “Pen of the Jahriyya: A commentary on The History of the Soul by Zhang Chengzhi.” *Inner Asia* 8, 2006 no.1: 29-50; Julia Lovell. “From Beijing to Palestine: Zhang Chengzhi’s Journeys from Red Guard Radicalism to Global Islam.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 2016 vol. 75, no. 4, pp. 891-911.
4. Zhang Chengzhi. *Rivers of the North* (Beifang de he 北方的河). Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 2002. Back cover. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
5. By contrast, in scholarly examinations of memory, space has always been a major reference point. See for instance, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2009); Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*; Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.
6. See Émile Durkheim. *Les Formes Élémentaire de la vie Religieuse*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960, p. 307-320.
7. The experiences of sent-down youth varied from region to region. Yunnan, for instance, proved to be one of the most harsh places for sent-down youth, whereas Heilongjiang allowed many to have a relatively positive experience. See Che Hongmei. *Literature of Sent-down Youth in the Great Northern Wilderness: An Alternative Facet of Regional Literature* (Beidahuang zhiqing wenxue: Diyuan wenxue de ling yifu miankong 北大荒知青文学：地缘文学的另一副面孔), Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2012, pp. 244-248.
8. “*Zhiqing wenxue*” is sometimes also referred to as “Urbling literature”, which is a term invented by Rachel May. See *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience*. Eds. Geremie Barné and John Minford. New York: Hill and Wang, 1988, p. 102. See also Kam Louie. “Educated Youth Literature: Self Discovery in the Chinese Village,” in *Between Fact and Fiction: Essays on Post-Mao Chinese Literature and Society*. Sydney: Wild Peony, 1989, pp. 91-102.
9. Zhang Chengzhi. “Rivers of the North.” *The Black Steed*. Translated by Stephen Fleming. Beijing: Panda books, 1990, p. 102. Subsequent quotations from Fleming’s translation will be indicated by page numbers in brackets in the main text, with corresponding Chinese original provided in the footnotes. “我相信,会有一个公正而深刻的认识来为我们总结的: 那时, 我们这一代独有的奋斗、思索、烙印和选择才会显露其意义。

- 但那时我们也将为自己曾有的幼稚、错误和局限而后悔，更会感慨自己无法重新生活，这是一种深刻的悲观的基础。但是，对于一个幅员辽阔而又历史悠久的国度来说，前途最终是光明的，因为这个母体里会有一种血统，一种水土，一种创造的力量使活泼健壮的新生婴儿降生于世，病态软弱的呻吟将在他们的欢声叫喊中被淹没，从这种观点来看，一切又应当是乐观的。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 75)
10. 他一下车就觉得眼花缭乱。眩目的阳光直射着这个河岸台地上的小镇。一点儿也回忆不起来啦，他惊奇地想。他完全回忆不起当年这里有些什么建筑和什么景物。那时我急得心火上蹿，因为我连自己被大卡车拉到了哪里全都不知道。他感慨地走在一条土巷子里，默默地想着。那天，为了避免暴露扒车者身份，他只是查对着一本薄薄的《革命串联地图》，猜测着卡车前进的方向。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 81)
  11. The reason why the protagonist felt nervous about not having bought a ticket when he was participating in the movement is unclear. But it can be assumed that even though most of the time participants of the revolution did not have to pay, in some remote places where the Cultural Revolution did not have too obvious an influence, they were still expected to pay their expenses.
  12. “这个记忆他可没有遗忘。这个记忆他珍存了十几年。他一直牢牢记着，一个乳臭未干的毛头小伙子目瞪口呆、惊惶失措地站在山顶，面对着那伟大的、劈开了大陆、分开了黄土世界和岩石世界的浩莽大河的时刻。他现在明白了：就是这个记忆鬼使神差地使他又来到这里，使他一步步走向地理学的王国。” (Zhang, 2002, pp. 86-87)
  13. Berry, p. 260. Here Berry uses the term “rustification” which is sometimes used interchangeably with “rustication”.
  14. “残渣余孽” (Zhang, 2002, p. 97) .
  15. “他的确不能想象，这个眼睛黑黑，身材柔细的姑娘，心里怎能盛着那么沉重的苦难。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 97) .
  16. “可是你不知道有个十二岁的小女孩在用毛巾擦着父亲尸体上的血污。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 99)
  17. “我感谢你，小姑娘，你使我得到了宝贵的修正，而且你还给了我那样的信任。你居然看得出来。是的，那时我是个地道的红卫兵，但是我没有打过人，更没有打过你那当工友的爸爸。不过，我愿意也承担我的一份责任，我要永远记住你的故事。他觉得自己心情沉重，但他也觉得自己的心变得丰富了。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 99)
  18. “那时你崇拜勇敢自由的生活，渴望获得击水三千里的经历。你深信着自己在脱胎换骨，茁壮成长，你热切地期望着将由你担承的革命大任。那时你偏执而且自信，你用你的标准划分人类并强烈地对他们或爱或憎。你完全没有想到另一种可能，你完全没有想到会有一个十二岁的小姑娘为你修正。” (Zhang, 2002, pp. 104-105)
  19. “你曾经义正辞严地向公社书记抗议，因为他没有在听到最新最高指示后组织庆祝游行。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 151)
  20. “它是碎的，不可弥补地残了一大块，哦，我觉得，这简直就是我们这一代人的生活。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 141)
  21. Similar pronouncements are observed in Zhang’s other fictional writing, such as *The Golden Pasture*. See Xu, *Collective Memory to be Forgotten*, p. 213.
  22. “我累了，他警觉地想。上一次我一点儿也不觉得累，记忆中只有轻松活泼、满心舒畅。这回刚游了一半你就累了，而且这回你没有走那四十里路，肚子里是白荞麦馅饼而不是青枣子。伙计，你在衰老。他突然觉得满心凄凉。十几年流逝得像这黄河

