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URBANISM AS MOTIF IN CHINESE FICTION IN THE 1980s

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Synopsis:

“Urbanism as Motif in Fiction in China’s 1980s” is a narrative analysis of Yu Hua’s *The April 3rd Incident*, in which the adolescent protagonist is caught up in the web of persecution complex, suspecting that everyone out there is plotting against him. Through the intricate psychological manipulation, the novella presents to the reader the fear of growing up in metaphoric terms.

As a “modernized, urbanized intellectual” (Widmer, xi), and a pioneer literary figure in the May Fourth era, Lu Xun, in his “native soil” short fiction, portrayed a series first person narrators constantly referring themselves as men who “[find themselves] already exile from [their homeland], driven by life to a strange place” (109). Although he wrote many short stories about his own home town, Lu Xun seldom took as his thematic focus what life was like in those strange places for people who had been uprooted from their native soil. It was in the works of his contemporaries that the theme of urban life was explored to its full extent and made it a dominant literary mode in the 1920s through the 1930s, i.e., the May 4th period. In Ellen Widmer’s opinion, the literary achievements of these modern and urban intellectuals branded the literature from the early May 4th period as focusing “on what was most modern – the city” and as looking at “characters who pitted the ‘self’ against family and society” (xi). The long list of writers who extensively deal with the literary theme in their works includes Yu Dafu, Ding Ling, Zhang Ailing, Ba Jin, Mao Dun, Lao She and others.

The most striking difference of the city literature from the native soil literature is the change of landscape. The dominant scenery is no longer the pastoral land, red sorghum fields or green rice-seeding paddies. In substitution, it is a modern wasteland where luxurious mansions and tall office buildings are contrasted with rat-infected slum for the underprivileged and broken-

down sheds for the homeless. It has been contaminated and overwhelmed with problems due to the rapid urbanization and industrialization: poverty, unemployment, alienation, crimes, corruptions, suicide and diseases. The protagonists in the stories under this category are usually confined in a claustrophobic interior. In Yu Dafu's *Intoxicating Spring Night*, the attic above a shaky house in Shanghai's most impoverished district is so crammed that the main character cannot stretch without bumping against the ceilings. In Ding Ling's *Diary of Miss Sophia*, the filthy room in a cheap working class hotel is full of disagreeable odors and unpleasant noise from its occupants where the female protagonist is stricken by deadly tuberculosis and severe depression. In the dust-covered suite of an old mansion once owned by a Qing aristocrat as presented in Zhang Ailing's *The Golden Cangue*, the leading character soaked in opium. In the corner of a quadrangle housing complex in Beijing in Lao She's *The Camel Xiangzi*, a country boy's dream of possessing his own rickshaw is shattered. Infected with syphilis, he is crushed by the various dark social forces.

In the parallel with the different landscape, the mindscape of the characters in the stories about urban life is in sharp contrast to that in the stories about life in the rural areas. Unlike the native soil/root seeking literature which makes a point of writing about families and their ties, various generations and their relations, the typical stories dealing with the theme of the city usually depicts the lives of the isolated individuals. The protagonists, who have been entrapped in the urban environment, are estranged and lonely souls uprooted from their native soil and are cut off from their family ties. The modern urbanized environment has a devastating effect upon those entangled individuals who are usually stricken by diseases, poverty, depression and despair. They are so at a loss in face of the problems to which there seems to be no immediate solutions that many of them become desperately suicidal and self-destructive. In the root-seeking

stories, the heroes and heroines are full of vigor and vitality. The family histories are loaded with earth-shaking deeds and shining with incomparable glory. In the city stories, on the contrary, the protagonists are usually sick in body, pale in soul and trivial in deed. They are victims of the hostile environment, helplessly struggling to survive everyday pressure and stress imposed upon them by the modernized and industrialized society.

Since the characters in the stories concerning the urban life are lonesome individuals who have severed the ties from their families and their past, the stories of this kind focus on different themes and aspects. While the stories of native soil/root-seeking literature put more emphasis on history and the past, the city literature concerns itself with the present and the status quo of its protagonists. Family sagas and genealogical chronicles usually cover several historical periods of time and involve several generations within a family, the stories dealing with city theme, however, tend to work synchronically within limited time spans. Many of the stories dealing with are psychologically and monologic, presenting to us the mindscape of the characters which very much mirrors the outer urban environment surrounding them. Once again, anachronism plays an important part in stories about urban life, just as it does in native soil/root-seeking literature. Mental confusion, neurotic disorder, temperamental unrest are textualized as structural disarrangements and temporal disjunctions. The narrative temporality travels from one time zone to another, from one space to another as the turmoil and disturbance of an inner mind falls and rises like a roller coaster. Reality has been distorted and twisted out of shape and beyond recognition. To comprehend this deformed reality so as to confront it, illusions and nightmarish fantasies are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. In the mental and psychological process, narrative temporality has to be disarranged, disoriented, and in other words, anachronized in order to make sense of what is incomprehensible.

The classics created by the writers in the 1920s and 30s set up the mode and models for the literature on China's modernity and urbanism and in its due time, exercised their influences on literature of the same genre at another high tide of Chinese literary achievements in the 1980s and 90s. At this latter time, there emerged, along with the rise of root-seeking literature, another large number of literary works successfully dealing with the city theme. Half century later, the social context in the city has changed. The nature and the content of the problems greatly differ. But what still concern the writers in the contemporary era are those same issues which had concerned their May Fourth precursors: isolation and alienation in modern city surroundings, conflicts and confrontation between the individual and the society, survivals and struggles in the hostile urban environment. Yu Hua, a Zhejiang writer, should be one of the first to be mentioned among the writers in the 1980s and 90s. Yu takes a special interest in urban theme and succeeded in catching its essence and expressing it in contemporary terms.

Yu Hua was born in the 1960s in a small city named Baiyan in Zhejiang Province, one of those China's coastal areas which were first modernized and urbanized early twentieth century. However, Yu did not choose big, metropolitan cities as the loci for his fiction. Instead, his stories usually take place in a small city where newly-constructed apartment buildings and wide streets can be seen side by side with old town houses and narrow lanes that were left behind from the city's early development. New apartment buildings and deep old lanes coexist as alternated locations for Yu Hua's stories. Yu present to us a typical urban environment in smaller cities in the eastern part of China before the economic surge. In his novella *The April 3rd Incident*, Yu Hua gives detailed visual descriptions of the contrasting settings: the urban environment narrow and claustrophobic, thus forming a depressing and suffocating space for his estranged protagonists.

Both the inside of the lane and the interior of the building are depicted as dark, gloomy, places. On either side of the narrow lane stand high walls covered with moss like posters pasted on them. The road down below the walls is paved with pieces of stone rendered uneven through the passage of time. Over the lane is a slim piece of sky stretching down to the end where the lane branches out in different directions. The sky overhead is sliced to even slimmer lines divided by the electrical wires. In Chapter 12 of the novella, when the paranoid protagonist ventures into one of the lanes, he feels as if he had entered a dark and dense forest:

He turns aside into the lane. Because the high walls on both sides prevented any sunlight from penetrating the lane, a blast of damp air hit him as he entered. The lane was straight and as gloomy as a path in a dense forest. He entered its depth in complete silence. Other lanes branched off in two opposite directions. They were even narrowed allowing only one person to walk through. They were soundless and empty with no present of human presence. The lane is over a hundred meters deep. He didn't turn around until he reached a dead end. By this time, the entrance of the lane became as narrow as a line of crack. (Yu, 35)

The gloomy and damp narrow lane with high walls and its deadly quietness may signify repression, oppression, subduction imposing on any individual who ventures into its dark shadow. In addition, modern buildings have an equal suppressing quality. The buildings usually stand very closely to one another. The windows are wide open like dead men's mouths. Once in a while, thick smoke billows from coal stoves on the window sills as if from chimneys. Yu Hua's protagonist has a different sensation when he steps into a building:

He went into the building as if entering a dim cave. He climbed up the stairs cautiously touching the staircase with his feet. He listened to the hollow sound of his own footsteps. Then he heard the echoes of the footsteps which he thought at first were not his own. (28)

Yu Hua's protagonist is entrapped in his environment and consequently imprisoned and persecuted by his own fears and illusions.