- 水。你还没有长成人，你的肉体就已经开始要背叛你。可是我的青春别想背叛！ ‘ 妈的，我活着就不让你背叛！ ’ ” (Zhang, 2002, p. 100)
23. “可是十几年来我经历过多少啊，我变野了也变文明了。我受过汉语专业本科训练，我还将是地理学的研究生。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 100)
24. I have unfortunately not been able to locate the 2011 revised version of *History of the Soul*, which, as a result of publication ban in China, was not published formally. Instead it was self published and given as gifts. See Zhong Jieling and Shen Xiayan. “The making of *History of the Soul*” (《心灵史》诞生始末 *Xinling shi dansheng shimo*), *Contention in Literature and Art*, 2015 (6), p. 54. My information on the revised edition is quoted from: Hai Pengfei. “Zhang Chengzhi: Never Beyond Utopia” (Zhang Chengzhi zoubuchuwutuobang 张承志 走不出乌托邦), *Southern People Weekly*, <https://nfpeople.infzm.com/article/2438> accessed 1st December, 2021.
25. “他心里觉得踏实。从学校里一出来他就觉得踏实，不管黄土从后挡板上面卷过来时，他怎样呸呸地吐着嘴里的沙子，他还是觉得踏实。这条浑浊的河，这片无边无际的黄土山帽和这蓝得质朴的天，都使他踏实。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 75)
26. “他觉得和这姑娘谈话很不自在。她身上有股什么味儿使他有点手足无措。” (Zhang, 2002, p. 84)
27. “那时你才二十岁，衬衣口袋里只有不足十块钱。你从青羊坪小镇子下了车就走上这条土路，不但没吃白荞麦面的素馅饼，而且从清晨起滴水未下肚。你走了那么久，翻过一架又一架黄土老帽，见一个人就问一句：‘嗑黄河还有多远？’ ” (Zhang, 2002, p. 85)
28. Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker. *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant “Other” in Modern Chinese Literature*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
29. See Rana Mitter. *A Bitter Revolution: China’s Struggle with the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. pp. 230-233.
30. For a discussion of the influence of European Romanticism on May Fourth intellectuals and Mao Zedong, see *Ibid*.
31. “我所渴望的、对60年代的反思与批判，以及对那大时代的继承；我们一代人悲愿的、耗尽了年华岁月青发白发寻找的出路，可能就在他们中间。” Hai Pengfei. “Zhang Chengzhi: Never Beyond Utopia” (Zhang Chengzhi zoubuchuwutuobang 张承志 走不出乌托邦), *Southern People Weekly*, <https://nfpeople.infzm.com/article/2438> accessed 1st December, 2021.

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