He is an introverted, lonesome soul who seldom initiates any conversations with anyone; and nor is he heard responding others' questions. So the novella *The April 3rd Incident* is monologic rather than dialogic piece. Written basically from the point of view of its unnamed protagonist "he", the novella is about an adolescent who just celebrated his eighteenth birthday the night before, a day that marked his coming of age. His anxiety, fear, paranoid, extreme sensitivity and nervousness turn into a persecution complex. Under such a psychological condition, he has a hallucination that his parents, former classmates, and people of the whole town are so hostile towards him that they plan a conspiracy against him on April 3rd. As a result, he runs away the night before April 3rd on a cargo train with a great sense of triumph. For the turmoil that he is going to cause the entire town by disappearing without leaving any traces. In his paranoid state of mind, he actually has created the hostile atmosphere for himself and planned his own persecution conspiracy. He masterminds the April 3rd incident with his pathological imagination. All this has been achieved through the subversion of textual structures, the disarrangement of narrative temporality and the interplay of complexity between objective reality and his subjective illusions.

In *April Third Incident*, there is clearly distinguished double temporality with one presenting what is happening in reality (the story time) and the other representing the protagonist's illusion and imagination (the discourse time) as to what could have happened. The discourse time representing the protagonist's paranoid fantasies exists side by side with the story time undercutting what is presented as real and disarranging the temporal schemes. It attempts to subvert the story time and distort it in order eventually to substitute it. The textual structure of the novella is episodic with altogether twenty-two short and rapid segments which follow the traces of the three-day activities of the protagonist. The three-day events parallel the three

divisional sequences in the narrative structure of the novella. The three macro-structural sequences in turn signify the three stages of his mental transformation with regard to reality and illusion, and the three steps of how the discourse time triumph over the story time within the domain of narrative discourse.

The first macro-structural sequence goes from Chapter One (when he gets up in the morning and walks up to the window) to Chapter Six (when he stands on the balcony and goes to the bed at night). In the first phase of his paranoia, the protagonist is still able to tell his illusion apart from reality even though he becomes sensitive and suspicious because of his nervousness about things that have gone by and things yet to happen. The first chapter starts on the morning of the first day when he stands by the window feeling upset in the dazzling sunlight. The episode makes the point of “zero degree” in the narrative structure of the novella. Chapter Two is an analeptical segment revealing to us that the day before was his eighteenth birthday. He found himself caught up in between an ending and a beginning. As he is lying in bed and imagining a young boy version of himself walk away along a pond surrounded by willow trees, “his past years had parted with him and the future time not yet started” (Yu, 26). The indifference towards the most important day of his life as shown by his parents and people around him greatly saddened him. His becoming of age distances him from his loved ones. He comes to the conclusion that the theme of the night of his eighteenth birthday was that he has no one to trust and no one to turn to. He has a premonition that everything would be different from that very moment onward.

At this point of the anachronic analysis of *The April Third Incident*, it is necessary to stop to take a look at a more recent theory of narrative known as “the communication model” (Martin, 153). The purpose is to have a better understanding of the intricate narrative structure and its

subtle signification in Yu Hua’s novella. As a substitution for the taxonomies produced by point-of-view, narrative theorists such as Wayne Booth and others, use a linear communication model to explain fiction. That is the famous addresser/message/addressee axis which describes graphically how a literary work is created by the writer and how its message transmitted to its reader:

The Communication model

Addresser	Message	Addressee
The real-life writer	Narrative →→→→→	The real authorial reader
The implied author	Narrative →→→→→	The model reader
The dramatized narrator	Narrative →→→→→	The narratee

On the side of “addresser”, there are “the real-life writer”, “the implied author” and “the dramatized narrator”. The implied author, the author’s second self, who may differ from the narrator, presents information about the characters and events to the reader. The implied author stands behind scene as a stage manager, a puppeteer, or an indifferent God silently paring his fingernails. He is always different from the real man who creates a superior narrator is usually a character in the story and radically different from the implied author who creates him. In Booth’s observation, the most important unacknowledged narrators in modern fiction are “the third person [centers] of consciousness” through whom authors have filtered their narratives. He is either a highly polished mirror reflecting complex mental experience, or else turbid, sense-bound camera-eyes of such fiction (Booth, 149-153).

In the case of *The April 3rd Incident*, the protagonist “he” can be identified as the dramatized narrator, a third person center of consciousness, who is always pushed to the foreground unfolding his story through his mind’s eye. The implied author, on the other hand, hides behind the scenes orchestrating the structural and thematic intrigues of the novellas. Because of the fact that the protagonist as a dramatized narrator is put in the position of strict

fixed focalization, the interference by the implied author is at first sight subtle and barely detectable. However, the intentional disarrangement of time in the narrative text, the deliberate imposition of dramatic irony upon the protagonist's schizoid behavior and the tactful manipulation of narrative structures and their contextual significations have given the implied author away as the ring master and the puppeteer.

The arrangement of the two anachronic episodes in the first macro-sequence is significant to the meaning embedded here in the depth of narrative structure. According to the chronological order of the events and actions in the two chapters, Chapter Two should have been placed before Chapter One. In the reversed order as it is, Chapter One (on the next morning) consists not just of a series of events in subsequent to what are left off from Chapter Two (on the night before); but also provide a number of testimonies of what had been predicted to happen by the protagonist the night before. That he feels upset when he stands by the window and that he senses the difference as he walks on the street the next morning, prove his premonitions the night before. They are made to be true through the deliberate temporal disarrangement and the careful psychological manipulation by the sneaky, invisible implied author who has made his first attempt to subvert the narrative structure. By putting what happen the next morning in the first chapter and what had happened the night before in the second, the implied writer first tricks the ignorant readers into believing his protagonist's uneasy feeling and nervous sensitivity; and then manipulates them into accepting his subjective predictions and testimonies (when readers recall the first chapter after finishing the second chapter).

In this first phase of the novella, the implied author does not want to let his initial attempt go too far. In portraying the different self of the protagonist, he strategically allows the interference of voices from "multiple focalization". He recedes into a passive position avoiding

direct descriptions of his dramatized narrator for dramatic irony. The polyphonic voices come from the main character's friends from his high school who cannot help but notice his bizarre behavior and obvious change. When asked repeatedly by his former classmates "what's the matter with you?" he appears to be bewildered and displeased about his friends' concerns without ever being heard verbally respond to their questions. The inner monologue of the protagonist (the dramatized narrator) plays crucial role in revealing his reactions and responses to people and events surrounding him. He is like a pendulum swinging hesitantly between subjectivity and objectivity, badly caught in a dilemma of whether to accept reality or to believe his own illusions.

The two figures with the paranoid protagonist is obsessed with at the first stage are Bai Xue (white snow), a former high school classmate whose bright yellow shirt had once touched his heart; and a middle-aged man smoking while leaning against a firmiana tree. The protagonist runs into Bai Xue while walking on the street. As his eyes meet hers, he finds her glance exceedingly peculiar and believes that she is trying to warn him of the traps close by. Upon discovering the middle-aged man who leans against a firmiana tree and smoke a cigarette, he suspects that the man is his threat. In the first six chapters, the two images emerge several times in the anachronic segments in order for him to consider and reconsider his assessment and judgment about these two individuals. Although he warns himself not to be consumed too much in his thoughts and tried to give up his inscrutable and ridiculous suspicion about Bai Xue's glance and the middle-aged man's behavior, his inescapable indulgence in Bai Xue leads to his obsession with his own fantasies and illusions. In Chapter Five, he comes across Bai Xue once again on the street in front of a store. He is scared to have it proved that what he had imagined Bai Xue would do coincides with what she actually does: walking toward him stopping by the

firmiana tree and casting a glance of warning before hurrying away. The assurance of Bai Xue's movements confirms in turn the reality of the suspicious middle-aged man smoking against a firmiana tree. He is convinced that he saw the same man as he was heading to Yazhou's home in a side lane.

There is a distinct structural change in the second macro-sequence extending nine chapters from Chapter Seven through Chapter Fifteen. Giving an account of the protagonist's second day, all the chapters in this section are proleptical/analeptical episodes. Two streams of story lines go paralleled with one relating what would happen when he stays at home and the other about what would happen as he wanders along the street. The two story lines are presented alternately from one chapter to another. The four chapters from Chapters 7 through 10 are about the events and activities after he gets up on the second morning and walks on the street. Chapter 7 reveals how he feels when he wakes up in the morning and expects a knock at the door because he had dreamed about it the night before. Chapter 8 all of a sudden makes a proleptical leap forward in time and tells how he roams on the street and studies the formation of his reflection in a shop window. Chapter 9 goes back in time, instead, to pick up where Chapter 7 has left off describing his encounter with the man who actually knocks at the door of his neighbor first and then on door of his home. Chapter 10 is a subsequent to Chapter 8 which exercising another proleptical move forward giving accounts of his confrontation with the shop assistant first in his imagination and then in reality. The following five chapters (Chapters 11 through 15) are alternating anachronically between the story of his suspicion about his parents and the little boy next door when he comes back home and the story of the reappearance of Bai Xue and his visit to Hansheng's home after he comes out of the store.

Since the narrative patterns of alternating anachronism is essential to the structural and thematic analysis of the second macro sequence, it is necessary to draw some diagrams in Genettean manner to provide striking graphic descriptions of the narrative structure in this section. All the episodes are considered as anachronic with the Arabic figures representing the discourse temporal schemes whereas the English alphabetic letters are adopted for the story temporal scheme. The first chart below presents the way that various anachronic segments are exactly arranged in the text:

A7 – C8 – B9 -- D10 – G11 – E12 – H13 – F14 – I15 – J17

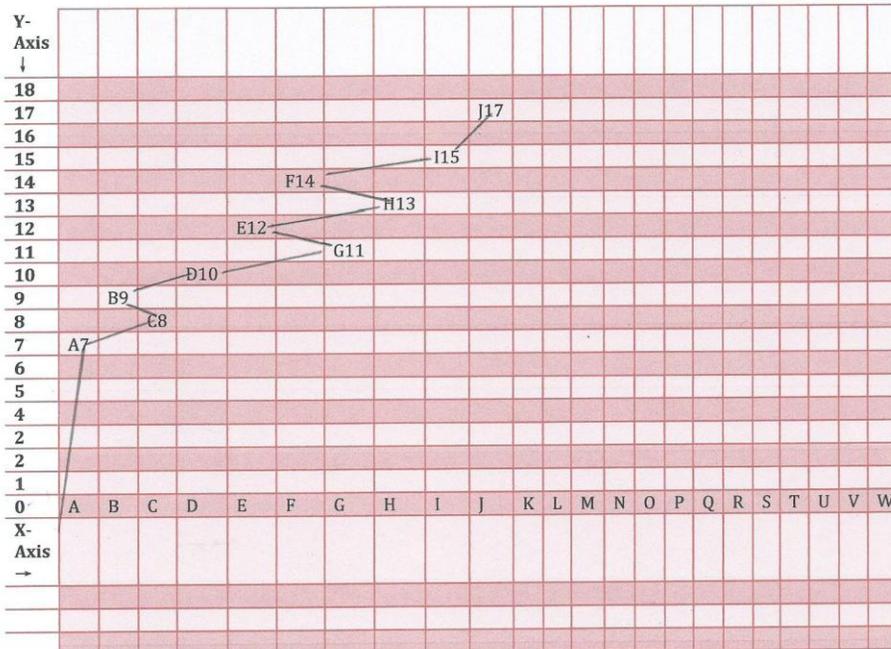
The second chart rearranges the temporal order to show what the narrative structure would look like in a chronological order:

A7 – B9 – C8 – D10 – E12 – F14 -- G11 – H13 – I15 – J17

The more visual and imaginative description of the narrative structure can be seen in the chart which borrows the coordinate in mathematics to show in a three-dimension way the alternating movement and interaction of the two temporal schemes. The first and third macro-sequences will also be included in the coordinate for a convenient comparison as well as contrast, with the English letters marked as A1, B1, C1 ... and A2, B2, C2 ... to indicate the two different sequences. The X-axis will stand for the story time with English letters whereas the Y-axis for the discourse time with the Arabic numerals. The point “0” (i.e., Chapter One) will serve as the measurement with which the anachronies are determined.

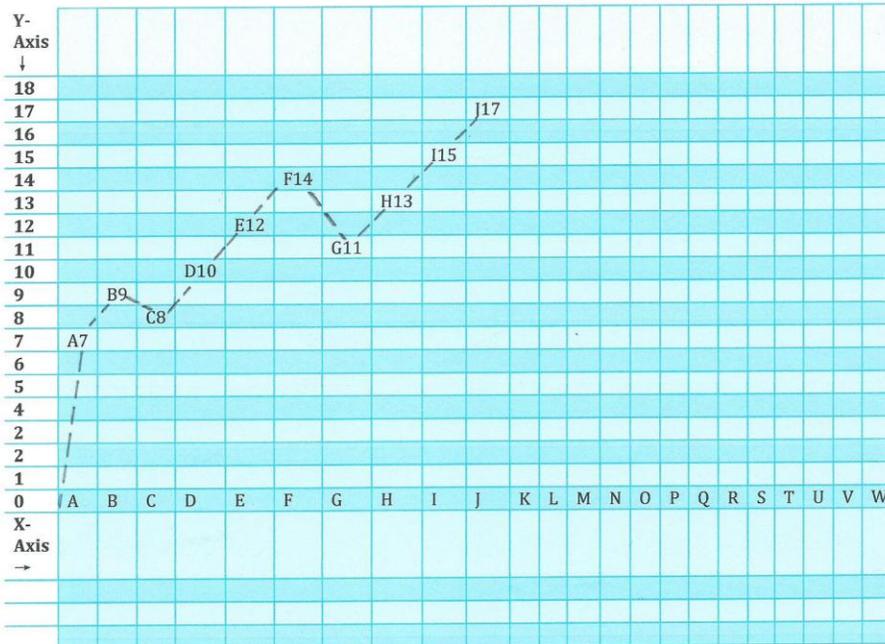
In the coordinate, the second macro-sequence graphically exhibits its distinctive features. There are two kinds of lines linking various intersections between X-axis (story time) and Y-axis (discourse time): the broken lines and the oblique lines. The broken lines correspond with the process whereby the protagonist is helplessly confused and painfully torn between reality and his

Chart 1: Story time and discourse time



(Note: X-Axis in Arabic numerals indicates "story time" whereas Y-Axis in English letters indicates "discourse time".)

Chart 2: Story time and discourse time



(Note: X-Axis in Arabic numerals indicates "story time" whereas Y-Axis in English letters indicates "discourse time".)

own illusion. The oblique lines, on the other hand, indicate the state of mind in which he is dominated by one mode of belief, by the awareness in the first macro-sequence that he is too much carried away by his own fantasies and in the third sequence by his indulgence in the imagined conspiracy and persecution. As mentions above, the second macro-sequence presents the second stage of transformation of his mindset. Caught between what actually happened and what he imagines to have happened, he is thrown into a kaleidoscopic world forever forming, re-forming and de-forming. The anachronic episodes in the text and the broken lines in the coordinate represent structurally and graphically the mental crises that have befallen the protagonist.

To the protagonist, the subjective perception plays a crucial part in the formation of one's world outlook. As he walks back and forth before the shop-windows, he discovers that they can function as mirrors reflecting in images of those people passing by. Since the shop windows are filled with displays inside, the items blot, distort and ruin the images that happen to be caught in window glass.

When he stopped before the windows of a pharmacist, he noted that three upright boxes containing "Double-Precious" medicine formed his belly, while his shoulders were represented by a triangle reaching right up to his nose even though his eyes hadn't been damaged yet. He stared into his own eyes as if they were the eyes of another person staring back at him.

.....
Just then, some fuzzy human figure was disturbed by window displays. One half of the head was conversing with more than one half of the face. In close proximity were moving legs and shoulders. Then a complete face without a neck loomed into the view. A red brassiere had displaced the neck. The broken images looked somewhat clandestine. (Yu, 31-32)

His seemingly innocent observation of and extensive elaboration about the reflections in the shop windows ironically turn into a symbolic description of his own mind and the way it functions.

That is one of the dramatic ironies embedded by the implied author in the tissues of the narrative text. As the protagonist wanders around the street, he delivers his monologues without being aware of the consequence of his own act. The implied author, hidden behind the scene, pulls the strings and is extremely careful not to show any sign of his existence. The subjective mind of the protagonist resembles the shop windows full of displays. His prejudice, obsessions and indulgence are like those window exhibits which blot and ruin reflections that are taken in. Whatever are projected through his mind's eye, they are bound to be deformed and distorted just as those images caught in the shop windows.

As the two schemes of the storyline are unfolding alternately in the second macro-sequence, the schizoid protagonist pendulates between the spheres of reality and illusion in his distorted mind and deformed judgment. The anachronic segments are inserted from time to time serving as measurements for the reliability of his proleptical anticipations. There are inevitably always discrepancies between what are happening and what are imagined to have happened. The gaps are usually filled up with further misperceptions and bridged by deeper self-indulgent illusions.

There are two episodes in the second macro-sequence that begin with sentences in the subjunctive mood (the most subjective manner of expression.) The former occurs in Chapter Seven – the first episode in the second macro-sequence: “According to the imagined arrangement of the previous evening, he should wake up at half past eight in the morning” (31). And the latter appears in Chapter Ten: “If what he had imagined last night came true, he would see Bai Xue again right here right now” (33). Both episodes are proleptical anticipations, recalled in the analeptical segments, which have initiated a number of other speculations and hypotheses on the part of the protagonist. The fact that the two subjunctives, anachronic beginning sentences

coincidentally occur at the second stage is significant in the structural and thematic analysis. In the temporal reversal of Chapters One and Two in the first macro-sequence, the actual happening in the next morning are placed before the speculations and pre-arrangements the night before. Reality at the first stage is given the first priority and valued as measurement for the reliability of imaginations and illusions. In the second stage, however, the anachronic, subjective beginning sentences have converted the importance of reality in contrast to illusion. Although the illusion and reality are still two separate entities for the schizoid protagonist in the second phase of development, what has actually happened has become secondary to what should have happened. The proleptical hypotheses try to forge the actual events into their assumed patterns and imagined processes.

As a result, the misperceptions and deceptions take an upper hand over truth and reality. By the time when he stands at the top of a water tower in the last episode of the second macro-sequence, he is totally convinced that there is indeed a conspiracy against him. When night falls, he goes for a walk and comes to the water tower which looks like a gigantic, intangible shadow. He climbs up the narrow iron ladder leading to the top where he can carefully observe the whole town. Under the moonlight, the town appears dismal and horrifying as if in a coma. He confirms: “There must be a conspiracy” (38).

The third macro-sequence (Chapter Sixteen to Chapter Twenty-two) begins with an episode (Chapter Sixteen) about how, on the third morning, Zhang Liang and some others including Bai Xue kidnap the protagonist from his room and take him to the street so that he can be run over by an on-coming truck. Readers will not be able to find out that it is an anticipational analepsis until two chapters later in Chapter Eighteen. Chapter Sixteen cuts short Chapter Fifteen about his bird’s eye view of the whole town and his suspicion about the town’s people. It inserts

between Chapters Fifteen and Seventeen and tells a nightmare that the protagonist had the night before. Readers only find out about it in the beginning of Chapter Eighteen. There is nothing in Chapter Fifteen that would give away any hints whether it is a real occurrence or just another imagined incident. It is the only chapter in the whole novella exclusively devoted to a dream, a fantasy and an anachronic speculation. Its positioning as the first episode in the third macro-sequence is significant in that, at the third stage, the illusive mind of the protagonist not only is gaining the first place but also is taking control.

To the mind of the protagonist, the subjective speculations and the actual happenings are interchangeable and substitutable. The typical narrative structure in the third macro-sequence is that the proleptical segments in description of the illusive speculations are placed in a close textual range with those about what actually happen for effect of contrast. The proleptical anticipations are expressed in full and explained in detail. The actual happenings, on the other hand, are just referred to in brevity. There are bound to be disjunctions between imagination and reality. But the discrepancies are not important anymore. What matters in this phase is what the protagonist imagines to have happened and what he believes to have happened. Structurally overwhelmed by the mental illusions, what have happened in reality are insignificant in contrast to the nightmarish imaginations. The imagined events are directly followed by the actual happenings which become part of the imagination. The illusions created out of the paranoid mind have thus substituted the reality.

The nightmarish illusion produced out of protagonist's schizoid mind is his belief that there is a conspiracy against him. It would be carried out by the townspeople along with his parents, his neighbors and his former classmates. They would be his persecutors on April the third, three days after his eighteenth birthday. Throughout the third macro-sequence, he imagines

what people would do to him and how he would respond, react and eventually triumph over them. In the twentieth episode, the protagonist sees a man leaning against a firmiana tree by the street and fancies that he is the man whom Bai Xue had warned him about. The only difference is that he is not smoking. Four fifths of Chapter Twenty is a proleptical narration about his imagined confrontation, verbally and physically, with the man who confesses the procedures of the conspiracy under his pressure and threat. The conspiracy is that he would be taken by Zhang Liang and others to the middle of the street in order to be run over by a truck. If that would not succeed, his father would take him to a building under construction where bricks would fall on him from above and have him killed. He imagines that he walks up to the man by the firmiana and demands that the man disclose the content of the conspiracy. When the man refuses, the protagonist knocks him over to the ground and kicks him on the face. What happens in reality is, or would be, the opposite:

It must be him (he thought). But he had no courage to walk over. He felt that, if he would walk up to him, the result could be the opposite to what he had imagined a moment ago. The one who lay on the ground moaning would be himself. That man was so muscular. In contrast, he was so thin and weak. (56)

The next chapter repeats the same narrative structure with extensive proleptical narration with details on what would happen as he imagines. On the contrary, what actually happens in reality is referred to in brief account.

The protagonist not only imagines the conspiracy against him; but also his triumph over his persecutors. As he climbs up on to a train cargo and sits on top of the full load of coal, he can see the small station and the small town receding farther and farther in the distance as the train moves forward. He knows for sure that he is leaving the conspiracy farther and farther behind. He congratulates himself for fabricating the persecution and winning the final victory as he carries out the final escape.

The novella *The April 3rd Incident* ends with analeptical sequence in which the protagonist recalls a young neighbor and the sound of his mouth organ. At the age of eighteen, the young neighbor died of jaundice hepatitis. The sound of his mouth organ died with him. The anachronic closing paragraph adds a new, symbolic dimension to the whole story and its implication. The sound of the mouth organ echoes to that in the second chapter in which the protagonist compares his eighteenth birthday to a train station full of the sound of mouth organ. The death of the young neighbor along with the sound of mouth organ when the protagonist turns to eighteen may allude to the closure of those bygone years before his eighteenth birthday. The past has to die in order for the new life journey to start.

Apart from the structural analysis and contextual reading of *The April 3rd Incident*, there is another important thematic aspect to the novella. That is the theme of growing up, not about the whole process; but the moment of transition from adolescent years to adulthood. The process of growing up alludes to person growth from naivet   to maturity. In the case of *The April 3rd Incident*, it is more about the fear and the paranoia of this very moment rather than about the process of the life transition. For the protagonist, the transition to maturity is a process of divorcing himself from the past and cutting himself off from any connection with people who used to be close to him and with the location he knows so well. He would forever be a lonely soul in his long life journey. The moment he completes his transition, he becomes a stranger to both his past and his future.

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